



NOFA Vermont 2019-2023 Strategic Plan

*for building an economically viable, ecologically sound,
and socially just Vermont agricultural system.*

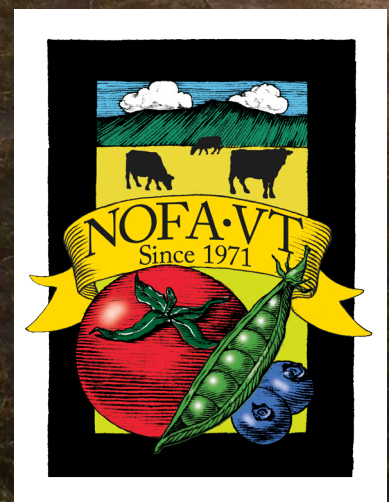


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INTRODUCTION

[April 2019]

Twice a decade, NOFA-VT pauses to deeply reflect on our work, celebrate our achievements and endeavors to create a new strategic plan to take the organization into the coming five years. To ensure this new plan focuses on the most pressing needs, NOFA-VT staff and board started by listening. We conducted dozens of stakeholder interviews, completed a full-member survey, and gathered feedback at our Celebrate Your Farmer socials around the state. The board and staff also analyzed statewide and national trends to develop an understanding of how we can position our organization to address the major challenges facing the local and organic agricultural sectors. Looking internally, NOFA-VT staff completed a 12-month program strategy process which included program assessment, visioning, (re) articulation of program strategies and identifying implementation plans. The staff and board looked earnestly at NOFA-VT and developed strategies to maximize our strengths and address our weaknesses. The result is a plan that ensures the continuity and refinement of our hallmark programs through an agile lens, allowing us to respond nimbly to emergent needs and important opportunities.

This year’s planning process coincides with a monumental transition for our organization. In December 2018, after 31 years of Executive Leadership, Enid Wonnacott retired and shortly after passed away. Enid was an important advocate for organic agriculture, not just in Vermont, but across the country. Her belief in building a “big tent” (bringing together people from all different backgrounds to work on common goals) and her focus on the importance of vibrant agriculturally-based communities have informed NOFA-VT’s work over the past three decades and positioned NOFA-VT as a central organization in Vermont’s agricultural support system. Enid will be deeply missed, and this strategic plan is a testament to the strong organization she helped to build as well as a road map that honors her legacy in the organization’s next chapter.

With this plan, we hope we have captured our excitement and passion for building an economically viable, ecologically sound and socially just Vermont agricultural system. Please take some time to read through our plan to steward our work over the next five years. We invite you to join us in this important work.

MISSION

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont promotes organic practices to build an economically viable, ecologically sound and socially just Vermont agricultural system that benefits all living things.

VISION

Vermont is home to thriving organic farms and agriculturally-based communities that nourish people and enhance the environment.

VALUES

- **Food Equity:** All people, regardless of circumstance, should have access to nourishing local and organic food.
- **Farm Viability:** Farmers should be able to make a living on the land and support themselves, their families and their employees. Farms and farm enterprises should be capable of being passed on to the next generation of farmers.
- **Organic Integrity:** Organic production enhances soil, plant, animal, and human health to protect the environment for current and future generations. Organic certification verifies these practices, ensuring that organic products are produced with integrity and transparency and providing consumers with a label they can trust.
- **Community:** Engaged communities are resilient communities. A vibrant food system provides opportunities to create genuine connections between people and the land, nurture relationships, and celebrate those who feed others.
- **Health:** Food should be nourishing and support general health. Organic production enhances soil, plant, animal, ecosystem, and human health.
- **Respect for Farmers:** Honor the work done by food producers and those who support them. Farmers are the foundation of our working lands, local economies and agricultural heritage. Public policies should support organic farmers, healthy agricultural communities and the environment.
- **Stewardship:** Organic land stewardship is a critical components of resilient agricultural and environmental systems. Farming should contribute to biodiversity and ecological health.
- **Education:** Education and outreach efforts (i.e. technical assistance) are basic elements of a culture of sharing, which in turn builds community. Good information benefits everyone.



HISTORY & PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Since 1971, NOFA-VT has served as the voice for organic production for commercial producers, homesteaders and gardeners. We work to support local, organic farmers, homesteaders and gardeners, make healthy food more accessible to all Vermonters and build strong, agriculture-based communities.

We work to help every producer understand the

values of farming organically, and every consumer to understand the impacts of eating organic food. By building public awareness, we grow markets for local and organic food. Through organic certification, technical assistance, research, policy and advocacy, we work to grow organic agriculture in Vermont.

Direct Markets

NOFA-VT supports direct markets (farmers markets, CSAs and farm stands) because we believe in strengthening the relationship between food producers and consumers. As a result, consumers will be more likely to make purchasing decisions that support the

producers and farming practices they value, and producers are trusted to share their values and practices transparently with their customers. Together, consumers and food producers enhance the viability of Vermont's working landscape.

Community Food Security

NOFA-VT believes all people, regardless of circumstance, should have access to local, organic food that is nourishing and supports our working landscape. Our Community Food Security programs support the many farmers and farm businesses that are committed to feeding everyone in their communities. They serve as a key mechanism for engaging Vermonters seeking

the opportunity to participate in a just and sustainable food system and are another way that NOFA engages consumers to grow the demand for local, organic food. We increase access to local foods at direct markets through programs that support limited-income Vermonters to shop at CSAs, farm stands and farmers markets.

Farm to School & Farm to Institution

Farm to Institution is a term that encompasses Farm to School, Farm to College and Farm to Hospital, as well as other institutions serving the public. NOFA-VT, as a partner in VT FEED, a program partnership between NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms, works to grow consumer demand for local, regional, and organic food, build relationships between Vermont farmers and Vermont institutions to increase local food purchasing, increase collaboration within the local and regional food supply chain, and share promising practices from Vermont with the greater New England region. In partnership with Shelburne Farms NOFA-VT manages the statewide Farm to School project, VT FEED (Food Education Every Day). These programs strengthen our agricultural economy and create stronger values-based local and regional supply chains.



Agricultural Education

NOFA-VT believes that Vermont farms and farm businesses will be strengthened as consumers increase their agricultural literacy, understanding and appreciation of who produces their food and where it comes from. The Farm to Community Mentor Program, Agricultural

Literacy Week, our annual Winter Conference, and other events work to foster a deeper understanding of agriculture and support ongoing engagement between communities and their local farms.

Vermont Organic Farmers

Vermont Organic Farmers LLC (VOF) is the USDA accredited certification agency owned by NOFA-VT. Since 1985, VOF has been a leader in the organic movement working hand in hand with producers to develop a meaningful definition of organic and to provide outstanding certification services. Our

producers and processors are dedicated to practices that use a holistic approach to soil fertility, pest control, and plant, animal and human health. We work to ensure integrity and transparency throughout the certification process to guarantee that the end product meets the high standards of organic production.

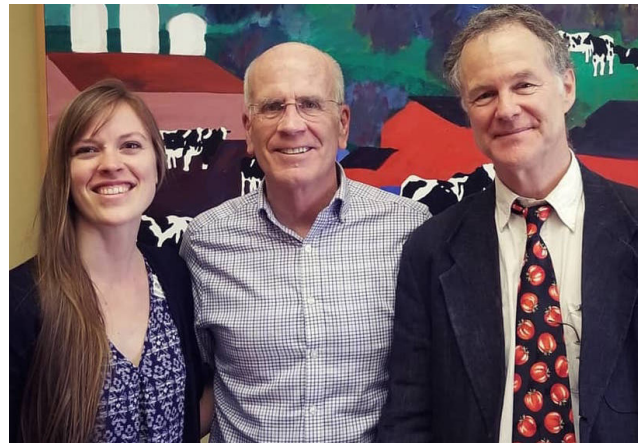
Farmers Services

NOFA-VT supports farmers as the foundation of our working lands, local economies, and agricultural heritage. We offer business planning services, production technical assistance, and educational opportunities for farmers who are certified organic,

transitioning to organic, and non-certified but using sustainable practices. We support farmers at all levels of development to meet their business and quality of life goals.

Advocacy

NOFA Vermont works on a range of state and federal policy issues impacting organic farmers and consumers in Vermont and beyond. We advocate for policies that strengthen our food system by supporting organic farming practices, increasing transparency in our food supply, improving economic opportunities for farmers, and expanding access to local and organic foods for all Vermonters.



NOFA-VT THEORY OF CHANGE



STRATEGIC PLAN FORMAT

GOALS define the long-term results to be achieved. Think of Goals as mini-Vision Statements that describe what success looks like for different areas in the organization. This plan lays out three goals (A-C).

OBJECTIVES describe the SPECIFIC SHORT-TERM RESULTS to be achieved over the next 1-5 years in order to realize a specific Goal. This plan lays out 12 objectives (1–12).

STRATEGIES describe the work activities that must be carried out in order to achieve the Goals and Objectives. Strategies are accompanied by the person or team responsible and an anticipated timeline in NOFA-VT's strategic work plan. This plan lays out numerous strategies for each objective (a, b, c, etc.). Strategies will be revisited regularly by staff and prioritized at the beginning of each year covered by the plan.

In addition to a written document/outline, the strategic plan will also take shape as a spreadsheet workplan that can be adjusted and updated at any time and referred to in individual or program workplans.

STRATEGIES TO MEET GOALS & OBJECTIVES



GOAL A: Be the Leader of Vermont's Organic Food Movement

OBJECTIVE 1: Raise our voice to strengthen the organic food movement through effective policy & advocacy

Strategies:

- a. Strategically build relationships/networks that support our policy agenda and leverage partner organizations for efficiency.
- b. Explore the development of an Advocacy & Engagement program to house outreach/policy/membership, and determine the best staffing structure.
- c. Create a streamlined process to identify policy priorities, and to develop policy statements/stances in a timely manner
- d. Develop a communication strategy to raise awareness about our advocacy efforts and enhance NOFA-VT's brand. Ensure all staff have clear talking points about policy issues.
- e. Educate and build relationships with key state and national decision makers that advance NOFA-VT's mission.
- f. Assess NOFA-VT's role and strategies for bridging divides in the organic community, both locally and nationally
- g. Create a plan to engage members more deeply in advocacy work

OBJECTIVE 2: Build the organic food movement through a committed and engaged membership

Strategies:

- a. Clarify the goals of membership internally and develop clear metrics for measuring success.
- b. Create an organizational structure and staffing plan to implement the membership funnel
- c. Develop and implement a plan to attract, retain, and engage members to meet organizational goals.
- d. Develop systems for program staff to grow NOFA-VT's membership and engage members.



OBJECTIVE 3: Raise our voice to strengthen the organic food movement through coordinated and responsive marketing and communications

Strategies:

- a. Develop a marketing & communications plan for NOFA-VT that addresses the needs of all its programs and builds staff capacity to implement the plan.
- b. Assess VOF marketing needs, develop a VOF marketing & communications plan and build staff capacity to implement the plan.
- c. Improve our ability to aggregate and disseminate relevant issues and resources in the organic food movement (such as climate change, water quality, soil health, dairy industry, hydroponics etc.)

OBJECTIVE 4: Enhance Programs and Program Delivery to Meet Our Mission

Strategies:

- d. Improve cross-program collaboration and integrate program strategies through internal communication structures and overarching organizing strategies
- e. Annually review, evaluate and update program strategies including target audiences, results, program activities, and performance measures.
- f. Elevate Engagement (Advocacy/Membership) and Marketing/Outreach as programs of NOFA
- g. Develop a process for communications of impact (dashboard, annual report, website, etc.)
- h. Identify, evaluate and strengthen organizational partnerships and alliances that can leverage opportunities to lead the progressive food movement in Vermont
- i. Clearly articulate NOFA's theory of change and conduct research that validates it (or adjust theory of change to reflect learnings).

GOAL B: Nurture a Viable Organic Farm Sector

OBJECTIVE 5: Grow the Demand for Organic Food

Strategies:

- a. Encourage and promote values-based purchasing approaches by strengthening awareness and relationships along the producer to consumer supply chain.
- b. Provide resources, technical assistance and educational opportunities to buyers of all kinds (consumers, institutional buyers) so they have the skills, knowledge and support they need to increase their values-based,

local and organic purchasing

- c. Develop program strategies to engage and deepen people's commitment to purchasing that aligns with the NOFA-VT mission.
- d. Increase awareness and access of local and organic foods for all Vermonters
- e. Explore creative partnerships and other funding sources to support programs that grow the demand for organic food
- f. Increase agricultural literacy by educating people about agricultural systems and connecting them to the farms and producers in their community
- g. Conduct research to back up the claim that a values-based food system correlates to organic farm viability, or that support of local farms translates to support of local organic farms.
- h. Clarify NOFA's role in promoting retail markets

OBJECTIVE 6: Increase the Supply of Organic Food

Strategies:

- a. Attract and retain customers
- b. Communicate a compelling and competitive VOF brand
- c. Increase staff capacity
- d. Improve operational efficiencies and excellence
- e. Maintain a high-integrity organic label
- f. Provide education & support for producers to transition to and/or maintain organic practices

OBJECTIVE 7: Support the Viability of Farms

Strategies:

- a. Engage in ongoing conversations with farmers around what they need to ensure relevance of programs
- b. Partner with both internal programs and external partners/initiatives so as to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure biggest impact
- c. Provide business planning services, technical assistance and educational opportunities so that farmers at all stages of development have the skills, knowledge and support they need to increase the viability of their farms



- d. Help exiting organic farmers successfully transition their farms
- e. Stay up to date and knowledgeable about climate change and the resources available to help farmers mitigate its effects
- f. Provide support for producers to transition to and/or maintain organic practices
- g. Standardize internal systems for improved efficiency and effectiveness of services
- h. Assess our revolving and emergency funding options (ie. Farmer Emergency Fund, Revolving Loan Fund) and determine whether to continue and/or grow these programs.
- i. Monitor and share market trends and consumer preferences so that market barriers are reduced and producer opportunities are enhanced
- j. Clarify NOFA's role in supporting market development (specifically with regards to wholesale/retail)
- k. Provide support and technical assistance to farmers markets to enhance the viability of local vendors.

GOAL C: Create a Vibrant and Responsible Organizational Structure

OBJECTIVE 8. Successfully transition executive leadership by the end of 2019 and develop systems to provide ongoing support to new leadership

Strategies:

- a. Recruit and hire NOFA-VT's next Executive Director
- b. Position the Executive Director for success through onboarding, training, and connecting with NOFA stakeholders
- c. Define NOFA's organizational culture and structure, and strengthen it throughout the leadership transition
- d. Strengthen NOFA's credibility and integrity through intentional internal and external communication throughout the transition
- e. Support the high performance of the new executive director by ongoing assistance and annual formal evaluations



OBJECTIVE 9. Achieve autonomous governance of the Board of Directors

Strategies:

- a. Attract and maintain effective board members through updated board job descriptions, recruitment and onboarding materials, protocols and tools
- b. Support self-governance by clarifying roles and responsibilities and investing in board development training and coaching
- c. Equip the board to be actively engaged in fundraising and public awareness (visible spokespeople and advocates for NOFA VT)
- d. Improve board performance through updated work structures (meetings, committees and bylaws) and board self-evaluation
- e. Determine most effective structures for staff and board communication and collaboration.
- f. Support NOFA's programs and impact by being available as a resource to staff for strategy and policy decisions and support the leveraging of other resources, including the membership base.

OBJECTIVE 10. Encourage a culture of shared leadership and support among staff

Strategies:

- a. Formally strengthen the Management Team's skills through professional development & training
- b. Foster a people-first human resources approach by designating HR function to a specific staff member(s) and by emphasizing transparency around HR issues, documenting policies and ensuring accountability
- c. Clarify staff roles and responsibilities by regularly valuing individual accomplishments, actively updating job descriptions and assessing staff capacity needs as part of annual performance reviews
- d. Develop a process for staff to learn about, seek and access professional development opportunities, and ensure funding
- e. Conduct regular compensation & benefits reviews and communicate results and strategies with staff
- f. Develop and cultivate a culture of inclusion for staff and programs centered on diversity and equity

OBJECTIVE 11. Establish nimble fundraising systems and financial management strategies

Strategies:

- a. Assess current development needs, capacity and structures to create a more systematic and strategic approach to development
- b. Enhance collaboration across programs and fundraising staff
- c. Develop strategies to stabilize and diversify NOFA's funding base. Strive for flexible funding that can more nimbly respond to needs as they are identified, rather than specific projects
- d. Ensure that the budget adequately resources and includes internal NOFA initiatives and staff (i.e. professional development, marketing, advocacy, membership)
- e. Strengthen the Board Finance Committee to create more capacity for financial management
- f. Assess how to best fund the capacity needs outlined in this strategic plan

OBJECTIVE 12. Formalize evaluation practices that inform and improve program strategy

Strategies:

- a. Select qualitative and quantitative program measures that help determine program strategy and value
- b. Develop and implement systems to regularly evaluate program outcomes
- c. Establish a program dashboard that articulates program impact to a broad array of stakeholders through unified program measures
- d. Understand NOFA's impact as it relates to other sources of information: demographic data, nonprofit performance, and trends.