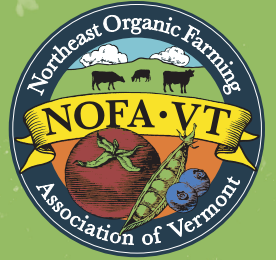


# NOFA Notes



Quarterly newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Spring 2025



Policy Campaign Updates | The Basics of Organic Maple | Bringing "Bread and Butter" to Schools





Dear friend of NOFA-VT,

As we prepared to host our annual winter conference, I was struggling with how to welcome nearly 800 attendees during such an intense moment of rupture, fear, and chaos.

I remembered last year – when we were all so raw from our first round of flooding. I remember the deep feeling of support, solidarity, and trust; the power of community, and how we all showed up for one another when it mattered.

I thought back to the year before, when the esteemed Winona LaDuke stood before us. She made us laugh, and in laughter, asked us all to have the courage of a feisty grandma with grandbabies to protect and to “be the ancestors our descendants will thank.”

I reflected back to the year before that, when Niaz Dorry, longtime leader of food sovereignty work, led the whole room through a collaborative writing of a ‘Declaration of Interdependence.’

And I thought back to those challenging early days of the pandemic, when Indigenous leader, Sherri Mitchell, spoke that, “Mother Earth is our first teacher. She has informed us that oneness does not equal sameness. She shows us this through the harmonious balance that is held in the rich biodiversity that exists within our world. [...] knowing that all healthy systems are comprised of complexity and an abundance of diversity.”

At the moment of the conference on the wheel of the year, we already know what we need to do. As Wendell Berry says, “and we pray– not for new earth or new heaven, but to be quiet in heart and in mind, clear. What we need is here.”

For many of us, the conference is one of the most important rituals of the year. It’s a place where we remember what we value and who we are as a community. Francis Weller, one of my teachers, explains that, “Ritual is able to hold the long-discarded shards of our stories and make them whole again. It has the strength and elasticity to contain what we cannot contain on our own, what we cannot face in solitude.”

I admit there are moments lately when I feel a lot of grief or overwhelm, and I hear from others in our membership that you’re feeling it, too. But Francis also teaches me that, “Grief and love are sisters.” Any grief is the flip side of profound love.

Where there is love, there is always, always a way forward. And there is always love, because the earth is endlessly giving to us, so ready to forgive, to collaborate, to flourish. Even now.

Have Courage. Build community. Laugh (‘though you have considered all the facts.’) Tend resilience through mutual collaboration with the earth and each other. Remain profoundly committed to diversity as the full flourishing of life. And of course, always lay a feast table so laden with bounty that it bows with the weight. Robin Wall Kimmerer says, “I’ve long believed that the ones who have more joy win.” I add: and the ones with good snacks!

This year, our conference helped us hold together what feels like we cannot bear alone. Farmers, community organizers, food producers, students, elders, and children all connected, imagining what is possible when we remember we have all we need to nourish a thriving tomorrow. How do I know tomorrow will be thriving? Because we are all planting those seeds today. As the maple sap runs and we finish the last of our seed orders, I feel heartened knowing that whatever comes, this NOFA-VT community is laying a long table and setting a place for all who hunger for another way.

With deep love,

Grace Oedel  
Executive Director, NOFA-VT



## NOFA-VT

Nourishing people, land, and  
justice through organic agriculture.

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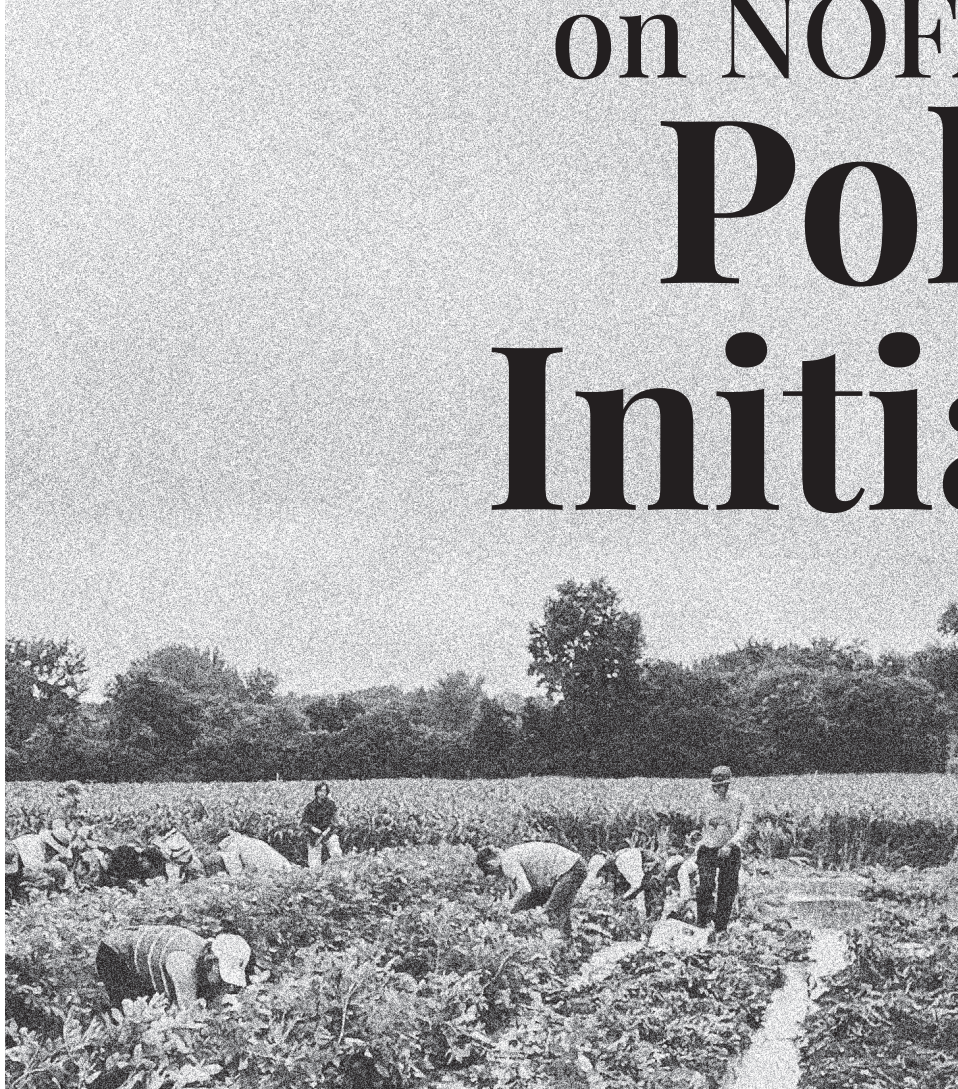
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*NOFA Notes is a quarterly publication produced for NOFA-VT's members. To share feedback, thoughts, and ideas for future NOFA Notes articles, contact NOFA-VT's Marketing and Communications Director Lindsey Brand at [lindsey@nofavt.org](mailto:lindsey@nofavt.org).*

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# A Mid-Session Update on NOFA-VT's Policy Initiatives



Together with our members, NOFA-VT brings the needs of Vermont's organic farmers and our food system as a whole to the state and federal policy stage.

Read on for updates on our two current state policy campaigns, the status of federal farming initiatives, and reflections from Stephen Leslie, a NOFA-VT member who participated in National Family Farm Coalition's D.C. fly-in this February.

To get more involved in any of these efforts, sign up for our email newsletter or follow us on social media to receive action alerts. If you're interested in testifying at the statehouse or organizing these issues more deeply, contact Jessica, NOFA-VT Grassroots Organizer, at [jessica@nofavt.org](mailto:jessica@nofavt.org).

## Farm Security Fund Gains Momentum

*By Jessica Hays Lucas, NOFA-VT Grassroots Organizer*

This year, we're championing the creation of a state Farm Security Fund to ensure farmers have the financial assistance they need to recover from the impacts of extreme weather. If passed, the fund will reimburse a farm for up to 50% of uninsured or otherwise uncovered losses. We all rely on farms, and we are all responsible for supporting farmers as they face increased climate instability.

The Farm Security Fund is picking up steam in the Vermont State House, with an amended version of S.60 passing out of the Senate with unanimous support on March 20. As it continues its path, we are thankful that so many of Vermont's legislators have heard farmers' voices, and see a clear need to support farmers in the face of climate change and extreme weather. This collaboration between farmers, allies, and lawmakers is creating something that will make Vermont more resilient. When enacted and adequately funded, Vermont's Farm Security Fund will be an important and necessary support to the farmers that feed us all.

*cont. next page*





The progress is exciting, and we're hopeful, though we also know we've got plenty of good work to do together to see it through. We need to ensure that the Farm Security Fund continues to build momentum as it is taken up by the House. We also need to work to ensure that state funding adequately meets farmers' needs today and into the future.

## Shoulder to Shoulder: Building Power Together

It was important to develop this legislation in collaboration with the very stakeholders the Farm Security Fund will support: Vermont's farmers and those who depend on them (that's all of us!). As part of this participatory process, we held a series of seven Community Action Workshops. This series, held in communities across the state, showed us what we've always known: we are stronger together.

About 100 Vermonters participated in a workshop, including farmers, food hub leaders, artists, state workers, and community members who understand the importance of a strong local food and farming system to our collective thriving. This participation was vital to creating a shared understanding of what the bill needed to do, and how to uplift the importance of supporting farms in this moment. Folks shared stories of floods, frost, and drought, and discussed what was happening to their goats, garlic, and hay. We shared art, food, experiences, and community. Together, we affirmed why it was so important to show up collectively for our farms. And then we did just that. Vermonters all over the

state have taken action in support of the Farm Security Fund in a number of ways:

- About a dozen NOFA-VT members have circulated petitions in support of the Farm Security Fund. This means that they also engaged in generative conversations with their fellow community members to explain the Farm Security Fund, why it's needed, and why they care about it.
- At least six NOFA-VT members have written letters for papers and newsletters. One also called into her local radio program!
- Two members hosted workshops in their own communities after traveling to one in a different part of the state.
- NOFA-VT members encouraged the Governor to include the Farm Security Fund in his budget. He chose not to,

but our requests made it into the final summary, and paved an easier path for the legislature to take it up.

We have enjoyed bringing this momentum to the State House! NOFA-VT members are engaging with their legislators, offering impactful testimony, and having conversations with their lawmakers in Montpelier and their home districts. This work is ongoing, and now is the perfect time to join in.

Every single thing we're doing together is important. Thank you for being a part of NOFA-VT and engaging in this work together. We are grateful for the leadership and vision of NOFA-VT's Policy Steering Committee for charting this path and supporting it along the way. We're also thankful to all the NOFA-VT members who are showing up, linking arms, and building the bridges we need to the thriving future we know is possible. ♦



# A Win-Win for Farmers and Families

By Johanna Doren, NOFA-VT Direct Markets & Local Food Access Program Director

NOFA-VT is requesting \$500,000 in base funding to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining two proven NOFA-VT programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share. Public investment in these longstanding food security programs will have an outsized impact on Vermont communities by ensuring that low-income Vermonters can purchase fresh, local food and Vermont farmers receive a reliable, fair price for their goods.

Crop Cash doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits for fruits and vegetables purchased at Vermont farmers markets. The program is federally funded, but a local match is required. State funds will allow us to continue

to meet increased demand and draw down as much federal funding as possible, assuming federal funds remain available. State funds would also allow this important work to continue at a meaningful, though reduced scale, if federal funds were to be cut.

Crop Cash Plus, a 2023 pilot, expanded Crop Cash to all SNAP-eligible foods and extended the program's impact to all agricultural vendors at farmers markets. During the 2023 season, Crop Cash Plus brought over \$200,000 in additional revenue to Vermont farmers, and supported low-income Vermonters at the same time. We did not have funding to continue Crop Cash Plus in 2024, but we have an opportunity to bring

it back for the 2025 season. State funding is needed so that hundreds more farmers will benefit, and thousands of low-income Vermonters can purchase more local, fresh food.

The Farm Share Program has subsidized CSA shares for limited-income Vermonters for 30 years. The Program pays 25-75% of the cost of a CSA share for a family facing economic barriers to local food access. State funding will allow us to support up to 700 families in purchasing a consistent supply of locally grown food, while ensuring farmers are fairly compensated for the value of their CSA.



State funding is necessary to maximize the federal and philanthropic dollars these programs can leverage. The State of Vermont can make policy choices that will ensure food security for everyone who lives here, while also making sure our farmers can profit from growing the food we all need. Public funding marks a crucial step forward on the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, a plan that we're working with a coalition of partners to implement that will ensure all Vermonters are food-secure by 2035.

We're grateful to have received \$300,000 in one-time funding during the 2024 legislative session (for FY25) for Crop Cash and Farm Share, which has allowed us to successfully maintain increased food security while directly supporting local, Vermont farmers. We need continued funding so that these proven programs can continue leveraging federal and philanthropic dollars, while supporting low-income Vermonters and farmers alike.

On top of maintaining the current size of our Farm Share and Crop Cash programs, state funding is needed to bring back the Crop Cash Plus expansion. For Vermonters with limited food budgets, the return of Crop Cash Plus is key for fulfilling nutritional needs. One Montpelier resident shared the importance of the Crop Cash Plus expansion:

"As a working Vermont artist and author

who is low income with multiple disabilities, it can be difficult for me to make ends meet. The Crop Cash program is incredibly important to me for keeping fresh foods on my table at home. But perhaps even more importantly, due to my disabilities, the Crop Cash Plus program was incredibly helpful [in 2023]. One of my essential medications requires that I have high fat foods whenever I take it. Fresh fruits and veggies will rarely meet that threshold. So being able to get dairy and eggs with Crop Cash Plus is INCREDIBLY important for me to meet my nutrition needs."

Crop Cash Plus also provides an economic boost to our local farmers. By expanding Crop Cash beyond produce, we doubled the number of farmers who could receive income through the program. According to Elizabeth Wood, who offers the New Leaf CSA through her farm in Dummerston, "These programs have made a tremendous difference in supporting low-income households and supporting local farms. Most farmers are low-income people and can't afford to keep food prices low while still paying our staff and our bills. These programs help fill the gap between what we need to charge and what low-income households can afford to pay."

In the wake of inflation, high food prices, more frequent flooding, and the end of pandemic-era supports, it is vital that the

state invest in these programs.

Governor Scott's budget did not include this request, so it is up to the Legislature to include it in their budget this session. The House Agriculture Committee has included our request in their budget memo to the House Appropriations Committee earlier this session. As of this writing in early March, we anticipate that the House Appropriations Committee will be considering this recommendation as they develop their version of the FY26 budget. Then, we will need to work with the Senate Agriculture Committee to do the same. Once both chambers have developed versions of the budget, they will come together to reconcile the differences. ♦



# Navigating Federal Uncertainty

By Lindsey Brand, NOFA-VT Marketing & Communications Director

As we continue facing the impact of the executive orders targeting federal programs that are not aligned with "the goals and priorities of [the president's] Administration," we're concerned about the anti-democratic nature of this attack on bipartisan programming and the direct impact on agriculture. NOFA-VT and our farmers have received conflicting information about different federal funding streams, or, in some cases, no information at all. Despite court rulings that federal funds should still be dispersed, widespread confusion at USDA and staff terminations have resulted in some stalled programs, delayed payments, and broken grant contracts.

As of this writing on March 17, we are adapting to the news that the Climate-Smart Farming & Marketing Program is at a standstill. This is a regional initiative in which USDA contracted with Pasa Sustainable Agriculture to pay farms to implement

practices that mitigate and adapt to climate change. The program is not officially canceled, but funds are frozen and a key third-party contractor has been terminated (despite the fact that their contract has already been paid in full), effectively ceasing its operation. NOFA-VT is a local partner in the program with 12 farms who are currently enrolled with contracts for \$116,924 to implement practices like cover cropping, reduced tillage, and prescribed grazing, and another 50 farms that are at various places in the enrollment pipeline. We're hopeful that the program will regain operation, as USDA's investment in sustainable agriculture is crucial to the future viability and resilience of Vermont's farms and our food system more broadly.

We also just received the news that USDA Secretary Rollins has canceled two major food access programs: Local Food for Schools and Child Care (LFSCC) and Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA). These initiatives

would have provided funding for schools, early childhood centers, and food banks to purchase food from local producers. The programs would have directed \$1.7 million to over 100 Vermont farms. The ripple effects are also deeply disappointing—every dollar spent on local food generates an additional \$1.60 in economic activity for Vermont.

It is challenging to navigate a system in chaos, but we know that together we can continue to build an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just Vermont agricultural system. Whether you're directly tending the land and growing food or advocating for those who do, you are part of a movement—thank you.

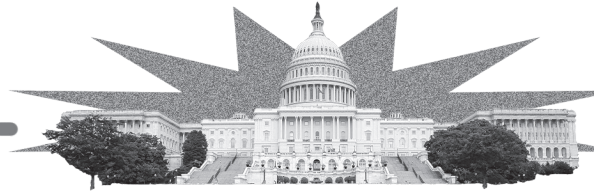
We're hosting more frequent member meetings to build relationships, grow resilience, and create good strategy amidst federal government instability. Check out **NOFAVT.ORG/EVENTS** to join one. ♦





# Speaking Up for Our Small Farms in D.C.

By Stephen Leslie, NOFA-VT Member and Farmer at Cedar Mountain Farm & Cobb Hill Cheese in Hartland, VT



Back in December, when Grace Oedel, the director of NOFA-VT, asked me if I would consider being a farmer-representative for the organization at the annual National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) DC-Fly-in held in February, I was honored to have the opportunity to step up and speak up for small farmers and the earth. But that was all in some other country in another time.

On January 20th, 2025, at Donald J. Trump's second inauguration ceremony, a group of tech-industry billionaires were in attendance with the best seats in the White House. For the first time the men of wealth and power stood in the light of day, revealing a reality that has always existed but tended to remain behind the scenes and in the shadows. In his recent "Fight Oligarchy" tour across the US, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders informed his audiences that currently just three multi-billionaires occupy more wealth than the bottom half of the U.S. population. These three men are Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg, all of whom had the most prominent ringside seats at the spectacle of Trump's swearing in.

Today in America it seems as if the last strands of our grip on democracy are slipping out of our hands. An authoritarian president has gained control over the other two branches of our federal government. A hostile corporate takeover of the U.S. government by the world's richest men is unfolding in real time. In the second Trump term, the president has been granted immunity from prosecution by the courts and usurped the power of the purse by canceling programs and putting spending freezes on funds already approved through legislation.

One of the important markers on the Economist's Democracy Index is the civil liberty to form associations that can then petition or have the power to lobby for their causes. In the United States, this liberty has been severely tested but has persisted. The

opportunity to claim that agency inspired me to join the delegation of farmers, ranchers, and fishers that traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with congressional staffers and representatives to advocate for such issues as fair pricing for farmers, food sovereignty, and equitable access to farm land and farm credit. We were sponsored by NFFC. As long as citizens still have this kind of agency there may be hope yet for our failing democracy.

When I went to D.C. as a farmer-representative for NOFA-VT, I was accompanied by my 17-year-old daughter, Maeve, who just happens to be studying the history of democracy at her high school. When you spend as much time as I do on the farm, it's always a little disorienting to travel. But after the last six weeks of what long-time advisor to the president Steve Bannon aptly describes as, "muzzle velocity" assaults on all fronts to destabilize and dismantle key agencies of the federal government, traveling into D.C. was more like being in a menacing episode of the Twilight Zone. I had to ask myself, what am I even doing here?

But when all the NFFC delegates and staff got together on our first afternoon at the Presbyterian Church to meet up and strategize, and after I heard all the introductions of these farmers, fishers, and ranchers from all across the country telling who they were and why they were showing up, I felt so grateful for their passion for what they do and their courage and willingness to step up to defend it, I knew we were in the right place at the right time. Congresswoman Alma Adams of North Carolina, a long-time member on the Ag Committee, graciously joined us to share her view on the moment and the prospects for the Farm Bill. She told us there was a time to show up, a time to speak up, and sometimes there is a time to, "cut up"—and it seems that such a moment has arrived. A moment to ask, "What would John Lewis do?"

For the Fly-In, Maeve and I were part of the Dairy Team. We had a dairy farmer on our team from a fourth-generation South Dakota farm. Farmer Kelly Scheetz spoke of how her husband's grandparents had raised 15 children on the farm, but now they were having a hard time supporting a family of five. Last year, after two months of getting a milk check in which all their profits went to cover transportation costs, they said "enough" and told the processor to please stop sending the hauler. Now they are selling raw milk to neighbors and developing their value-added, first-in-the-state cream line yogurt business, with plans to create a mobile processing plant that could be shared with other area farms. Sarah Lloyd from Wisconsin recounted that she and her husband had recently sold off their 450 cows because, with operational costs constantly rising, they could no longer make the multi-generational farm business pay. They were holding onto the land and making plans to introduce elements of agroforestry into the farm landscape. And Patti Naylor, an organic farmer from Iowa, related how she was raised on a small diversified farm before they were described that way because that was just what a farm was. She described how her brother still operates the family farm, but the cows that once served as the fertility engine of biological soil health are all gone, replaced with commodity crops. These powerful women farmers are active with local and national farmer-led organizations.

Each Fly-In Team was accompanied by an NFFC staff member. We were fortunate to have communications and media specialist Samantha Cave on the Dairy Team, who somehow managed to combine fun with efficient time management. The folks at NFFC did an incredible job orchestrating the entire event. The National Family Farm Coalition is proposing a comprehensive reform of the dairy sector through the Milk from Family Farms Act. The NFFC proposal



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could radically reform the dairy sector through a non-monetized national quota system, incentivizing small and mid-size farms and gradually deconsolidating the concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

This proposed Act is still in search of a champion. We visited offices the NFFC had already identified as being potential allies for this bill, or to new members who represent districts with high concentrations of dairy farms. And of course, when we spoke with staffers we all addressed how the freezes on USDA funding for programs and grants is directly impacting us, our farm neighbors, and our trusted technical assistance partners. All the staffers we spoke with—from both parties—expressed a sense of shock and dismay at the freezes on USDA programs directly impacting their farmer constituents. We also got a sense that everyone was feeling in the dark about which cuts were coming next, and were often reduced to getting their updates from the media rather than directly from the White House. Most everyone is familiar with the concept that times of crisis present both danger and opportunity. With these betrayals of signed contracts, the Trump administration is literally killing farms. With all those folks out in farm and ranch country feeling hung out to dry, this might be a moment when seeds can be sown for a bi-partisan agrarian uprising.

We heard from a couple of our New England representatives' staffers that if Welch's office takes up the Milk from Family Farms Act, they would follow suit. We visited Vermont Senator Peter Welch's office as our last stop on Thursday afternoon. Senator Welch showed up and spent a generous amount of time with our dairy team, along with staffers Evelyn Vivar and Darryl Alexander. Many of the representatives seem most responsive to requests for a meeting when they know their own constituents are going to be present, and Senator Welch was no exception. It probably didn't hurt that for over thirty years, he lived in the same town where our farm is located, and even used to get milk from the family that owned the farm before us. It's a hallmark of our "Brave Little State" that engaged citizens can gain access to the ears of their elected representatives. Senator Welch stated that he has, "always supported supply management." He assured us that his staffer Darryl was working on the bill's language. Of course, the Senator is also obliged to meet with lobbyists representing the interests of the large farm operations. Given that reality, I think the Dairy Team left the meeting encouraged to hear the Senator confirm that his office is engaging with the

language of the Milk from Family Farms Act. We have good incentive to continue following up with Senator Welch's office and to circulate the bill's language among farmers and rural organizations in our respective regions.

At all the offices we visited, I did my best to convey the grim details of the current dairy crisis in Vermont (and the country in general). Ours is a story of rapid consolidation. Back in 1996 when my wife Kerry and I first started buying heifers there were 2500 dairy farms in the state of Vermont. Today there are less than 450. Yet, the state is still producing the same amount of milk and has approximately the same number of cows. The dairy sector still makes up 80% of agricultural sales in the state (and occupies 80% of the agricultural land) but all of that production is increasingly concentrated into large CAFO-style operations located in a couple of counties. The small and middle-sized farms that used to dot the countryside all across the state are quickly disappearing, with huge negative ramifications for local economies and culture. Even more alarming has been the conversion of farm land to development. We have lost 30% of our prime agricultural lands since 1987—that's more than 100,000 acres. The American Farmland Trust reports that Vermont and New Hampshire collectively lose 35 acres of rural land to conversion daily. All this is taking place in the context of a rapidly destabilizing climate system and loss of biodiversity.

We cannot expect farmers who are forced to have annual operating debt and long-term debt on infrastructure and assets to be innovators and risk-takers. Dairy farmers invest enormous amounts of capital in equipment, infrastructure, inputs, and labor. They have seen profit margins flat-lined for 50 years while operating costs have sky-rocketed. Meanwhile, equipment manufacturers and purveyors of copyrighted seeds, fertilizers and pesticides rake in record profits. If agriculture continues to operate within the free market, it needs to be with built-in safety nets.

In recent history, the state and federal government's response to the crisis in the dairy industry has been to fund projects that prop up the existing model. One example of this would be the promotion of on-farm methane bio-digestors as a "green solution" for generating electricity. To construct these high-tech facilities requires huge expenditures and an enormous amount of concrete and steel. This energy generation model depends on pairing electric utilities with large farms, where a minimum of 800

cows (often thousands) are housed in year-round confinement. This is all heading in the wrong direction.

Dairy farmers need to be offered viable options to reduce the number of cows, get them back out on the land grazing, and diversify their operations. Farmers need technical assistance to grow innovative specialty crops such as vegetables, fruits, nuts, mushrooms, hemp, medicinal and culinary herbs, small grains, pseudo grains, and legumes for human consumption. Additionally, elements of agroforestry can be integrated into annual cropping systems, with perennial crops enhancing diversity and resilience. All of these incentives aim to re-establish a regional food system. Consumers ought to be able to buy a full diet of food grown within one-hundred miles of where they live. We don't need more California lettuce coming to us on jet planes, but rather healthy, organic, and bio-regionally produced food eaten with the seasons.

When I entered into a farm apprenticeship back in 1992 with the idea of becoming a farmer, I did so because I felt that becoming a small diversified organic farmer in the United States at that time was the most potent form of non-violent direct action to change the system that I could undertake. I still believe that is true and that this kind of farming represents our last best hope in surviving climate change. Every small farm and woodlot managed with organic and regenerative practices is like a stone tossed in a pool. There is no telling how far the ripple effects of such efforts will travel and how they might help raise ecological awareness and give impulse to the systemic changes we so desperately need. Although we are just one small farm, if soil health practices are to be adopted widely, it will be a grassroots movement of forward-thinking land caretakers who will be the catalysts. We are trying to implement practices on the foundational principle that the best adaptation is mitigation. We are part of a larger regional, national, and international grassroots agroecological movement aiming to create resilient, just and equitable, re-localized and sovereign food systems. This re-rooting and reconnecting to the living earth offers an opportunity to turn things around and make human progress toward a regenerative global civilization.

Thanks to NFFC, La Via Campesina, and all of the partner organizations who came together to help farmers, fishers, and ranchers and their allies stand united in these challenging times! ♦



# Looking Back at Our 43rd Annual Winter Conference

Thank you to everyone who joined us for a weekend of learning, growing, connecting, reflecting, and celebrating. We're also continually grateful for the sponsors and exhibitors who support the conference and make this event possible. We all can make a difference in our food system, and we're stronger together!



*Top to bottom, left to right: Dānia Davy gets the crowd dancing during the keynote speech; All smiles reconnecting with friends in the hallway; The seed swap table hosted by Fruition Seeds.*



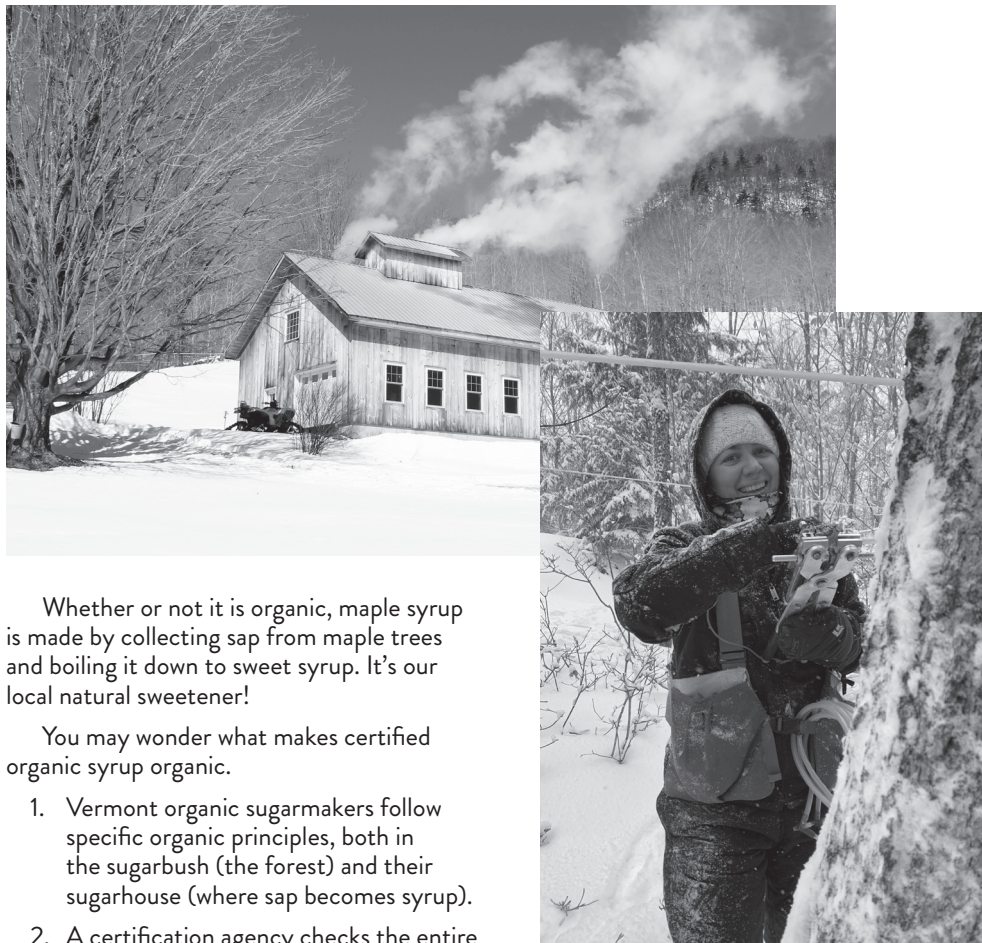


Top to bottom, left to right: Attendees seated for the conference opening and keynote; Kids practice setting maple taps in trees at the Children's Conference; Mikahely plays music for conference goers at the end-of-day social; Artist Christine Tyler Hill of Tender Warrior Co. demonstrates how to make a zine; Abdoulaye Niane and Marja Makinen of Khelcom Farm in Barre receive the Spirit of Enid Award; The last spoonfuls of ice cream from Strafford Organic Creamery are enjoyed after the ice cream social.



# Isn't *All* Maple Syrup Organic?

By Zea Luce, NOFA-VT Organic Practices Specialist



Whether or not it is organic, maple syrup is made by collecting sap from maple trees and boiling it down to sweet syrup. It's our local natural sweetener!

You may wonder what makes certified organic syrup organic.

1. Vermont organic sugarmakers follow specific organic principles, both in the sugarbush (the forest) and their sugarhouse (where sap becomes syrup).
2. A certification agency checks the entire maple syrup production process once a year.

Organic certification is one way to communicate how food (even syrup!) is produced so that we know more about what we are buying and eating, how it is grown, and how the land is treated for the health of all future generations.

To boil it down, three of the main things that are important for Vermont organic sugarmakers include:

## The Forest

Syrup production begins in the forest! Taking care of the forest is at the heart of a sugarmaker's work. An organic sugarer has a long-term forest management plan to ensure they create and maintain a healthy forest ecosystem. This includes fostering a diversity of plants and animals, protecting soil and water quality, planning for tree regeneration,

and more. Sometimes an organic sugarbush can look "messy" because brush is left on the ground for beneficial animal habitat and to enrich the soil. The health of the whole forest and its associated components are the priorities in organic production.

## The Trees

Sap is collected from sugar maple and red maple trees. To gather the sap from each tree, a hole is drilled into the tree and a tap is inserted into the hole so that the sap can flow into collection tubing. Tapping a tree can impact the tree's lifespan, ability to grow, and/or resilience to disease and pest pressure. Organic sugarers follow rules that consider the tree size (diameter), only tapping mature trees and limiting the number of taps per tree. Taps also need to be removed from the trees within a certain time frame when the season ends to allow the tree to heal. These organic

practices ensure the health and longevity of the trees.

## The Syrup

Did you know that all sugarmakers use a defoamer when boiling their sap into syrup? A defoamer is a product used in small quantities to decrease the amount of foam (bubbles!) when the sap is boiling. This is needed so that the pans of hot maple sap do not boil over or burn, making the boiling more efficient while maintaining the flavor. A fat is used to break up the bubbles (you know the saying: oil and water don't mix). In the past, when many sugarmakers were also dairy farmers, butter was commonly used! But now, there are synthetic chemical-based defoamers and vegetable oils. Certified organic syrup is typically processed with certified organic vegetable oil as the defoamer.

## And More!

There is so much more that goes into syrup production in general and organic sugarmaking specifically – like filtering the syrup, storing it, using various kinds of equipment and technology, cleaning the sugarhouse, preventing contamination, keeping good records, and preparing for the organic inspection.

Maple syrup producers who go through the organic certification process commit themselves to the highest standards of environmental stewardship and purity of their maple products.

Learn more by visiting a sugarhouse near you, taking a tour, tasting the syrup, and asking the sugarmakers about their process – from forest to jug! ♦

Funding for this work comes from:



United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



# Vermont Family Farmer of the Month

By Kevin Haggerty, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

The Vermont Family Farmer of the Month Award continues to recognize outstanding farms across the state for their commitment to sustainable agriculture and innovative projects. Administered by NOFA-VT in collaboration with VHC Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Shelburne Farms, and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, this award highlights Vermont farms that contribute to a resilient agricultural landscape and demonstrate environmental stewardship. We are honored to introduce the latest awards:



## Leaping Bear Farm, Putney - November 2024

Justin Bramhall and Vanessa Rose started Leaping Bear Farm in 2019 with the belief that regenerative agriculture is fundamental to the fight climate change and creating abundance and resilience. Since then, they have grown Leaping Bear Farm from a flock of 50 laying hens to over 2000 meat chickens and 900 layers each season. Now in their sixth season, Leaping Bear Farm is one of the few certified organic pasture-raised chicken and egg producers in the region, selling directly to their community at local farmers markets and wholesale to surrounding food co-ops and restaurants. Justin and Vanessa are also deeply focused on building the social resilience of their community and are working to preserve the Putney Farmers Market as a community and economic fixture of their town.

Leaping Bear Farm was awarded \$12,000 to upgrade their egg washing infrastructure with the purchase of a Power Scrub Egg Washer. Despite the farm's recent growth, Justin and Vanessa were still washing eggs by hand, a both time-consuming and physically demanding task. This upgrade will allow Justin and Vanessa to continue to meet growing demand, increase their profitability, and move closer to being able to purchase their own land in the near future.



## The Farm Upstream, Jericho - December, 2024

As first generation farmers, Jake Kornfeld, Cory Froning, Jacqueline Huettenmoser, Spencer Hardy, and Tucker Andrews knew that the path to land tenure would require creativity and trust in community. After three years of farming on leased land, the opportunity to purchase a historic, conserved farm in Jericho presented itself and the collective of five farmers purchased the farm in 2023. The farm has previously specialized in growing a select mix of certified organic vegetables for wholesale markets. But, as new stewards of historic farmland with deep roots in the community, the farmers are shifting their business from exclusively wholesale to a community-centered retail model to engage their neighbors on this land that has been part of the agriculture community for generations.

The Farm Upstream was awarded \$12,000 to finish ongoing renovations of an existing building into a farm stand. This award will allow the farm to insulate the building, pour a concrete floor, and install welcoming doors, display features, and lighting. Finishing this renovation will have a direct and lasting impact on the farm by helping diversify their business mode, while also providing a space to grow genuine, lasting relationships with their neighbors for years to come.



## Sandy Bottom Farm, Isle La Motte - January, 2025

Believing that local agriculture is both an essential aspect of small communities as well as a vehicle for social change, Patrick Helman and Mary Catherine Graziano founded Sandy Bottom Farm on Isle La Motte in 2018. Over the past six years, Sandy Bottom Farm has grown into a highly diversified, certified organic farm growing over 50 types of vegetables and fruit crops available for a CSA, farmers markets, and farm stand. Sandy Bottom Farm also partners closely with local schools, gleaning programs, and food access organizations to provide thousands of pounds of fresh produce each season to those in need in their community.

Sandy Bottom Farm was awarded \$12,000 to install a larger walk-in cooler that will meet their increasing need for cold storage as the farm grows. The addition of this cold storage capacity will allow Patrick and Mary Catherine to cultivate new wholesale markets, reduce crop loss, and harvest and sell through the winter months. This project will allow Patrick and Mary Catherine to more deeply support their community through offering year-round employment opportunities to neighbors, provide fresh food to schools and food pantries year-round, and make their produce as accessible as possible to everyone in their community. ♦

**Applications are open to any small or medium-sized farms in Vermont. The next round of applications will open in early April. To learn more, visit [VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG](https://VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG).**



# Feeding Kids Is Our “Bread and Butter”

By Lauren Griswold, NOFA-VT Wholesale Markets Program Director



Exciting news! The NOFA-VT Farm to School team is spearheading two new projects to reimagine what's possible in school cafeterias. This work is strategically focused on localizing a few of the products K-12 school kitchens serve most often, bakery and dairy products, or, as we're fondly calling them, our bread and butter. For NOFA-VT, this work is a no-brainer: in a state like ours, every child deserves the delicious, nutritious bounty being baked and bottled all around us every day, our farmers deserve access to these meaningful markets, and our communities are more resilient when they're connected.

Our hearts are warmed to share that this new project was originally inspired by Vermont's school nutrition professionals' desire for local options for purchasing the products they use most often. Vermont's school nutrition professional community is rich with local purchasing champions, who foremost want to do best by the students they serve every day, and see healthy, fresh, organic, and local sourcing as a big part of that goal. They also recognize the

potential of their local purchasing decisions to positively influence local economies and communities.

Their dedication is made all the more remarkable when considering the barriers they face – from tight budgets to stringent nutrition requirements, K-12 buyers navigate a maze of regulations with finite resources. Bakery products, for example, must be at least 50% whole grain, must be portioned at the appropriate serving size, and must meet sodium and sugar requirements in order to meet National School Lunch Program requirements. As you might imagine, this essentially means that bakery products must be developed specifically for the K-12 market.

And that's exactly what the NOFA-VT Farm to School team is setting out to do. Over the next two years, we'll work with Vermont bakeries and school nutrition professionals to facilitate K-12 bakery product development, ensuring there are local options that meet child nutrition standards for the breads, buns, and muffins Vermont's K-12 buyers serve every day as part of their school meals. We will also support participating bakeries to source local flour for these K-12 bakery products, and will support schools in incorporating Vermont-grown flour into their scratch baking programs. We are thrilled to



be digging into this work, connecting Vermont's school buyers and students with healthy, fresh, local grains, and forging connections between Vermont's burgeoning grain growing, milling, and baking community and an eager local school market.

Alongside this work localizing the bakery products served in Vermont schools, we're also coordinating a two-year push to get more Vermont organic dairy in our local schools across the state. Building on the success of a pilot project running for the past two years that connected several Vermont schools with local, organic Miller Farm milk, we're now facilitating conversations between any and all interested Vermont organic dairy farmers and school buyers in their respective communities. This effort is paired with statewide outreach to school buyers to identify untapped opportunities for Vermont organic dairy products in school lunch, breakfast, and summer meal programs. In some cases, these introductions and support will be enough to spark new purchasing relationships for existing Vermont organic dairy products. We also anticipate that these initial conversations will surface demand for more K-12 dairy product development, as with our school milk pilot with Miller Farm.

This K-12 supply chain facilitation is responsive to product gaps and opportunities in K-12 local purchasing, and would not be possible without the inspiring insight and vision our school nutrition professional colleagues bring to our shared work, and the drive so many Vermont farmers and food producers have to feed their communities. The vision our Farm to School team brings to this intersection of farm and school is not one marked by compromise or sacrifice, but by mutually beneficial collaboration. We really are stronger together, and it is a privilege and a joy to serve in this connective role. ◇

*Elementary school students in the Windham Northeast Supervisory School Union drinking local, organic milk for lunch and visiting Miller Farm to see the source of the milk.*



Are you a dairy or grain producer (or baker!) who wants to sell to schools in your community? Or, perhaps you're a parent or caregiver who wants to see local "bread and butter" in your child's school? Have questions or ideas? Contact NOFA-VT's Farm to School Program Manager, Kayla Strom: [kayla@nofavt.org](mailto:kayla@nofavt.org).

For more farm to school resources, check out Vermont FEED, our farm to school partnership with Shelburne Farms, at [VTFEED.ORG](http://VTFEED.ORG).



# Thank you for supporting organic agriculture and a stronger food system!

A warm welcome to the following new NOFA-VT members who have joined this winter:

## NEW MEMBERS

Abby Kelso, Middlebury, VT  
Alan Gorkin, Charlotte, VT  
Alexis Yamashita, Essex Junction, VT  
Alice Evans, Waitsfield, VT  
Alyssa Eaton, Tinmouth, VT  
Andrew Ahern, Burlington, VT  
Ansley Davis, Woodstock, VT  
April Zajko, Saint Johnsbury, VT  
Brett Parker, Danville, VT  
Brock Rasor, East Thetford, VT  
Bruch Lehmann, Quechee, VT  
Christina Reiter, Burlington, VT  
Cindy Allen, Chelsea, VT  
CJ Sands, Burlington, VT  
Colette Lucas, Peterborough, NH  
Colin Anderson, Burlington, VT  
Collins Household, Barnet, VT  
Courtney Ek, Sherborn, MA  
David Crews, Shaftsbury, VT  
Dierdre Heekin & Caleb Barber, Bethel, VT  
Drew Dowds, Barnard, VT  
Edith Baragar, Saint Bernard de Michaudville, QC  
Elizabeth Flynn, White River Junction, VT  
Elizabeth Spier, Johnson, VT  
Emily Cai, Norwich, VT  
Emma Goldenthal, Burlington, VT  
Florence Damon, Colchester, VT  
Gabrielle Hall, Bristol, VT  
Gibbs Eddy, Burlington, VT  
Gilligan Household, Amherst, NH  
Hadley Mueller, Burlington, VT  
Hannah Distasio, Arcade, NY  
Heather Bella, Sutton, VT  
Heather Lafont, West Glover, VT  
Hyacinthe Ayingeneye, Williston, VT  
Jackie Reno, Burlington, VT  
Jacob Farber  
Jacob Welborn, Waban, MA  
James Carneiro, South Royalton, VT  
Jeremiah Cook, Hardwick, VT

Jessica Freed-Haitz, Vergennes, VT  
Jessica Rhys, Machester Center, VT  
Johannes Ziegler, Burlington, VT  
John Roberts, West Cornwall, VT  
Julia Riesman, Richmond, VT  
Julie Conason, Salisbury, VT  
Kalé Camara, Duxbury, VT  
Karissa Smith, Wolcott, VT  
Kate Zoeller, Richmond, VT  
Kathleen Katz, St. Albans, VT  
Kathy Howell, Lincoln, VT  
Katie Stowe, Walpole, NH  
Kayleigh Boucher, Highgate, VT  
Kelly Spooner, Newbury, VT  
Kim Corey, Montpelier, VT  
Klein Household, Swanton, VT  
Kym Anderson, Brookfield, VT  
Landon DePaulo, Johnson, VT  
Laura Fair, Ferrisburgh, VT  
Laura Tobin, Barnet, VT  
Lillian Gutoff, Burlington, VT  
Madeline Reynolds, Woodstock, VT  
Mae Peterson, Bristol, VT  
Marianne Eaton, New Haven, VT  
Mariella Torres, Burlington, VT  
Mark Schonbeck, Floyd, VA  
Mark Turco, Mount Holly, VT  
Marlie Hunt, Addison, VT  
Matthew Dami, Woodstock, VT  
Max Pomroy, Burlington, VT  
Mia Smith, Sunderland, VT  
Mikayla Peront, Bethel, VT  
Miriam Hansen, Montpelier, VT  
Morgan Jablonski, Burlington, VT  
Morgan Langlois, Eden Mills, VT  
Natalie Pruell, Essex Junction, VT  
Paul Hamilton, Chester, VT  
Payne Household, Danby, VT  
Rene Castro, Martinsburg, WV  
Seamus Martin, Shrewbury, VT  
Sean Walsh  
Serena Kent, Winooski, VT  
Sopher Household, Charlotte, VT  
Sophie Wood, Thetford, VT  
Stephen Lowe, West Glover, VT  
Susan Witham, East Montpelier, VT

Timothy Hoopes, Burlington, VT  
Una Lee, Johnson, VT  
Vincent Tamakloe, Burlington, VT  
Windsor Smith, Middlebury, VT  
Zoe Sabadish

## NEW BUSINESS MEMBERS

Abolition in Action Farms, Shoreham, VT  
Alyssa DeBella, Addison, VT  
Arden Flower Farm, Mendon, VT  
Asa Searles, Lowell, VT  
Barred Woods, Underhill, VT  
Beebe Family Sugarbush, Swanton, VT  
Belaski Family Maple, Richmond, VT  
Belvidere Mountain Maple, East Fairfield, VT  
Bennington Community Market, Bennington, VT  
Bill Werneke, East Fairfield, VT  
Black Bear Maples LLC, Belvidere Center, VT  
Boney Woods Maple, Barnet, VT  
Bottomless Well, Corinth, VT  
Branon Shady Maples, Inc., Fairfield, VT  
Buck Family Maple Farm, Waterbury Center, VT  
Bucky Shelton dba Still Hill Farmstead, Glover, VT  
Burke Mountain Maple, East Burke, VT  
Burns Farm Maple, LLC, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Butch & Bonnie Currier, Glover, VT  
By Hand Farm, Newfane, VT  
Charley Witherell, Johnson, VT  
Clayfield Farm, East Ryegate, VT  
Cloud Brook LLC, East Ryegate, VT  
Cobbler Hill Farm, Cambridge, VT  
Cochran Family Maple Farm, Richmond, VT  
Cold Hollow Maple, Shelburne, VT  
Cold Ridge Maple, LLC, Johnson, VT  
Collins Maple, LLC, Washington, VT  
Creeks End Beef and Maples, Sheldon, VT  
Croft & Craft, Saint Johnsbury, VT  
Crystal Ducharme, Derby, VT  
Dan Lussier, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Emily Asper, Johnson, VT  
Eric & Michelle Pomeroy, Peacham, VT  
Fern Bridge Farm LLC, North Ferrisburgh, VT  
Frank Kneeland, Cambridge, VT  
Frederic Nadeau, Sharon, VT  
Full Steam Ahead, LLC, Fairfax, VT  
Gavin Ryan, Fairfield, VT  
Goldenrod Design LLC, Waterbury Center, VT  
Gray's Sugar Shack, Newport, VT  
Great Book Nursery, Plainfield, VT  
Green Mountain Lavender, Chester, VT  
Griffin Corse, VT  
Heffernan Family Sugarworks LLC, Bristol, VT  
Heinlein's Maples, Enosburg, VT  
Hundred Acre Works, Underhill, VT  
Jacobs Family Maple Grove LLC, Richford, VT  
Jacobs Family Sugarhouse, Bakersfield, VT  
Jason Colburn dba Hudson Road Maples, West Charleston, VT  
Jean's Family Maple, Colchester, VT  
Jericho Underhill FoodHub, Underhill, VT  
Jessica Fischer & Thomas DiRenzo, S Burlington, VT  
John Andersen, Westford, VT  
Judd's Wayeeses Farms, Morgan, VT  
Kendrick Griggs, Lowell, VT  
Kingdom Maple, Irasburg, VT  
King's Little Maple, West Topsham, VT  
Lamb Family Maple LLC, Waterville, VT  
Land Care Cooperative, LCA, Burlington, VT  
Larry & Denise Cota, E Fairfield, VT  
Leblanc's Sugaring, N Troy, VT

Living Tree Alliance Collective  
Garden, Moretown, VT  
Lower Notch Farm, Bristol, VT  
M & J Maple Ridge, LLC,  
Enosburg Falls, VT  
Manning's Maple, East Barre, VT  
Maple Crest, Underhill, VT  
Maple Mountain Sugarhouse,  
Albany, VT  
Maplestone Farm, East Corinth,  
VT  
Marble Meadows, Wallingford,  
VT  
Mark Booth, Barre, VT  
Marsh Family Maple, LLC,  
Jeffersonville, VT  
Matthew Sweet, Jeffersonville,  
VT  
McAllister Home Farm LLC,  
Richford, VT  
McBride Family Maples,  
Westford, VT  
Middle Maple Farm, Milton, VT

Moose Mountain Maple,  
Underhill, VT  
Nelson Hill Maple, Derby, VT  
Nicole Civita, Danville, VT  
Norris Sugarworks, Starksboro,  
VT  
North Face Maples, LLC,  
Montgomery, VT  
North Hill Partners LLC,  
Westfield, VT  
Otter Brook Maples LLC,  
Hinesburg, VT  
Our Gold-In Maples,  
Jeffersonville, VT  
Patrick Fondry, Waterville, VT  
Perkins School for the Blind,  
Watertown, MA  
Perley Farm Maple Products,  
Richford, VT  
Playful Shady Maples Inc,  
Fairfield, VT  
PNP LLC, Bakersfield, VT  
Possum Planting, Brattleboro, VT

Poulin and Daughters Family  
Farm, Brookfield, VT  
Raina Koeller, Starksboro, VT  
Republic of Vermont, Goshen,  
VT  
RM Hill, LLC, Underhill, VT  
Rock Allen, Sheldon, VT  
Rootin Tootin Acres, West  
Rutland, VT  
Russell Reed, Sheldon, VT  
Scott Joyal, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Scythe Supply, Perry, ME  
Sharpshooter Sugarworks LLC,  
Fayston, VT  
Sleepy Maples LLC, Bakersfield,  
VT  
Spencer Shoram, Waterville, VT  
Stardust Botanicals, Burlington,  
VT  
Steven Shores, Ferrisburgh, VT  
Stewart Maple, Cuttingsville, VT  
Sundown Farm, Marshfield, VT

Sweet Ridge Maples LLC,  
Highgate, VT  
Sweet Stone Maple Farm,  
Hardwick, VT  
Ted Lancaster, East Fairfield, VT  
Totman Hill Farms, Pomfret, VT  
Umbrella Hill Maple, Morrisville,  
VT  
Vermont Electric Coop, Johnson,  
VT  
Vermont Filtered, LLC, Fairfax,  
VT  
Victoria Bryan & Chelsey Rich,  
Chelsea, VT  
Walden Mountain Farm, East  
Hardwick, VT  
Waterville Mountain Maples LLC,  
Belvedere, VT  
Wayne King, Cambridge, VT  
Wiggly Goat Farm, Panton, VT  
WildWood Valley Sugaring,  
Morgan, VT  
Wind Swept Dairy Farm,  
Brookfield, VT

## 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!



Erik Reimanis  
Middle Maples Farm  
Valley Fog Maple  
Sleepy Maples LLC

Hundred Acre Works  
Brandyn Guyette  
North Face Maples, LLC  
Larry Cota

Heavenly Maple LLC  
Beck Pond Sugarworks LLC

**Learn more about the benefits of certified organic, locally grown at [VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC](https://VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC)**



NOFA-VT | Our Staff

## A Warm Welcome to Our New Staff!

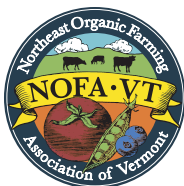


**Avery MacLean**

Local Food Access Assistant Americorps Member

Avery's interest in agriculture began when she started raising laying hens and selling eggs in middle school. In 2021, she founded Red Wing Farm, a market garden located on Grindstone Island in northern New York. Avery graduated from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences with a degree in Sustainable Cropping Systems. After her years of farming Avery is excited to join NOFA-VT's team as the Local Food Access Assistant. When she's not in her garden, she loves to spend time working on fiber arts, walking her dog, or cross country skiing.





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Association of Vermont  
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*It's CSA sign-up season!*

# Community Supported Agriculture

For a list of CSAs in your area, go to: [NOFAVT.ORG/CSAS](http://NOFAVT.ORG/CSAS)