Dear friend of NOFA-VT,

I hope you are reading this newsletter as snow falls on the ground and you have a warm mug of tea in your hand. May the nourishment from winter rest be deep and restorative.

After a truly challenging year, we are thrilled to invite you to take time to connect, reflect, imagine, and build power for transformative change together at our beloved Winter Conference, coming up on February 17th and 18th at the University of Vermont (UVM) in Burlington. This year our conference theme is “Working Upstream.”

We are delighted to shift our collective efforts from harm mitigation during this very rugged year to thinking upstream, envisioning the transformation that is possible when we come together and address the roots of the food system. Together at the conference, we gain sustenance, generate new ideas, find hope, give gifts, and build solidarity and power to nourish an agriCULTURE that works for people and the planet.

Toni Cade Bambara says that the job of a writer is to make the revolution irresistible. I would add that farmers help make the revolution DELICIOUS. I’m looking forward to feasting on local cheese and veggies at the snack table, listening to inspiring speakers in the ballroom, laughing with old friends while making community art, taking notes on a new seed variety for next season, getting involved in ongoing political action, and raising my voice in song with good company. All of these things help me feel rooted, strengthened, and connected—and allow me to access the part of myself that knows that true transformation is always possible. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.

I hope you will join us at UVM (or if you prefer, tune in remotely for select portions of the day!).

May tending to our roots and growing together help support a thriving, just, and resilient organic future for all here in Vermont.

As ever, don’t hesitate to reach out to me at grace@nofavt.org.

Warmly,

Grace Oedel
Executive Director, NOFA-VT
Each year, the NOFA-VT Winter Conference provides a valuable opportunity for farmers, gardeners, land stewards, educators, students, policy-makers, and other food system activists to share ideas, resources, and skills.

After a rugged year of extreme weather and crisis for Vermont’s farmers, this year’s conference will provide a space to focus on transformational work. Together, let’s shift our attention upstream and focus on food system issues at their source to create more holistic change. The main conference will take place on Saturday, February 17, at the University of Vermont (UVM) in Burlington, with some virtual live-streamed offerings. On Sunday, February 18, we will deep-dive into singular topics during all-day intensive workshops, hosted in-person only at UVM.

Keynote Speaker: Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin

Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin has spent a lifetime working toward transformative food systems change. He began his work in his native Guatemala, collaborating on economic development projects with Indigenous communities while serving as a United Nations consultant and advisor to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. After moving to the U.S., he continued his support of responsible, land-based economic development by helping launch several food and land-centric social enterprises and co-founding the Fair Trade Federation. Following this, he dove deeper into regenerative agriculture, and today he is one of the foremost leaders and innovators on climate-smart, scalable agriculture. He is the founder and former Executive Director of the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, a nonprofit working on a scalable, systems-level regenerative poultry solution that restores ecological balance, produces nourishing food, and puts money back into the hands of farmers and food chain workers. They are developing a completely new supply chain that integrates grassroots organizing of farmers with physical infrastructure and other regeneratively stacked enterprises. Today he lives in Northfield, MN, as the co-founder and CEO of Tree-Range Farms, an aggregator, marketer, and distributor for the regenerative poultry products.

Join us for over 40 workshops offerings on Saturday! There is something for everyone passionate about a just and verdant local food system, from commercial farmers to gardeners, policy wonks to grassroots organizers, and food system professionals to home cooks. Dig into topics like Plant Propagation, Native Food Plants for Pollinators and People, Maple Syrup Business Planning, Farm Financials 101, Fermentation Demystified: Make Sauerkraut, and tons more!

Intensive workshops devote a full day to deeply exploring a single topic. Led by knowledgeable presenters, there is plenty of time for discussion, question and answer, and networking with peers. Intensive workshops are available in person only on Sunday, and registration is an optional add-on when registering for the main Saturday conference.

Winter Conference is about learning, but it’s also a chance to connect, reflect, and have fun. Mingling with acquaintances new and old, sign your little ones up for our on-site Children’s Conference, peruse the exhibitors fair, meet up with folks at an affinity space or roundtable discussion, participate in the seed swap, and more!

Mark your calendar! Registration opens January 10 at NOFAVT.ORG/CONFERENCE
The Vermont Family Farmer of the Month Award provides grants of $12,000 to a family farm each month to support an innovative project that will improve the farm’s viability. Award recipients are farm businesses that contribute to a more resilient agricultural landscape and demonstrate environmental stewardship through their sustainable practices. This grant is funded by a generous anonymous charitable gift and is administered by NOFA-VT in partnership with VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Shelburne Farms, and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association.

We are honored to present the most recent recipients of the award and share a bit about their farms and projects. Congratulations to Sandwood Farm, Moo Acres, and Does’ Leap for their excellence in environmental stewardship and the work they do to build social and economic resilience in Vermont.

The next round of applications are due January 22, 2024. To learn more, visit www.vermontfamilyfarmeraward.org.

Sandwood Farm - August 2023
Sandwood Farm, founded by Bob and Sara Schlosser 35 years ago in Wolcott, is a family-run, multifaceted farming business. The farm includes a maple sugaring operation and a small diversified CSA and offers various farm-based activities like stays, dinners, and a unique venue for rent. Together, the Schlosser family ensures that Sandwood Farm is a vibrant hub of sustainable agriculture, embracing new opportunities while preserving treasured traditions.

Sandwood Farm received a $12,000 award to expand their sugarbush and upgrade the infrastructure necessary to increase sap production and maple syrup yields. Project costs include acquiring a 3000-gallon stainless sap storage tank, constructing a covered tank platform, obtaining additional fittings, mainline and secondary lines, taps, gauges, and installing necessary equipment. This project not only enhances the economic viability of the farm but also contributes to the ecological health of the land through the sustainable forest management practices employed by the family.

Moo Acres - September 2023
Ben David Williams is the dedicated steward behind Moo Acres, an organic dairy farm located in the heart of Fairfield. Having taken over ownership in 2007 from his parents, Ben’s mission is to uphold the land’s integrity and cultivate a sustainable future for his family and the broader community. Today, Ben and his wife Hillary raise their four daughters on the farm, instilling the next generation with a commitment to environmental stewardship, community building, and innovation.

Moo Acres was granted $12,000 to equip a new bedded pack barn for winter housing for their cattle, a crucial component of the innovative manure management system adopted by the farm. By converting winter manure storage into a bedded pack housing and composting system, Moo Acres aims to minimize nutrient runoff and cultivate healthier soils. This approach improves animal well-being, reduces environmental impact, and enhances the overall economic viability of the farm. The improved manure management system also builds soil-based resiliency and improves labor efficiency, ensuring financial sustainability for the next generation on the farm.

Does’ Leap - October 2023
Does’ Leap, led by George van Vlaanderen and Kristen Doolan in East Fairfield, excels in producing a diverse range of certified organic goat cheeses and pastured whey-fed pork. The farmers are recognized leaders in Vermont’s agricultural community, implementing innovative management-intensive grazing and browsing systems for goats, prioritizing fresh, nutrient-dense forage to enhance both their animals’ health and cheese quality.

In October, Does’ Leap was granted $12,000 to support the addition of solar power to the farm, aiming to reduce operating expenses. This solar energy project aligns with their core values of environmental stewardship and self-sufficiency, and their steadfast commitment to sustainable agriculture. The funding will propel Does’ Leap toward their goal of aligning farming practices with the harmony of nature, while simultaneously improving the energy efficiency of their cheese production.

Applications are open three times a year. To learn more, visit VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG
Winter Bounty: Vermont Farmers Markets Thrive Year-Round

By Andrew Graham, NOFA-VT Direct Markets Coordinator, and Johanna Doren, NOFA-VT Local Food Access Coordinator

Winter has arrived in Vermont, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t buy fresh local food anymore. Many people associate farmers markets with the summer and fall seasons, but here in Vermont, many farmers markets operate year-round. The Vermont Farmers Market Association, which is administered by NOFA-VT, counts over 20 member markets operating across Vermont for at least some portion of the 2023-24 winter season. This is more than in previous years, a good sign that our local food system is resilient after a trying season for many farmers and producers.

Just over a quarter of those markets are what we consider “holiday markets,” operating only in November and December, but the rest will be open throughout the winter until at least March or April, with a few farmers market organizations operating truly year-round. Last year, half of the 16 winter markets were holiday markets, so there has been a significant increase in markets—and farmers—providing local food to Vermonters for a larger portion of the year. These markets showcase the best local food that you can buy directly from farmers, so if you’re interested in having some cold-season vegetables and finding out from the grower how they’re able to grow them, visit a farmers market! Of course you can also find meat, dairy products, baked goods, and other value-added products at these markets too, along with many different items from local artisans and crafters.

According to a recent NOFA-VT survey of farms that sell food directly to consumers, farmers who are market vendors earn over 17% of their income from farmers market sales. This means that farmers markets are an important sales channel for the farmers who make the effort to sell at them. The USDA’s Economic Research Service has found that “farmers who market goods directly to consumers are more likely to remain in business than those who market only through traditional channels.” In addition, direct markets can play a critical role for beginning farms. According to USDA’s Economic Research Service, “beginning farms with direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales had a 54.3 percent survival rate, while 47.4 percent of those without DTC sales survived.”

Typically, winter farmers markets would be utilizing NOFA-VT’s Crop Cash program, which provides SNAP customers with extra funds to spend on fruits and vegetables. However, we experienced unprecedented use of this program during the summer and fall of 2023, ultimately tripling the amount of Crop Cash used on local food at farmers markets this year compared with last! While we see this in part as a huge success for these funds benefiting farmers affected by this summer’s floods while significantly increasing local food security—we have had to pause Crop Cash from December until the beginning of the 2024 summer market season. Because it is clear how impactful this program is for Vermont households and producers alike, we are taking this year’s sudden surge in Crop Cash use as an opportunity to communicate to the Vermont Legislature that demand for our local food access programs has increased in great magnitude since the pandemic and that we need both state and federal funds to continue supporting this growth. If you would like to help us make the case to continue the Crop Cash Plus pilot and increase funding so we can continue to operate the Crop Cash program year-round, we invite you to share how important these programs are to your household and/or your farm by sending a statement to NOFA-VT’s Local Food Access Coordinator, Johanna Doren, at Johanna@nofavt.org.

To find a winter farmers market near you, including times and locations, visit www.nofavt.org/VTfarmersmarkets or reach out to NOFA-VT’s Direct Markets Coordinator, Andrew Graham, at Andrew@nofavt.org or 802-434-7165.
“We have to break with the professional doctrine that ascribes virtually all of the problems that clients experience to defects in personality development and family relationships...This is a political ideology as much as an explanation of human behavior. It is an ideology that directs clients to blame themselves for their travails rather than the economic and social institutions that produce many of them.”


“Things are really terrifying and enraging right now, and feeling more rage, fear, sadness, grief, and despair may be appropriate. Those feelings may help us enliven us.”

—Dean Spade

Social movements for mutual aid and power-building are not a new concept, in agriculture or anywhere else, but they are not familiar strategies for many farmers, especially white farmers and those with class privilege. There are two great lines of mutual aid organizing in and around U.S. agriculture: Black freedom movements, Indigenous and Latin American movements, and allied movements of immigrant farmers.

For Black farmers and Black communities in general, mutual aid has long been a strategy to resist oppression, displacement, and state-sponsored violence, as Monica White documents in her book Free Black Farms. White describes the long tradition of self-help and cooperation among Black farmers, farm laborers, civil rights organizers, and scholars, from the Tuskegee cooperative extension movement of the 1920s to the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. Some of the most transformative, movement-building work of the Black Panthers took place through their free breakfast program and other community survival programs. Today a whole host of movement groups, many sprung out of the Movement for Black Lives, continue to do important mutual aid work in Black communities across the U.S., often with a strong and clearly stated goal of building collective power.

Mutual aid has long been a strategy for community survival in Latin America in the face of state violence and ongoing extraction and displacement. It has also been led by cooperatives from the Global North. One well-known example of this tradition is the Landless Workers’ Movement in Brazil, who has long organized schools for teaching farming methods to members, who then seize underutilized industrial

Farmland for their own use as subsistence farmers. Another inspiring contemporary example is the Argentine movement Crooked Futura, which started out as a movement to resist land gras by developers in the settlements on the outskirts of Santa Fe. They later started a cooperative dairy farm to help feed their members, as well as a host of businesses to create jobs and provide services and an electoral party to push through more progressive policies. Across Latin America, numerous organizations together form a “social and solidarity economy” based on mutual aid, self-help, and provision of basic needs through shared effort. Mutual aid has also been a key part of farm worker organizing in the U.S., not least because of cultural and personal ties to organizing traditions in Latin America.

What’s different about these traditions of organizing, as opposed to the landscape of small farmer advocacy in the U.S.? Politicization, solidarity, and connection to an organizing tradition.

First of all, at a time when grassroots movements are claiming wins across the U.S. and around the world, the farming world is surprisingly disconnected from much of this. Much of the focus from the organizing work of Black farmers, like Kali Akuno of Cooperation Jackson, could have been more connected to the organizing work of Black Lives. We could have made it hard to satisfy these needs. When we come together to figure out how to build our collective power, we have a lot of potential actions in harmony with our spirit. We lay the foundations for well-being amongst our friends who view themselves as equals working and living conditions that are partly dictated by the owners and partly a result of much bigger systems of oppression and exploitation. A small portion of farms do live their values and offer better working conditions, but they still struggle to earn revenues that can sustain the farm. Mutual aid, driven by a deep commitment to solidarity, is the method to bridge, as shown by foregrounding politics and acknowledging each other’s circumstances; we see how our struggles intersect and how we learn from each other’s struggle to move forward. This kind of solidarity is urgent and essential.

The third missing ingredient is a collective of organizations that see and value mutual aid, driven by a deep commitment to solidarity, is the method to bridge, as shown by foregrounding politics and acknowledging each other’s circumstances; we see how our struggles intersect and how we learn from each other’s struggle to move forward. This kind of solidarity is urgent and essential.

“Ours is the struggle of the people. It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

—Assata Shakur

In the words of Assata Shakur: “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

Jan Magee is a community organizer based in the Connecticut River valley of Massachusetts. He is also a Technical Assistance Coordinator at the Agricultural Justice Project, which offers practical tools for building solidarity every day, and clamor power.

Farmers, workers, and everyone on this planet who seeks the same things—food and clean water, community, livelihood, dignity and purpose, and a connection to the land—should come together in solidarity; it makes it hard to satisfy these needs. When we come together to figure out how to build our collective power, we have a lot of potential actions in harmony with our spirit. We lay the foundations for well-being amongst our friends who view themselves as equals working and living conditions that are partly dictated by the owners and partly a result of much bigger systems of oppression and exploitation. A small portion of farms do live their values and offer better working conditions, but they still struggle to earn revenues that can sustain the farm. Mutual aid, driven by a deep commitment to solidarity, is the method to bridge, as shown by foregrounding politics and acknowledging each other’s circumstances; we see how our struggles intersect and how we learn from each other’s struggle to move forward. This kind of solidarity is urgent and essential.

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Navigating the Farm Bill Expiration and Extension

By Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT Policy Director

On October 1, 2023, the 2018 Farm Bill officially expired. The federal farm bill is an omnibus bill (i.e. a package of legislation combined into one bill) passed roughly once every five years. This bill includes the bulk of the federal legislation that relates to agriculture, food, and the food system, and has a massive impact on the way food is grown, sold, distributed, and bought in this country. In addition to programs that directly affect farmers, the farm bill authorizes and funds critical nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in Vermont as 3SquaresVT.

Having run out of time to pass a new farm bill before the end of the year, Congress included a one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill in a stopgap funding measure passed in November. This extension will ensure continued funding and authorization for many important programs that support organic, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers through September 2024.

In each farm bill cycle, powerful agricultural interest groups spend a great deal of time and money lobbying Congress. This time around, commodity trade groups (like the National Corn Growers Association and the American Soybean Association) are focused on calling for Congress to raise “reference prices.” Reference prices are target prices that act as a trigger for support payments to commodity farmers. If the season-average price for a given commodity is below the reference price, growers receive access to land for beginning farmers, invest in organic and other truly regenerative farming practices, and move resources away from risky, harmful agricultural practices toward ones that actually keep farmers on the land and people in our communities fed.

With the one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill comes a major opportunity to continue raising our voices to our Representatives and Senators.

We need to keep the pressure on Congress because we know commodity groups and agribusiness corporations will be, too. When we come together, we can build our power to win meaningful change. In order to do that, we need your help. Thank you for being a supporter of NOFA-VT—we have strength in numbers. To engage more directly with Congress, please consider donating.

Major support for NOFA-VT’s flood relief efforts has been made possible in part by generous contributions from:


Donors as of December 3, 2023.

By Bill Cavanaugh, NOFA-VT Farm Business Advisor

As no doubt many of you know, the 2023 growing season has been incredibly challenging for Vermont’s farmers. A very late frost hit fruit growers hard, and the massive flooding in early July was only a precursor to a historically wet summer. In response to the unprecedented loss we were seeing from farmers this year, NOFA-VT activated our Farmer Emergency Fund and began seeking widespread support. Since 1997, this fund has supported organic and NOFA-VT member farmers who have been adversely affected by natural and unnatural disasters such as crop failure, extreme weather and flooding, fires, and barn collapse.

Due to the scale of emergency this year, we expanded access to our Farmer Emergency Fund. In order to support local, sustainable farms, this fund has always been available to operations that are certified organic with Vermont Organic Farmers or are members of NOFA-VT. This year, we waived the pre-existing one-year waiting period for new members, allowing people to become members and immediately apply for funds. Earlier this year, we added a $1 million level to remove cost as a barrier to membership, and this was an important way for farmers experiencing great losses to easily join and access this fund. Because of the scale of devastation that farms experienced, we also increased the total amount of grant funding available per farm from $2,500 to $5,000. This expansion of our Farmer Emergency Fund came along with an outpouring of support from individuals, organizations, and foundations from around the country and abroad.

Thanks to this incredible solidarity with Vermont’s farmers, we have raised a few thousand dollars shy of $1,750,000 for the Farmer Emergency Fund as of the first week of December. We have received 182 applications for funding and have so far granted $833,362 in emergency grants to farmers. While $5,000 isn’t a lot in terms of the overall scale of the loss we’ve seen for many farms, it was a much-needed cash flow boost in a season marked by uncertainty, mounting challenges, and a lack of other financial supports.

While we do still have some first-time applications coming in for the Farmer Emergency Fund, the pace has slowed significantly and we are now launching a second round of grant applications for funds who have already been awarded a grant earlier in the year. This second round will be awarded in tiers proportional to the loss that farmers have experienced, meaning that farmers who have seen the biggest loss will be awarded a larger grant. Our plan is to hold $100,000 in savings in the Farmer Emergency Fund for the next disaster and fully distribute the remaining $1,660,000 by the end of the year. We hope that this second round of grants to impacted farms will further bolster farmers’ businesses as they head into the 2024 season.

NOFA-VT set to award over $1.6 Million in Farmer Emergency Grants by the end of 2023

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Thank you for helping us Share the Harvest

By Cailey Gibson, NOFA-VT Development Manager

With your incredible support by shopping at participating businesses, our annual Share the Harvest fundraiser raised over $15,000 this October to support our Farm Share Program. Thank you, thank you! These funds will provide up to 75% off the cost of a CSA for 85 families, ensuring they have consistent access to healthy, local, and organic food through the season. Participating farms still receive the full cost of the CSA—it’s a win-win that supports the viability of their farms. We are so grateful for your support!

We also want to thank the following participating restaurants and food businesses for making this fundraiser a big success:

- Cedar Circle Farm & Education Center, East Thetford, VT
- Juniper Bar & Restaurant at Hotel Vermont, Montpelier, VT
- Bobcat Cafe and Brewery, Bristol, VT
- Colatina Exit, Bradford, VT
- Fire & Ice Restaurant, Middlebury, VT
- Stoner Barns Market, East Thetford, VT
- Stone Leaf Teahouse, Middlebury, VT
- Waybury Inn, Middlebury, VT
- Caladonia Estates, Bristol, VT
- Bobcat Cafe and Brewery, Bristol, VT
- Fire & Ice Restaurant, Middlebury, VT
- Stoner Barns Market, East Thetford, VT
- Stone Leaf Teahouse, Middlebury, VT
- Waybury Inn, Middlebury, VT

A warm welcome to the following members who joined us or renewed their membership this fall:

NEW MEMBERS

- Blessing Yen, Bellows Falls, VT
- Bob & Juliet Gerlin, Cornwall, VT
- Brennan Michaels, Salisbury, VT
- Bryan Dickinson, North Troy, VT
- Caleb Smith, Danby, VT
- Camila Carrella, Bristol, VT
- Charlene Parker, Midlothian, VA
- Christina Bertorelli, Huntington, VT
- Donna Chin, Niverville, NY
- Gordon Murray, East Ryegate, VT
- James Jones, Craftsbury, VT
- Jeanne Fox, Ludlow, VT
- Jeremy Michaud, East Hardwick, VT
- Mary White, Corinth, VT
- Maya Sakellaropoulos, Frelinghuysen, QC
- Michele Capron, Derby, VT
- Michelle Bolesi, White River Junction, VT
- Paul Mazza, Colchester, VT
- Penn Hackney, Pittsburgh, PA
- Remy Perkoff, Chester, NJ
- Stephen Purdy, Morrisville, VT
- Susanna Karwoska, Guilford, VT
- Thomas Galignat, Peacham, VT

NEW & RENEWING BUSINESS MEMBERS

- Backwoods Betty Farm, Guilford, VT
- Barnard Dairy, Barnard, VT
- Bonum Nature LLC, The Woodlands, TX
- Brattleboro Feed Co-op, Brattleboro, VT
- Bryce Farms, Cambridge, VT
- Cedar Circle Farm and Education Center, East Thetford, VT
- Cedar Mountain Farm, Hartland, VT
- Center for an Agricultural Economy, Hardwick, VT
- Certified Naturally Grown, Temple, NH
- Champlain Valley Compost Co., Charlotte, VT
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- Center for an Agricultural Economy, Hardwick, VT
- Certified Naturally Grown, Temple, NH
- Champlain Valley Compost Co., Charlotte, VT

Please join us in supporting these local businesses throughout the year and let them know you appreciate their participation in Share the Harvest!

Learn more about our Farm Share Program at NOFAVT.ORG/FARMSHARE

NEW Organic Certifications

Vermont Organic Farmers welcomes the following new producers who have recently obtained organic certification for all or a portion of their operation, joining the nearly 750 organic farmers and processors throughout the state.

- Juna Organics LLC
- Fog Lake Enterprises
- Brad Sprague
- Zen Eastes

Learn more about the benefits of being certified organic and locally grown at VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC

A warm welcome to the following members who joined us or renewed their membership this fall.

NOFA-VT Members: Thank you for supporting organic agriculture and a just, ecological food system!
Thank you to everyone who has made a year-end contribution to NOFA-VT! Your support is the bedrock of our work for an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just Vermont agricultural system.

(If you haven’t had a chance to give yet and would like to, there’s still time! Simply visit NOFAVT.ORG/DONATE or send a check to our return address. Thank you!)