



## SPRING 2021

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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

# Resilient Responses Emerging in the Food System in Vermont

By Grace Oedel, NOFA-VT Executive Director

Over the past year, NOFA-VT has more deeply committed ourselves to the work of developing a more resilient food and farming system. But the word 'resilience', right alongside 'pivot,' has bubbled to the surface as a most overused and jargony term in the lexicon of change. What does 'resilience' really mean? We understand that the three main challenges of the last year are all inextricably linked: the pandemic, and resulting turbulence; white supremacy, and the national struggle with the historic and continued reality of racism; and finally, climate change and its increasingly devastating effects. 'Resilience' in the face of these interwoven challenges most basically refers to our collective ability to bounce back and recover. Simply surviving, and mitigating harm through enormous disruption, is absolutely a short term need. But is recovery and reversion to the agriculture of 'before' a goal in and of itself?

This time of enormous turbulence and disruptive change reveals that many of the systems we have relied on are not resilient, reliable, or adaptable. We need to notice what systems actually proved 'resilient' this year, and then move toward more investment and support for

those strategies in the long term. We need new systems, which won't inadvertently perpetuate the conditions that have allowed for increasing climate chaos, endemic racism, and whole communities of people being left behind, whether it be through rampant food insecurity, lack of healthcare and affordable housing, or other means. How can we use this moment to imagine a different goal than just survival? One that helps us move beyond harm mitigation, into durable, lasting, thriving of everyone in our communities?

It is in the voices of those most affected by these challenges that we will hear the answers we all need. The knowledge our farmers and farmworkers hold can point us to a truly resilient, and even thriving food and farming system. These front-line communities are both experiencing the brunt of the challenges and innovating adaptations to them. They have the answers that not only offer resilience, but thriving for all.

First, the disruptions to the food chain caused by the pandemic allowed us to see where our national food systems are fragile and weak. Corporate-controlled stores experienced empty shelves in a nation accustomed to abundance any day of the year. Food system workers, from farmworkers to meat packers to



grocery store employees, were left unsupported and exposed, despite their newly acquired label of 'essential.' And as people lost jobs, they lost stable access to food. In Vermont alone, UVM researchers estimate that food insecurity has increased at least 25% over the past year. People waited for hours in their cars to receive a box of groceries. The charitable food system was taxed like never before.

Where did we see resilient responses emerge in the system in Vermont? Local food systems stepped up to the challenge. Farmers teamed up and designed delivery routes to keep home-bound people supplied with all the food they needed. They waived delivery fees. They increased the number of subsidized farm shares dramatically. Farmers redesigned their packing systems to keep workers safe. As they always do, farmers and farmworkers kept us all fed. Local food shelves and restaurants partnered together to employ people out of work and keep Vermonters fed. Resilience



*Resilience, continued on page 3*

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# Spring Thoughts from Grace

As I write you, I'm sitting with a cup of coffee sweetened with some of the season's first maple syrup, basking in the earliest light of morning during a rare quiet moment before my children wake up. Snow falls steadily outside the window but with the sweet sap flowing, the earliest of seeds tucked into trays to germinate, and the steady growing of the light, spring –hallelujah, spring!–is on the way.



in the National Organic Coalition "Fly-In" (normally in D.C., this year via Zoom), which offers us an opportunity to champion organic priorities to our federal delegation as part of a powerful national effort. (We participate in a number of other national coalitions as a part of our advocacy work throughout the year.) We, along with organic farmers from Vermont,

This year I've been longing for spring more than ever, pacing myself through this final stretch of winter, holding onto the knowledge that once again, the miraculous will occur: the snow will melt, and the rested, sun-warmed soil will offer up its richness for new life to emerge miraculously despite it all. We all have been through a year of wintering as writer Katherine May calls it—of quarantine, of challenge, of too much time in our own homes and apart from one another. Our own personal challenges, losses, and griefs from this time are unique, though the struggles of this time have left none of us untouched. I am noticing a need to mark the anniversary of this year of pandemic, to process the enormity of the challenges and losses we have faced this year and to make way for my very real readiness for joy, warmth, and tender new shoots of growth.

At the same time, we have seen amazing acts of hope—the emergence of new life, of collective effort, of a sense that we are truly in this together—that I think are in many ways helpful learning for our shared future. We know now that our farming and food community can and will rally for each other. That we can make it, together. That new life, truly, will return each spring. The shoots are already pushing up underneath the snow.

This Spring issue of NOFA Notes is all about what we have learned this year about resilience—and for our belief in a path toward a more resilient food system for our future. What worked this year? What didn't fall apart? What were the new ideas that finally found the right moment to germinate? What long overdue learning were we finally able to receive and heed?

I wanted to share a bit of our work that is often out of public sight: we recently participated

met with Senators Leahy and Sanders and Representative Welch and their teams to bring forward three main priorities that we have centered as a national organic agricultural community. They feel relevant to bring forward here as we explore the idea of resilience, and how to move more towards it:

1. Centering organic agriculture as a key strategy to help heal ecological decline and mitigate climate change;
2. Working for racial equity in organic agriculture and farmland access, and;
3. Standing for integrity and authenticity in the 'organic' label, and by closing loopholes in enforcement, ensuring that small, authentic organic producers can thrive.

While these are the priorities of the national coalition, they are also deeply aligned with NOFA-VT's sense of leadership needed for durable change and a truly resilient world.

As the maple trees begin to drip and the light returns, I feel a sense of real hope—the kind of "active hope" that Joanna Macy writes about, hope that asks us to participate in making it so. Personally, I am excited to share that I'm expecting a baby in the summer, so the sense of life and potential growing is very immediate for me right now! For this baby and all our children, I am heartened, hopeful, and inspired by the many efforts towards a more resilient future for us all.

Warmly,

Grace Oedel  
NOFA-VT Executive Director

looked like this local economy, coming together to keep people fed while shortening supply chains, strengthening the viability of local farms, and turning to each other rather than relying on corporations.

Moving toward thriving, resilient systems is asking: what do we need to further decentralize the food system and connect more eaters directly with farmers? How do we increase local, organic food access as the norm for all eaters, not the exception?

How do we grapple with resilience as it relates to white supremacy and agriculture in Vermont? The first step must be to acknowledge the foundational history of agriculture in our nation: twin legacies of genocide and the displacement of the Indigenous community, as well as the practice of enslavement that grew the nation's economy, with agriculture as its engine. Vermont shares in the unbroken lineage that stems from these traumas. We see the continuation of these realities when we look at land ownership in Vermont. Why is land so overwhelmingly owned by white people in the state? Why do we consistently hear the narrative that there are no farmers of color in Vermont, when there are, in fact, thousands of farmers of color who are critical to the agricultural economy of Vermont? The invisibilization (and resulting normalization) of both of these realities get in the way of meaningful work to dismantle racism in our 'Brave Little State.'

Where in the Vermont food system did we see resilience emerge in response to racism and white supremacy? We saw the power of relationship and coalition building when farm and workers' rights organizations organized together to advocate for stimulus payments for people excluded from federal stimulus, and together helped Vermont emerge as the national example of how to build a COVID 'Equity Fund'. We are seeing the innovative ideas of an 'Every Town' effort put forward by grassroots organizers (led by Kenya Lazuli) who imagine boldly that our state might similarly be a leader in an effort to remedy the exclusion of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous or person of color) land ownership in Vermont with land designated

for BIPOC in every town in the state. Farmers are organizing anti-racism study groups, and are beginning the slow work of learning and healing. BIPOC-led collective teams are building new models of cooperative farming, land stewardship, and are keeping their communities fed. Thriving requires centering these strategies in all our work, ensuring that equity is the lens through which our work flows, not an afterthought.

Climate change, the third major challenge of these times, impacts Vermont agriculture enormously. This past year, we recorded the worst drought on record, with many Vermont farmers struggling to irrigate and source enough feed for their animals. We are seeing an enormous increase in the trend of people from out of state buying land in Vermont, a state well positioned in the face of a changing climate; Vermont is a state scientists predict will prove one of the best places to live and grow food in the world by 2070. We need to plan a path to be a safe and welcoming place for all people migrating due to climate (which, again, isn't far off in the future; it has already begun to happen) while also ensuring that land can remain in farmland, and that everyone—not just the economically advantaged—can make a home here.

Where do we see resilient responses emerge in the system in Vermont as climate change continues to make itself abundantly clear? Organic farmers who already had grazing practices in place fared better than those without, as the organic matter in their fields helped them to retain moisture and therefore, were able to grow more grass throughout the season. Practices like hedge rows, cover cropping, and no-till management all help store water during drought—but also keep carbon in soil long-term and therefore, reduce carbon in the atmosphere. Organizing around farmland access and new cooperative ownership models to reduce the economic barrier of land ownership has blossomed, with more cooperative and community trust models emerging over the past year. We need these new models, models of cooperation and

community building, at the core for our future. NOFA-VT recently launched a second round of 'Resilience Grants' for farmers, with pools of funds set aside specifically for BIPOC-run farms to do projects that will help address climate change, and other forms of resilience. By listening closely to the projects that these

farmers put forth to increase long-term resilience, we will be able to align our organizational goals with the most helpful strategies for a thriving future.

Resilience is defined as 'the ability of an object to spring back into its shape.' Yet we need not restore the dominant systems we had in place before 2020—these

were the very conditions that have allowed for white supremacy and climate change to flourish. As we listen carefully to those people working on the front lines to restore thriving ecosystem health, to keep our communities fed, and to dismantle racism from the way we create society, we will hear the strategies we need that bring us back into "shape" with our ecology. These people are both those most affected by, and on the front lines to respond to, these challenges. Centering their voices will bring forward the strategies we need for a thriving future.

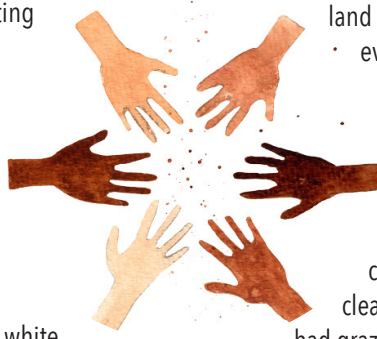
Naomi Doe Moody, one of the cooperative members of the Susu Community Farm, spoke on our 'Future Scouting' panel as part of our 39th annual Winter Conference in February. Naomi shared the idea of 'Sankofa' as a strategy for finding the path forward. Naomi defined 'Sankofa' as the idea that we don't need magical new tech-heavy solutions or to find some silver bullet that will catapult us into the future. Instead, we need to remember what we already know, what ancestors who tended this land for thousands of years in a way that generated life, community, and health, already knew. As we remember an older way, one that centers community-level relationships, we will uncover the original meaning of 'economy': "Economy" comes from the root word 'oikos': the Greek word for 'home tending'. As we tend our place and each other as if we are all sharing a home together, we will return to a true, just, thriving economy for a shared future, in which we can not only survive, but thrive.



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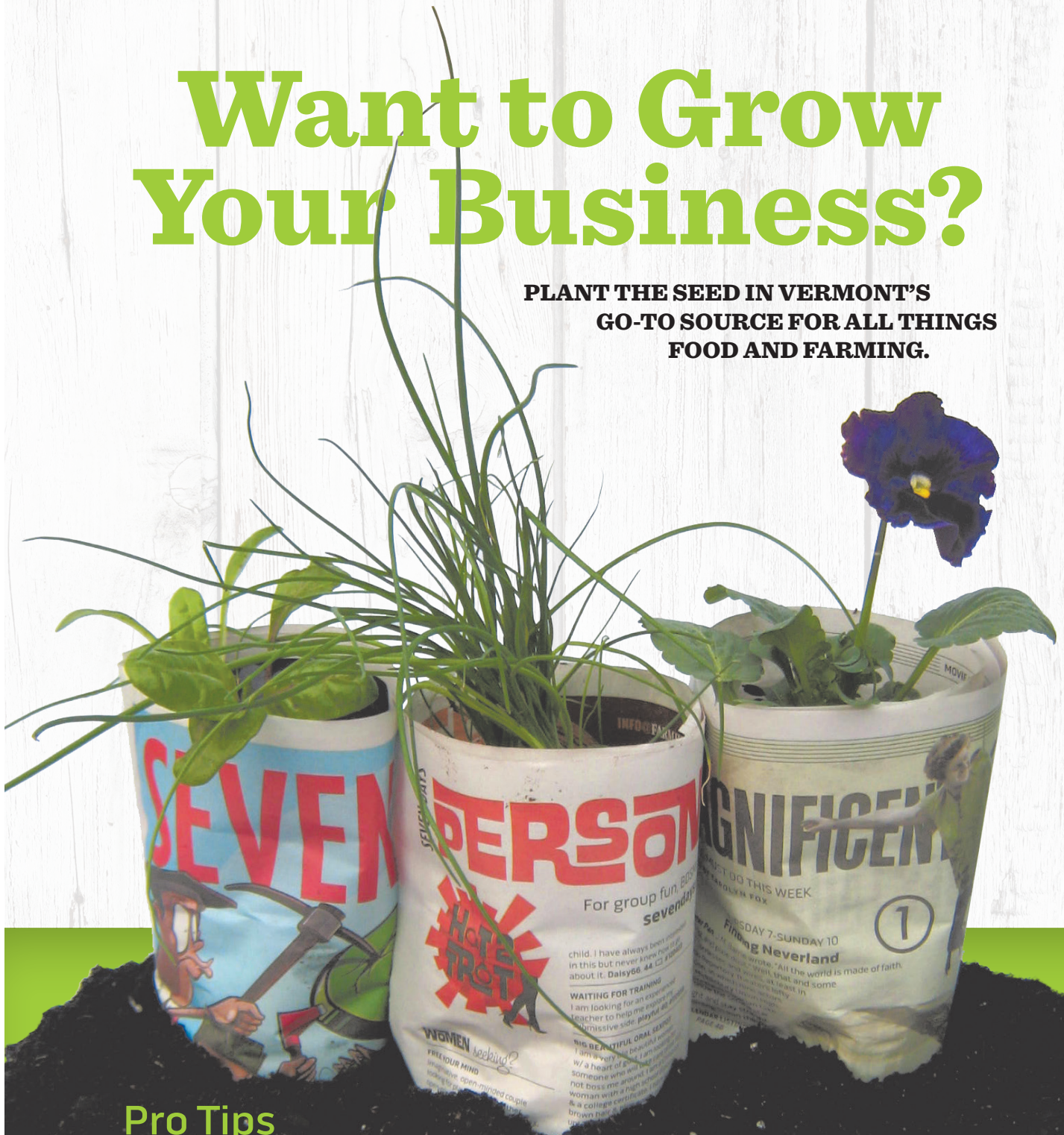
**As we tend our place and each other as if we are all sharing a home together, we will return to a true, just, thriving economy for a shared future, in which we can not only survive, but thrive.**

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# The Spirit of Enid Wonnacott Award: Honoring Jack & Anne Lazor and Scout Proft



*Pictured above, left to right: Enid Wonnacott, Executive Director of NOFA-VT, 1988-2018, Jack & Anne Lazor of Butterworks Farm and Scout Proft of Someday Farm*

## **Following is a transcription of notes from the award presentation on February 7th, 2021, by Peter Forbes, NOFA-VT Board President**

One of the things that makes a beloved community, an inclusive community, is honoring our elders, and in this moment I'm feeling the loss of two very important elders. We are remembering Enid Wonnacott today through this award, and we are also remembering Jack Lazor, one of the people we're honoring today who passed away last November 30th.

The purpose of the Spirit of Enid Wonnacott Award is to bring Enid's spirit right to the surface of our lives, by honoring those who truly embody it daily. Let me begin with Jack and Anne Lazor, innovators of organic agriculture and cofounders of Butterworks Farm in the Northeast Kingdom. From that hilltop in northern Vermont, these two really have changed our state and our country.

Jack and Anne have always been a powerful team. They moved to that hilltop 45 years ago and started making yogurt and cottage cheese prepared on the cookstove, doing door to door delivery, to now an array of exceptional quality yogurts, kefirs, heavy cream and buttermilk that's widely available all across the east coast.

That would be exceptional success alone, but there's been so much more to their lives. Jack knew the particulars of soils but also how to elevate every conversation to the larger topic

of universal human needs. Pasture was Jack's passion, but so was fixing tractors with his friend, Brian Dunn, or reading Wendell Berry's poetry, or writing his own book.

Jack Lazor was an exceptional scholar, a persistent and optimistic farmer, and a remarkably generous human being. One of those people you felt would drop anything, if you asked him, to have a conversation. So many of us have benefitted from those conversations with Jack.

Stonyfield Yogurt and Anne have created a farmer cohort program at NOFA-VT—"Soil Health Stewards"—to honor Jack's ideas and spirit of mentorship.

I want to say something, too, about the model of their partnership. Jack and Anne accomplished so much together. They built a business and supported each other's ideas, and then Anne cared for Jack through seven years of dialysis, all the while keeping their farm and family going.


Jack and Anne were honored in 2019 with a Vermont Agricultural Hall of Fame lifetime achievement award for advocating for organic agriculture. Their 100% grass-fed, organic products are in yogurt, buttermilk, creams; their corn is in whiskey; their lessons are deep in our movement.

Today, we are also honoring Scout Proft: mother, farmer, and teacher. Scout cares for Someday Farm in East Dorset, Vermont's

longest-running CSA, which Scout started in 1987. They've been community-driven ever since.

Their hillside farm has earned so much respect all across New England not just for how they farm but also for the consistent way they've served their community over decades. If you spend time in that part of Vermont, Someday Farm has likely helped to make you. They raise thousands of game birds, roasting chickens, and turkeys, processed in their own state-certified processing facility. They've innovated countless many new ways of doing community supported agriculture. And somehow they also propagate over a 100 varieties of organic vegetables and fruits.

We honor Scout Proft not just because of the energy and care she's given to Someday Farm, but because of how she's shared herself with so many generations of VT farmers. Scout's generosity of spirit has made our NOFA community so much stronger.

"This recognition is a reminder to keep planting the seeds and nurturing the folks who watch the seeds grow," says Scout, of receiving this award. "In these times it's of the utmost of importance to mentor as Enid did, and to show kindness to all things growing as Enid did, and to spread the inclusiveness of what NOFA stands for as Enid did. Kindness and joy and heart-full work. Thank you Enid for reminding us all of what really is of greatest importance." 

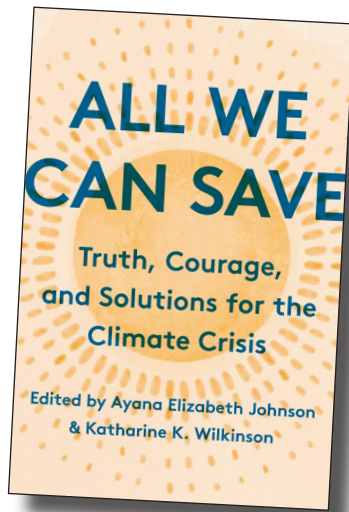
# NOFA-VT Member Book Club, April 1

By Erin Buckwalter, NOFA-VT Development & Engagement Director

During these virtual times, we're offering a NOFA-VT member book club! On Thursday, April 1st from 6:30-8pm, please join us to discuss *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson. This collection sets out to highlight a wide range of women's voices in the environmental movement, most of whom are from North America. Connect with fellow NOFA-VT members during these socially distant times.

If you don't have

a copy of the book yet, you can contact your local library or consider purchasing from one of Vermont's incredible independent bookstores. You can find a list here: [www.vermontbookshop.com/visit-vermont-independent-bookstores](http://www.vermontbookshop.com/visit-vermont-independent-bookstores).



## More about this collection from Goodreads

*All We Can Save* illuminates the expertise and insights of dozens of diverse women leading on climate in the United States—scientists, journalists, farmers, lawyers, teachers, activists, innovators,

workers, and designers, across generations, geographies, and race—and aims to advance a more representative, nuanced, and solution-oriented public conversation on the climate crisis. These women offer a spectrum of ideas and insights for how we can rapidly, radically reshape society.

Intermixing essays with poetry and art, this book is both a balm and a guide for knowing and holding what has been done to the world, while bolstering our resolve never to give up on one another or our collective future. We must summon truth, courage, and solutions to turn away from the brink and toward life-giving possibility. Curated by two climate leaders, the book is a collection and celebration of visionaries who are leading us on a path toward all we can save.



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# Get a Taste for the Jr Iron Chef VT Cooking Club

By Kayla Strom, NOFA-VT Farm to School and Development Coordinator

This winter, teens across the state have been participating in Vermont FEED's (a collaboration of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms) virtual competition, the Jr Iron Chef VT Cooking Club. The monthly cooking challenge is a fun way to bring our community together while honoring the core values of Jr Iron Chef VT, which engages middle and high school students in improving their own health and the health of their community by creating nutritious, locally sourced dishes to inspire school meal programs.

Over the last four months, participating students have learned how to make mixed vegetable curry, Chinese dumplings, vegetable pot pie, and sweet potato chickpea burgers. One participating family shared that, "My son has

been having so much fun in the club and the rest of us have enjoyed having him cook for us!"

"I just wanted to let you know how much the kids loved getting their prize box," another family shared. "They have already picked out some recipes to try from the new cookbooks. Today we're making dumplings! This is a really wonderful program!"

It's not just students who have been involved. The Cooking Club has brought together past Junior Iron Chef VT competition judges, coaches, and local chefs to share their wisdom with participants each month. This



reminds us that it takes many players—students, food service professionals, parents, and the community—to change our food system. Jr Iron Chef VT involves all of these individuals to create a vibrant and fun event.

**Please share the news of this club with all the Vermont teens in your life who love to cook or try it yourself! Below is the recipe challenge for the month of March. For more details about the club, participation, and rules, visit [jrironchefvt.org](http://jrironchefvt.org).**

## Sweet Potato-Chickpea Burgers with Caribbean Slaw & VT Maple BBQ Sauce

2019 Crowd Pleaser, Green Mt. Union High-Middle School, Team: Turnip the Beet

TIME: 10 minutes prep, 45 minutes baking YIELD: 4-6 servings

**Ingredients** (\* these can easily be sourced locally)

### Burgers

- 1 15 oz can of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 medium sweet potato\*
- ¼ cup coarse grain cornmeal\*
- ¼ cup scallions, cleaned, and chopped\*
- 1½ teaspoons chili powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

### BBQ sauce

- 1 cup canned tomato sauce
- ¼ cup VT maple syrup\*
- 2 teaspoons cider vinegar\*
- 1½ teaspoons water
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire Sauce (use soy sauce if vegetarian)
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Caribbean Slaw

- 1 cup shredded red or green cabbage\*
- 1/3 cup sweetened coconut,

- toasted
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ¼ cup shredded carrot\*
- ¼ cup scallions, cleaned, and chopped
- ¼ cup mayonnaise (or Greek yogurt)
- 1 lime, juiced
- ¼ teaspoon allspice
- Salt and pepper to taste

**Garnish:** Avocado slices (optional)

### Preparation Instructions

#### Step 1: BURGERS

Preheat oven to 450°F. Cut the sweet potato in half lengthwise. Rub a little olive oil on the cut side of the sweet potato. Place cut side down onto a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake for about 25 to 30 minutes until the sweet potato is tender when pricked with a fork. Allow to cool. Remove skin and place in a medium size bowl. While the sweet potato bakes, make the BBQ

sauce and slaw.

Mash the cooked sweet potato together with the chickpeas. Add all other burger ingredients and continue to mash until well combined. Form the mixture into about five patties with your hands. A half cup measuring cup can be helpful for scooping and flattening your patties. Place on an oiled or parchment lined baking sheet. Bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown, flipping halfway through the baking time.

#### Step 2: CARIBBEAN SLAW

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Spread coconut evenly on a rimmed sheet. Bake 5-10 minutes, watching carefully and stirring a few times until fragrant and golden brown, being careful not to burn it. Set aside and allow to cool.

Combine all of the slaw ingredients, including the



coconut in a large bowl. Mix until thoroughly combined. Refrigerate for 20 minutes to allow the flavors to combine.

#### Step 3: BBQ SAUCE

Combine all BBQ sauce ingredients in a small bowl and set aside while patties bake.

#### Step 4: ASSEMBLY -CREATE YOUR SANDWICH

Toast and butter French bread or buns of your choice. Layer your sweet potato chickpea burgers, BBQ sauce and Caribbean slaw, and top with optional avocado slices.

*Enjoy!*

**Don't forget to compost!** Have someone in your house join the fun and help with the root vegetable peeling and dicing. Once you've peeled all of your vegetables, this recipe comes together quickly. You'll find the vegetable prep will leave you with a nice pile of peels which are garden gold.

# The Unique Challenges of Farming & Caregiving

By Megan Browning, NOFA-VT Farmer Services Program Facilitator

Caregiving in our society is systemically undervalued as a matter of course. Any false expectations compound for farmers, with the pastoral and unrealistic vision that farmers can provide childcare—while they are also farming. Since the pandemic, we've heard from many farmers who felt like they were really alone. Many worried they were both bad parents and bad farmers—that it was just too hard to do both well with all the constraints and added stress from the pandemic.

After hearing this same refrain repeated by many folks, NOFA-VT wanted to help create more opportunity for farmer to farmer support, to bring farmers with these shared experiences together to feel less alone, and share strategies that were working for them so others could benefit.

With the generous support of folks who made donations to our COVID-19 Response Fund, we started a support series in December. We worked with farmers and caregivers from different parts of the state: Abbie Corse, Kate Spring and Keegan Albaugh, to offer support and guidance through this 6-part zoom series that we called: "Help! I'm Farming and Caregiving in a Pandemic."

Throughout this time together, people had the space and support to have open and honest conversations about their farming and caregiving challenges and strategies they were using to address them. The series supported around fifty farmer caregivers across the sessions and we brought back another series in March to continue these conversations, as well as some additional opportunities

for storytelling and relationship building around the unique challenges of farming and caregiving.

In a survey of participants after the series, most reported feeling less alone, and appreciated the space to both share their struggles and build relationships with other farmers experiencing a similar challenge.



## I Am the Farmer: Abbie Corse Reflects on Farming & Mothering

By Megan Browning, Farmer Services Program Facilitator

Abbie Corse, an owner and operator of the Corse Farm Dairy, has been learning to juggle mothering and farming for ten years, and it has not always been easy. Mother of Eli, 10, and Niko, 7, and stepmama to Grey, 14, Abbie is finally becoming clear headed about what pressure points exist at the intersection of farming and parenting. "I'm an unusual dairy farmer," shared Abbie in a recent interview, "because I don't farm with my partner. This has literally defined how I am able to farm; needing to be the primary caregiver and farmer all at once."

Before becoming a mother, Abbie had no idea what a challenge it was going to be. "My expectation of myself, brought on by a societal and cultural expectation," she shared, "is that I would be able to become a mother and still farm, just like I had before." In fact, after having her first son, struggling through a difficult labor and trouble breastfeeding, difficulties finding childcare, and working hard to keep the family farm going, Abbie felt more alone than she ever had in her life. "I don't want any other farm

mother to experience the pain, heartbreak and despair that I did," she said.

Abbie described the unique challenges of farming and caregiving, emphasizing the reality that carrying out the responsibilities of your job and childcare simultaneously is not expected in any other profession. Somehow, however, in the farming world, this is expected and accepted. "If that is what you want to do, I bow to you," Abbie shared, "but it shouldn't be the standing expectation."

Abbie is quite clear that our young people are in part leaving the state, "because there is not a robust enough infrastructure here to raise up your family rurally." Farmers need what every other person needs to live a life of dignity: schools, childcare, healthcare, and community. We must continue to advocate for these things on the policy level, and in the meantime we're going to have to build these systems of support together.

After suffering a nervous breakdown in August 2008 while living and working away

***I can always find something to advocate for being better, but I have genuine contentment through almost all of my days and that is the greatest privilege in the world. I wouldn't have that if I wasn't farming and caregiving.***

**—Abbie Corse**





from the family farm, Abbie and her husband moved back because that was where they felt she could be most whole and supported. With access to her family and the medical support she needed to navigate her mental illness, she apprenticed with her father to take over the family dairy business. She felt privileged to have housing and basic needs met, but money was tight, and when she had her first child in 2010, childcare was a financial burden.

Although she was able to figure out a childcare solution within their family budget, this was a seriously challenging time for Abbie and her family. Imagine the dead of July, in 90 degree weather, urgently needing to get hay dry and then having to stop in the middle to pump and drive 20 minutes to bring milk to her child in childcare. This was not sustainable.

*Read the rest of the story ~  
nofavt.org/abbie-caregiving*



# Welcome to our Newest Staff!

## Andrew Graham - Direct Markets Coordinator

Andrew grew up in Pennsylvania attending a Waldorf school. After he finished high school, his family moved (back) to Vermont, where he studied Community & International Development at UVM. After a year with AmeriCorps VISTA doing poverty remediation work in Vermont and three years at an urban farm co-op in Portland, Oregon, Andrew attended Antioch University New England where he earned a degree in Environmental Education focused on the food system and climate change. Most recently, Andrew spent three years as the Community Engagement Coordinator for the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), where he managed the incredible volunteer community that helps put on the Common Ground Country Fair. Andrew loves to cook and do all things related to food, including growing and processing it. He believes that we each need to be an ally to people who are suffering or marginalized. His values include localism, thriftiness, and sharing resources. He currently lives in Brattleboro.



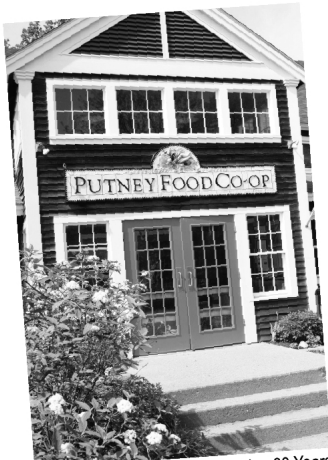
## Eric Andersen - NOFA-VT Office Manager and VOF Admin Assistant

Eric lives in East Montpelier with his wife and ten year old daughter on their farm, Anderbell Acres. When he's not managing finances, you can find Eric riding his John Deere in the fields, getting his hands dirty, and enjoying hiking, biking and exploring all the wonders that Vermont has to offer with his family. You can check out their farm website at [anderbellacres.com](http://anderbellacres.com).



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- Plainfield Food Co-op, Plainfield, VT
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# Our Friends the Fields

## Chronicles of the early years of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association

By Sara Norton, NOFA-VT Director, 1980-1984

One morning in June, 1979, Larry Karp walked on his hillside in Greensboro, Vermont. He wrote in that summer's *The Natural Farmer* issue how, "a walk in my fields this time of year is my reward... the sounds of birds, the wind dusting the leaves of the trees and the warm summer sun playing with all the shades of green. ... We've just finished our first cutting of hay and the thought comes to mind that I am cutting and harvesting half a year's worth of feed for my animals in four weeks of the year. Then I realize how wondrous it is. Here falls with every pass of my mower, every circuit of my tedder, every blade of my baler, the sustenance of winter ... the forces of the sun captured in each bale to warm my cattle during those winter days far from the green mosaic of summer pasture."

Karp continues, "Haying is the time I get to become reacquainted with my fields and see how they have done since last year; to see what I've done for them. Fields are living beings, friends a farmer gets to know. And teachers. Our fields teach us the lesson of our actions. If the fields are not fed and cared for they will

not yield up their harvest. One cannot take without giving back."

Larry and Erika Karp were among the group of farmers, organizers and activists who came together as NOFA, The Northeast Organic Farmers Association.

That next spring, I sat with Larry and Erika at their kitchen table, planning a NOFA workshop on their farm on keeping bees. Their farm was beautiful—a mosaic of enterprises that fit together in a pattern: bees, cows, pigs, chickens, vegetables—all on a hillside in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. This is how life should be, I thought. Here is an example of the ingenious puzzle that is a diversified, small farm.

The topography of Vermont and New Hampshire, where NOFA began, with its hillsides, sometimes steep and sometimes gentle, and with its river valleys, sometimes narrow and sometimes wide, begs for small farms and diversified farming practices. And

the times, with their desperate need for local, healthy food and with their planetary climate crisis, demand organic agriculture. And it is deeper: it's about having an intimate relationship with the intelligence of the land and to know the fields as friends.

I am writing this in 2021. I am almost 80 years old and I'm looking back 50 years to NOFA's beginning. Now I can say with conviction that NOFA is the most extraordinary organization I have ever known. It is my privilege to have been a part of it.

## Special 50th Anniversary Article

Memory likes to gather things up in bundles like bales of hay or bins of carrots in the root cellar – the preserved harvest. These bundles become themes, which is the way history loves to organize itself. The themes in my memory of NOFA are these: 1) The strong, pervasive sense of idealism that was shared. It was felt in

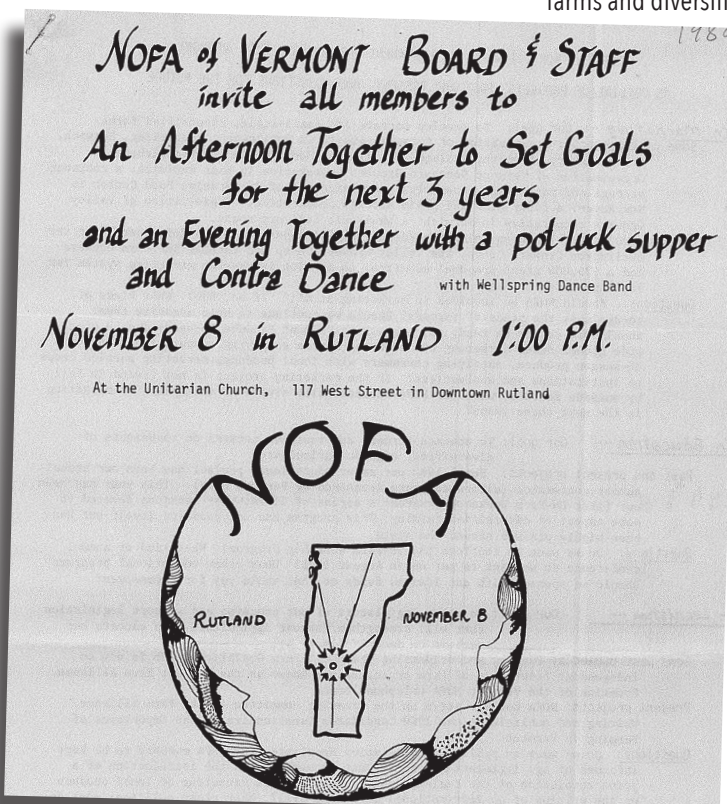
*NOFA is the most extraordinary organization I have ever known. It is my privilege to have been a part of it.*

each meeting in farmhouses around the state, tasted in the potluck before the meeting, felt at farmers markets, experienced in the conferences and the hearing rooms at the statehouse, and was present in the mix of grit and high goals seen in the rural, hardscrabble way of life

that people were willing to live. 2) The people gathering to work together in a robust volunteer spirit of collective action. 3) A commitment to care for the land, the soil; to nurture our places, our valleys and hills.

My story with NOFA begins on January 2, 1980 when I took the job of State Coordinator, or Director, of the still new organization of Vermont-NOFA. (In those days NOFA loved the term "coordinator" in keeping with its nonhierarchical principles. One didn't "direct," one "coordinated." Later the board changed my title to "Director" to better interface with organizations in the non-NOFA world with whom we were networking). I was given the keys to the new NOFA office at 5 State Street in Montpelier, just two blocks from the Statehouse. I climbed the narrow stairs to the bare office. There was no furniture yet but over along one wall, a collection of cardboard boxes of old files which had emerged from closets around the state waited silently. I sat on the floor and eagerly opened the first box. What would I learn here about what to do as the new director?

*Read the whole article  
& see early NOFA  
documents online! Go to  
[nofavt.org/50th-stories](http://nofavt.org/50th-stories)*



# Spring Policy Update

By Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT Policy Director

The past few months have been a whirlwind in the Vermont legislature, both for advocates and, no doubt, for legislators themselves. A COVID-focused 2020 session that extended well into the fall left both advocates and legislators with less time than usual to regroup and make plans for the new biennium now underway. As a result, it's been challenging to predict what would "stick" during this legislative session in terms of improving or moving forward with new policy.

Thankfully, one area of focus that became clear early on was the dire need to address food insecurity, particularly among children, which has sharply risen as a result of the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Since the start of the session, we have worked with Hunger Free VT, Shelburne Farms, Vermont Foodbank, and early childhood advocates to move S.100, a bill that is truly a win-win effort to address food insecurity, as well as long term agricultural resilience, by taking meaningful steps toward more local food being purchased by schools. The bill combines three important school meals initiatives into one: Universal School Meals, funding for the Farm to School grants program, and Vermont Food for Vermont Kids, a tiered incentive program that encourages schools to purchase more local food. As of March 10, S.100 has passed out of the Senate Agriculture Committee and is in the Senate Education Committee.

Closer to the farm, we've also been working with the legislature to address and clarify some problematic language currently in statute in Act 116, which requires that animals predominantly maintained outdoors have access to "adequate natural or built shelter" at all times, to "prevent direct exposure to the elements." While this language was passed with the goal of preventing egregious animal abuse and cruelty (a goal we clearly share), we are concerned about its implications for the grazing community. Working in collaboration with our partners at Rural Vermont, NOFA-VT has testified on this issue and brought in a number of graziers and other agricultural experts to the House Agriculture & Forestry Committee to propose alternative language based on the National Organic Program, which we believe sets a more reasonable standard for shelter of grazing animals. While not clear if our language will be accepted, we are making

progress toward a solution that clarifies that farmers practicing accepted animal husbandry or grazing management will not be required to provide access to shelter at all times.

We have continued to work alongside Rural Vermont, Vermont Growers Association, Justice for All, and Trace to advocate for changes to Act 164 (previously S.54) that will create a more just and equitable adult-use cannabis marketplace. S.25 is a bill put forward by the Senate Judiciary Committee this session regarding cannabis, which was taken up on March 10 by the Senate Agriculture Committee, marking the first time adult-use cannabis legislation has been considered by the agriculture committee in either chamber. We are seeking changes to the existing law that would 1) establish outdoor cannabis cultivation as an agricultural activity, 2) establish a craft licensing structure and the costs of craft licenses, 3) differentiate between indoor, mixed-light, and outdoor cultivation for commercial sale, 4) institute production caps for all scales and types of cultivation licenses, and 5) increase allowances for home cultivation.

We are tracking, and have testified in response to a proposal from the Vermont Agency of agriculture, Food & Markets to create an "Agricultural Innovation Board" to replace the Vermont Pesticide Advisory Council (VPAC). The Agricultural Innovation Board would make recommendations to reduce the use of and exposure to pesticides, as well as advise the legislative and executive branches on agricultural pest control measures. It would be constituted of a range of experts from across the agricultural community, along with a few members with expertise in the human health and ecological impacts of pesticide use. We are supportive of some aspects of this proposal - particularly the ways in which this board would work more holistically and collaboratively on pesticide use reduction. However, we have concerns about abolishing VPAC altogether, about the Agency's oversight role in the board, and about the creation of yet another agricultural advisory board whose work is related to many other concurrent efforts still underway.

Speaking of related efforts, the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Soil Health Working Group is set to reconvene this spring,



having not met since April 2020. On March 16, the group resumes its work, along with several new members added via legislation last year. The charge of the group is essentially to research and recommend approaches for compensating farmers and other land managers for ecosystem services provided by ecological land management. NOFA-VT serves in the seat representing small-scale, diversified agriculture. In this role, we plan to advocate for a PES program that rewards farmers, including organic farmers, for a range of ecosystem services and that specifically address biodiversity (both above and below ground) as a cornerstone of ecological health.

In recent weeks, the Climate Council has also finalized the membership of its five subcommittees on Agriculture & Ecosystems, Cross-Sector Mitigation, Just Transitions, Rural Resilience & Adaptation, and Science & Data. While NOFA-VT was not appointed to a seat on the Agriculture & Ecosystems Subcommittee, we are pleased to see many of our partners and allies on the list of appointees, and are cheering on our board member, Abbie Corse, who is serving as that subcommittee's co-chair.

Finally, at the federal level, we continue to work closely with our Congressional delegation and allied national organizations like the National Organic Coalition and the Organic Farmers Association to advocate for stronger enforcement of the organic regulations and the finalization of important rules that will close loopholes in organic production. In March, we participated in a virtual "fly-in" with NOC, where we advocated for organic as a climate solution, racial equity within organic, greater enforcement of the pasture rule and soil health regulations, and for USDA to finalize several rules including Origin of Livestock (OOL), Organic Livestock & Poultry Practices (OLPP), and Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE). See more details in "Thoughts from Grace" on page 2.



# Reflections on the Early Organic Movement

By Will Stevens, organic farmer & past NOFA-VT Board President

Vermont's organic movement in the late 70s and early 80s was marked by a number of small, discreet, and innovative operators who were sprinkled throughout the state. Many of these folks were homesteaders inspired by Helen and Scott Nearing, and/or back-to-the-landers looking for an opportunity to find life's meaning. A few were conventional farmers who saw commercial opportunity in organic food production. Most (if not all) of them were motivated by the idea that their efforts were making the world a better place. Whatever the reasons, however, those organic pioneers looked to NOFA for support because of a shared sense of purpose and mission. This year, NOFA-VT adopted the theme of "Honor, Energize, and Imagine" for its Winter Conference, kicking off the celebration of 50 years of service to Vermont's organic community.

The "Honor" portion of the conference was a keynote Panel of Elders, composed of six veteran farmers, who represent what was going on in Vermont's organic community during those nascent early days:

**Grace Gershuny** became involved with NOFA-VT in 1974 when she organized, and then sold vegetables at, the Newport Farmers Market. She served in many volunteer and staff positions for NOFA through the 1980s and joined the National Organic Program staff to help write USDA's organic regulations in the 1990s. Grace has authored and co-authored several books, including the 1986 classic, *The Soul of Soil*. The third edition of her memoir, *Organic Revolutionary*, was published in 2020.

**Sam Burr and Eugenie Doyle** of Last Resort Farm in Monkton bought their current farm in 1986 after running a dairy and strawberry operation for several years in Brookfield. Along with organic berries, vegetables, and hay, they raised three children, one of whom (Silas) is in the process of taking over and expanding the farm.

**Bruce Kaufman** runs Riverside Farm in East Hardwick with his wife and business partner Judy Jarvis. Bruce had farming in his blood at an early age and first farmed in New Hampshire with Samuel Kayman in the late 70s. Samuel went on to Stoneyfield Yogurt fame while Bruce kept on farming – he moved to Vermont and partnered with Joey

Klein at Littlewood Farm in Plainfield for several years before landing at his current farm in 1989.

**David Marchant** came to Riverberry Farm in Fairfax in 1991 by way of Cornell, in addition to work/life experiences in Oregon, Plymouth, VT, and the New Alchemy Institute in Massachusetts. He and his wife, Jane Sorensen, currently raise strawberries, vegetables, and bedding plants. He is very proud of the fact that about 20 of their past employees are now farming on their own.

**Suzanne Long** runs Luna Bleu Farm with her husband, Tim Sanford, in South Royalton. They are primarily a Community Supported Agriculture operation and offer an assortment of vegetables, meat, and eggs. Suzanne came to the farm through a variety of farm work experiences in New Jersey, India, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Their daughter Shona is assuming responsibility of the livestock portion of the operation as part of their farm succession plan.

Since knowing where we come from provides perspective on where we're going, panelists shared their experiences as new farmers starting out at a time when "Organic" was a euphemism for poor-quality produce. For most of them, organic farming just made sense; its moral imperative preceded the task of making it work economically. Although none of them started out with a brilliant business plan in hand, several launched their career paths out of "active resistance" to their higher educational experiences as undergrads, rebelling against the then pervasive lessons about soil health, organic production and profitability, and



Above, Grace Gershuny, NOFA-VT's first state coordinator (known then just as "NOFA"), speaks from the podium during the 1983 Summer Conference. Below, Eugenie Doyle and Sam Burr, of Last Resort Farm, have been continuously farming since 1986.



nutrition. Grace Gershuny used her Master's studies to advance her commitment to organic education. Their best lessons, it seemed, came from their experiences in the School of Life.

Every one of these panelists were ready when opportunity knocked. The early organic movement was marked (out of necessity) by self-education and innovation. The lack of supportive services and businesses meant that farmers needed to create their own ways of doing things. They refined their farming practices and management systems through trial and error, good record-keeping, and information-sharing. Although not explicitly mentioned, NOFA played a critical role in the

Reflections, continued on page 15

# Organic Agriculture is Climate Friendly Agriculture

By Nicole Dehne, VOF Certification Director


We are happy to announce that VOF and NOFA-VT have received a Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant to help market organic farming as a solution to climate change. We are excited about this opportunity to create a statewide campaign to educate consumers about the important role Vermont organic farmers play in mitigating against the harmful effects of climate change, and how their purchases of organic food can make a big difference! As part of this project, we have partnered with Vital Communities to evaluate messages and materials with shoppers in market channels like farmers markets, co-ops, and CSA pickups in the Upper Valley.

This marketing campaign is part of a larger goal of NOFA-VT's, to help our state (and beyond) recognize the important role that organic agriculture plays as a solution to the climate crisis and to encourage shoppers who care about this issue to buy more organic to

make a positive impact on climate change. Science demonstrates that organic farming reduces greenhouse gas emissions, builds soil health, sequesters carbon, and fosters resilience to droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events. We believe that it is critical to increase the broader public understanding of how organic practices like cover cropping and crop rotation help to create healthy soils. The role that organic producers play in fighting the negative impacts of our changing climate must be more clearly understood, allowing shoppers to make that connection when purchasing their food. In addition, as consumers increasingly value and support climate friendly organic practices with their dollars, we believe that more farmers will be incentivized to adopt organic practices.

This spring, we are launching this educational campaign through radio, print, and social media. Please keep an eye on your inbox

and look for a short survey, which will test a number of taglines, slogans, and talking points to determine which will capture consumers' attention about the power of organic agriculture to address climate change.

Thank you! 



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success of many of today's Elders because it was there to support them when little else was. NOFA sponsored on-farm workshops, summer and winter conferences, and other programs and services that nurtured the organic community throughout its infancy. NOFA's community came to be made up of farmers and consumers, educators and students, practitioners and acolytes, mentors and mentees. In this community, knowledge was freely shared and co-operation, not competition, was the norm. Every panelist agreed about the value this co-operative culture played in their development as an organic grower and in its importance for the future.



Farmers markets were an easy entry point for many panelists' careers in organic farming. The markets provided a flexible training ground where planting schedules, marketing ideas, and quality assurance could be experimented with and perfected, and through which producers could discover their real interests and refine their management styles and farming systems. Every panelist described their business's evolution as a series of responses to changes in markets, interests, skills, personal and/or economic situations, and other factors. Eugenie said that "transition" represented the essential story of their farm.

Of all the challenges mentioned by the panelists, access to land was, and still is, at or near the top of the list. All of them are first-generation farmers, and the land they are farming today is not where they grew up. Fortunately, a variety of programs and policies now exist that are designed to help young farmers find, finance, and profitably operate a new farm. The Vermont Land Trust, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, lenders who have a new understanding of the business potential of small diversified farms, and Federal programs have all made things much easier for young farmers today to "set up for success" than what the panels' Elders experienced back in the days when "farming" in Vermont was defined as conventional dairy, period.


Several panelists mentioned the 1989 "Alar

scare" as being a watershed moment in the evolution of the organic movement, because it made Food Safety a top national issue. Prior to this, many small organic producers were comfortable operating within, expanding, and exploiting the "cracks" in America's existing food system. After Alar, Vermont's organic producers suddenly found themselves in the spotlight and well-positioned to take advantage of the public's new and growing interest in personal health and access to a safe, secure, and local supply of food. This would become the "Localvore" movement in the Northeast. As larger farms began converting to organics in other parts of the country, their economies of scale both increased production and lowered prices. As Grace mentioned, the upside was that consumers had better access to more organic products because more land was in organic production. The challenge for Vermont growers became how to compete on this new stage.

The panelists discussed the challenges of achieving balance between work and family life while running a family farm business. The reality is that on the farm there is always something to do and never enough help, and sometimes time-critical actions (whether family or farm) need to be taken. The overriding hope is that the long-term economic ends justify the short-term means.

Although time did not allow for many "Tales from the Farm," the panelists were generally upbeat about the state of organic farming in Vermont today and were encouraging about the prospects of future success for today's young farmers. Tomorrow's Elders have the advantage of having had the path cleared for them through the experiences of and lessons learned by today's Elders.

When asked for words of wisdom, several folks mentioned the importance of being kind to yourself and not being afraid to ask for help – feeling alone is not the same as being alone. Remember that your community can help share your burdens; it is in your interest to both ask and share. They mentioned the importance of unity: organic agriculture is still but a small speck of the national ag economy and panelists stressed the need to maintain solidarity around the shared mission and purpose of organics. Several suggested that priorities are situational: yes, it's good to establish priorities, but it's also good to review and adjust them as conditions change. Quality of life should include the production of good food and vice versa!

Bruce's advice? "Do not be afraid . . . do what Mother Earth wants us to do . . . You can do it! Have faith, (and) plant seeds!" 



Above, Suzanne Long and her husband, Tim Sanford, of Luna Bleu Farm in S. Royalton. Left, Dave Marchant and his wife, Jane Sorenson, started River Berry Farm in Fairfax in 1991.



# NOFA-VT Members: Thank you for supporting organic agriculture!

**A warm welcome to the following members who joined us or renewed their membership in the 1st quarter of 2021:**

## NEW MEMBERS

Emily Amanna, Athens, VT  
Victor Atkins II, Lincoln, VT  
Andrew Bainton, Burlington, VT  
Jenna Baird, North Chittenden, VT  
Aylie Baker, Shelburne, VT  
Susan Beshar, West Glover, VT  
Ethan Bond-Watts, Charlotte, VT  
Scott Boyce, Richford, VT  
Tim Brennan, Greensboro, VT  
Chess Brownell, Stowe, VT  
Kara Buchanan, Burlington, VT  
Molly Bulger, Huntington, VT  
Nathan Bullard, Bridgewater Corner, VT  
Karen Burke, Colchester, VT  
Capps Household, Lunenburg, VT  
Lisa Carper, Fairfield, VT  
Rae Carter, Plainfield, VT  
Paul Cate, Montpelier, VT  
Kat Clear, Ferrisburgh, VT  
Krista Coombs, Bennington, VT  
Sarah Costin, Shaftsbury, VT  
Jill Crosbie, Bridgewater Corners, VT  
Anne & Paul Dannenberg,  
Huntington, VT  
Lara Dickson, Middlebury, VT  
Elisabeth Dorries, Danville, VT  
Kevin & Paula Dougherty, Rochester, VT

Hannah Doyle, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Nicole Draper, Swanton, VT  
Emmett Dunbar, S Londonderry, VT  
Jeff Dunham, Starksboro, VT  
Linda Dunnack, Fairlee, VT  
Lucas & Louisa Farrell, Townshend, VT  
James Findlay Shirras, Montpelier, VT  
Karey French, Hinesburg, VT  
Heath Galloway, Waitsfield, VT  
Licia Gambino, Shrewsbury, VT  
Jessica Garretson, Plainfield, VT  
Cecilia Garvin, Peacham, VT  
Angela M Grenier, Wilder, VT  
Victoria Hahl, Middlebury, VT  
Eli Hersh & Valerie Woodhouse,  
Norwich, VT  
Rick Hubbard, Grand Isle, VT  
Dmitriy Ioselevich, Burlington, VT  
Andrea Jacobson, Great Barrington, MA  
Amber Kennedy, Underhill, VT  
Brent Kidder, Northfield, VT  
Kieran Killeen, Shelburne, VT  
Kurt Kling, Starksboro, VT  
Sylvia Knight, Burlington, VT  
Pam Knights, Northfield, VT  
Alice Kriz, Brattleboro, VT  
Christine Kubacz, Fairfield, VT

Katy Lash, Cambridge, VT  
Lazor Family, Westfield, VT  
Seth Leach, Pawlet, VT  
Wendy Leffel, Pownal, VT  
Katie Rose Leonard, Shelburne, VT  
Dan MacArthur, Marlboro, VT  
Michael Maguire, Great Barrington, MA  
Jette Mandl-Abramson, Wells River, VT  
Jean Martel, Embrun, ON  
Kate McConlogue, Underhill, VT  
Robin McDermott, Waitsfield, VT  
Susan Munkres, Burlington, VT  
Charlie Nardozi, N Ferrisburgh, VT  
Emily O'Connor, Avon Lake, OH  
Sharon O'Connor, S Royalton, VT  
Luigi Palmeri, Putney, VT  
Willis Phelps, South Strafford, VT  
Sherri & Ken Pidgeon, Williston, VT  
Mary Louise Pierson, Thetford Ctr, VT  
Christine Porcaro, Ferrisburgh, VT  
Janis Reinke, Hubbardton, VT  
Marianne Richards, Milton, VT  
Jess Rubin, Burlington, VT

Linda Ruth Smith, Putney, VT  
Giovanna Sassi, Shelburne, VT  
Fred Schmidt, Burlington, VT  
Tatiana Schreiber, Putney, VT  
Jess Simpson, Lyndonville, VT  
Donna Smith, Marshfield, VT  
Adele Stafford, Waitsfield, VT  
Meggie Stoltzman, Halifax, VT  
Ethan Thompson, Burlington, VT  
Cornelia Tierney, Charlotte, VT  
Cole Trager, South Royalton, VT  
Suzanne Tremblay, Colchester, VT  
Stephanie Walsh, Burlington, VT  
Maria Wicker, Charlotte, VT  
Winnie Wilkinson, St Albans, VT  
Sarah Williston, Oak Bluffs, MA  
Sarah Wood, Hartland, VT  
Rebecca & Douglas Worpel,  
Jeffersonville, VT  
Helena Wu, Londonderry, VT  
Olive Ylin, Wolcott, VT  
Philip Young, Morristown, VT  
Kayleigh Boyle, Craftsby, VT

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Artesano, Groton, VT  
Black Dirt Farm, Greensboro Bend, VT  
Brigham Family Farm, Cuttingsville, VT  
Butternut Mountain Farm, Morrisville,  
VT  
Cedar Circle Farm & Education Center,  
East Thetford, VT  
Dana Hudson, Waterbury Ctr, VT  
Deana Hawk, East Montpelier, VT  
Dobra US LLC, Burlington, VT  
Farm & Wilderness Foundation,  
Plymouth, VT  
Farmers To You, LLC,  
Middlesex, VT  
Hunger Free Vermont, S.  
Burlington, VT  
Jade Mountain Wellness,  
Burlington, VT  
King Arthur Baking  
Company, White River  
Junction, VT  
McEnroe Organic Farm,  
Millerton, NY  
Michael Pill, Shutesbury,  
MA  
Mountain's Edge Farm,  
LLC, Hinesburg, VT

Plainfield Co-op, Plainfield, VT  
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# Jack Lazor Memorial Soil Health Stewards

NOFA-VT is proud to launch a soil health cohort program to honor the legacy and wisdom of Jack Lazor, an organic farming pioneer and the co-founder of Butterworks Farm. This cohort will promote farmer-to-farmer education and relationship building in an effort to address both short term mitigation strategies around soil health as well as long term systems change. This cohort will prioritize farmers who are, or wish to become, great educators and will continue to share what they learn with other farmers through mentorship or by hosting workshops in the future. In this way, the funds will continue to pay it forward and honor Jack's legacy for years to come. In this inaugural year, the program will focus on dairy and livestock farmers.

*Many thanks to Stonyfield Organic, Butterworks Farm and the Lazor Family for their generous funding for this legacy project to help steward healthy soil and a thriving agricultural future for our planet!*

## ***Jack's Life & Legacy***

Jack Lazor was a cornerstone of the organic farming community. Jack, along with his wife Anne Lazor, have always been innovators or organic agriculture. They co-founded Butterworks farm 45 years ago and started making yogurt and cottage cheese on the stove and doing door to door deliveries. This business has grown to include exceptional quality yogurts, kefir, heavy cream and buttermilk widely available across the east coast, with the business now largely managed by their daughter, Christine Lazor. Jack has always known the particulars of soils and in his later years, Jack was especially passionate about support for the care of life in the soil and the soil carbon sponge. He was a brilliant and enthusiastic educator, always eager and willing to share his wisdom and experience with other farmers.

Jack was an exceptional scholar, a persistent and optimistic farmer, and a remarkably generous human being. Jack and Anne were honored in 2019 with a Vermont Agricultural Hall of Fame lifetime achievement award for their work advocating for organic agriculture. Their lessons are deeply embedded into the organic farming movement. Jack passed in November 2020 after a long battle with cancer, and Vermont's organic farming community

is eager to honor his legacy and assure that his work and knowledge continues on with the next generation.

## ***Generous donation from Stonyfield Organic***

In December 2020, NOFA-VT was honored to receive a \$5,000 donation from Stonyfield Organic in memory of Jack Lazor. Sharing the intentions for this donation, the Stonyfield team wrote, "Healthy soil is the foundation of organic agriculture. We can think of no better way to honor Jack's legacy than to support Vermont's organic farmers in coming together to learn more about the best ways they can improve soil health, and share this knowledge with each other. This builds the viability of organic farms and advances the climate mitigation potential of organic farming."

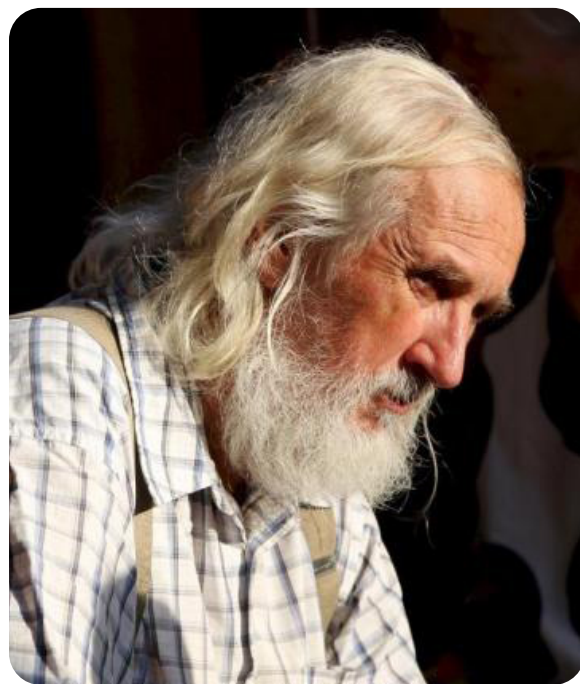
## ***Butterworks Farm & Lazor Family Matching Contribution and Focus on Education***

When determining the best use of these funds, we reached out to Jack's dear life and business partner, Anne Lazor. Excited about this memorial, Anne generously offered to match Stonyfield's donation to support farmer education on soil health. Anne shared, "Jack would wish that you could make the main focus of this money to support education and technical support for the care of the "life in the soil" and the "soil carbon sponge", which he was so passionate about in his later years. This would include soil biology, plants and roots covering the earth, biodiversity in farming and gardening, and creating systems that draw carbon into the earth and mitigate climate change."

## ***Goals & Timeline***

Honoring the legacy of Jack Lazor, the central goal of this cohort is to share his passion for building soil health and educating the farming community about soil health practices that contribute to long-term resilience of farms and farmland. We intend for this cohort to:

- Directly address soil health on Vermont farms
- Increase knowledge of soil health, climate



- resilience, and innovative practices to support long-term farm viability
- Build farmer-to-farmer educational opportunities for farmers to learn from and with each other
- Begin a network of soil health stewards who will contribute to educating others through mentorship and on-farm education about soil health practices
- Continue to bring farmer voices into soil health advocacy work

The initial cohort will begin soon, with soil health intensives, and will continue into the summer months with several on-farm visits to farms implementing innovative practices to improve soil (and animal) health, mitigate climate change, and increase biodiversity. The cohort will wrap up in the fall of 2021 with a closing session and keynote speaker to round out learning and develop next steps.

## ***Expected Outcomes & Next Steps***

We are seeking additional funding to run this program again with a variety of production types, which over time will build a dedicated team of soil health stewards around the state who will continue practicing innovative soil building on their farms and serve as educators in their communities.

More information can be found at [nofavt.org/soil-stewards](http://nofavt.org/soil-stewards).



# The Natural Farmer Welcomes New Editor

Beginning with the summer 2021 issue, Elizabeth Gabriel will take over as editor of *The Natural Farmer*. The newspaper is published and mailed to NOFA members quarterly and features news of the organic movement and in-depth stories about farming, gardening, and homesteading.

**The Natural Farmer:** Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Elizabeth:** I am an educator, food justice advocate, community organizer, farmer, and new mom. For the past six years, I have been the Executive Director of Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming, based in Ithaca, New York and serving the Finger Lakes Region.

**TNF:** What do you raise on your farm?

**EG:** My husband Steve and I have run an agroforestry farm, Wellspring Forest Farm in Mecklenberg, New York, since 2011, when we started with log-grown shiitake mushrooms. We have expanded to include indoor mushrooms as



well, including oysters, lions mane and others. We also raise pastured sheep for meat, ducks for eggs and slug control, and we have a small (really, very small) maple syrup operation, with 100 trees on our land, and another 200 that we lease down the road. Our farm is based on principles of silvopasture, with our sheep grazing through existing woods, and we plant hundreds of perennials every year, including elderberry.

**TNF:** What does Groundswell do?

**EG:** Groundswell is a beginning-farmer training and food justice organization, founded in 2009.

Farm businesses in the US are 98% owned by white folks, and yet 98% of the industry's work force is non-white. Land ownership and agriculture have a long history of racism and unequal access to resources, including land and money. Groundswell's programs and distribution of resources can make farming more diverse, and support people typically marginalized to gain access to the land, loans, money, technical assistance, training and other

resources they need to become a farmer.

**TNF:** Why did you want to become the editor of *The Natural Farmer*?

**EG:** I've been working in and developing nonprofits for nearly 15 years. Before my time at Groundswell, I worked in Cooperative Extension, and before that I was a cofounder of a small urban farm nonprofit in Washington, DC called Common Good City Farm. That time was extremely rewarding and I'm proud of my contributions, but those roles and as Executive Director, have required me to hold a bird's eye view almost constantly. I miss diving into the details, writing and researching, gathering stories. It is really appealing to me to take on a new role, as a voice or a facilitator, for sharing those stories. I am looking forward to meeting NOFA farmers and other stakeholders. I am committed and excited to think about how *The Natural Farmer* can be a platform for the intersection of NOFA and issues of equity and justice to take shape. I look forward to expanding it and moving it forward in a direction that appeals to existing members, and attracts new members and diverse voices to NOFA.



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# Why get a CSA? Good for Farm Businesses, Good for Building Community

By Andrew Graham, NOFA-VT Direct Markets Coordinator

Many of you probably already know that Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, are a great way for farmers to get the money that they need to cover costs in the beginning of the season in order to produce delicious fresh food. This model not only helps reduce financial stress on farmers, but helps customers feel invested in their local farms. With the yield of the CSA tied to how the farmer's season goes, customers have an opportunity to learn about the factors affecting farm businesses, as well as which crops come into season at different times in their area.

CSAs also help build community among shareholders. Seeing the same people when you go to pick up your share allows you to meet your neighbors and many people find out about CSAs from friends and family members. Frederica Graham of White River Junction told us that several years ago she volunteered at a local event and someone she met there was extolling the virtues of a local organic farm's CSA program. However, she felt that it was probably too expensive and too much food for her. Last year, after hearing another testimonial from a friend, she decided to visit the farm's website and discovered that she could get a half-share and pay in installments.

Frederica enjoyed the bounty of fresh food with the option to choose between several different options each week, and froze some of it to eat throughout the winter. She mentioned that the pick-your-own beans and herbs reminded her of her gardening days and helped her feel like she was part of the process. While the farm also has a farm stand offering many products available to purchase while picking up shares, she told us she did not choose to do that.

When Covid-19 changed how we shop for food last year, Frederica felt lucky that she had a CSA share lined up, and praised the farm for their safety protocol, including a handwashing station, signage, strings and dots on the floor to regulate distancing, everyone wearing masks,

and tongs so customers would not touch the food. She said she has already signed up for the 2021 season with the same farm, and is looking forward to her first pickup. Frederica is now another community member singing the praises of buying directly from a local organic farm through their CSA.

Some farms offer events for shareholders to get to know the farm better and the interactions on pickup day help solidify a sense that you are part of a local community supporting a local farm.

Signing up for a CSA is often more cost-effective than buying similar farm-fresh products at a store, and the money spent goes directly to the farmer. People interested in purchasing a CSA share should act quickly, as one Vermont farmer told us that they had sold out their CSA over a month ago.

## *Following is a brief interview with CSA member, Frederica Graham:*

**NOFA Notes:** Where did you purchase a CSA from in 2020?

**Frederica Graham:** Sunrise Farm, White River Junction

**NN:** How far away from you?

**FG:** 5 minute drive.

**NN:** Did you know of that farm before purchasing a CSA share?

**FG:** Yes

**NN:** How did you hear about it?

**FG:** Four years ago I volunteered at Flavors of the Valley (local farm and food event) and someone there told me about it and how wonderful it was for her family of six. I didn't think I could afford it, and thought it would be too much.

**NN:** How did you overcome the thought that it wasn't for you?

**FG:** I realized I didn't want to grow a big garden anymore, and also that I could pay in installments. I went to their site and learned that I could get a half share. Other community members/friends knew the farmer and talked about how excellent both the farmer and the quality of the food is, and the convenience of pickup. Last year, with the pandemic affecting everything, they had a great safety protocol and setup with handwashing and distancing, masks, and tongs, so customers would not touch the food.

**NN:** When did you sign up?

**FG:** Mid-February 2020. This year I was worried I had missed the deadline, so I went to the website and learned that it was time to sign up. (Already signed up for 2021.)

**NN:** Had you purchased a CSA share in the past?

**FG:** Yes, about 25 years ago.

**NN:** Have you heard of the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program, which provides 1/2 price CSA shares for limited-income farmers?

**FG:** I have now!

**NN:** Did you learn anything (through having a CSA) about food and farming?

**FG:** What grows when, I guess, but I knew that as a lifelong gardener.

**NN:** Did you generally just get your share, or did you buy any add-ons?

**FG:** Just the share, no add-ons. I enjoyed the pick-your-own.

**NN:** Did you find that it provided you with food that you liked to cook?

**FG:** You bet! I ate a ton of swiss chard and kale while it was in season.

**NN:** Did you preserve any of the food?

**FG:** Yes, I froze some!



**Go to the NOFA-VT website at [nofavt.org/csas](http://nofavt.org/csas) to find a directory of CSAs across the state, and support your local organic farmer this year!**



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 King's Little Maple  
 Marsh Family Maple  
 Nicholas Livestock

Peaceful Harvest Mushrooms  
 Pumpkin Hill Maple  
 Red Mountain Maple  
 Still Hill Farmstead  
 The Mackenzie Inc  
 Tristan Butler  
 Whispering Hills Homestead  
 Windswept Farm

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