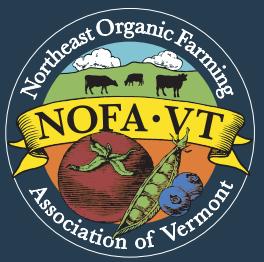


NOFA Notes

Quarterly newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont



Winter 2025-26



Legislative Session Preview | Stories of Organizing in the Northeast Kingdom | By Hand Farm's Journey | Wrap-Around Support for Farm Viability

Cover photo: NOFA-VT member
O Bread sells fresh-baked loaves and
goodies at the Burlington Winter
Farmers Market



Dear friends,

We arrive again at the solstice, when we find ourselves in deepest darkness, celebrating the return of the light. Wherever this finds you, I hope you are cozy and safe—settled near a crackling wood stove, hands wrapped around a mug of piping hot coffee or tea. Winter lays bare the basics: fires to keep us warm, food curing in the cellar, company to play music with through the long hours of darkness. How fortunate we are when we have these simple comforts.



Author Margaret Atwood says that the winter solstice is, “the year’s threshold and unlocking, where the past lets go and becomes the future.”

Back in late summer we waited—squeezing the fleshy insides of the best tomatoes to ferment, tapping scruffy flower heads into our palms, sliding our thumbnails along the papery husks of bean pods and popping open treasures—saving the earth’s promises for another season of bounty to return. At solstice, we pour those saved seeds onto the kitchen table, running our fingertips over the multitude of possibilities. What will we choose for next season?

We’re looking forward to gathering with you in six weeks to consider the kind of future we will choose to seed together at our annual Winter Conference (now in a new location; more details on page 14). The venerable Ira Wallace, longtime leader of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, will join us as the keynote speaker to cultivate fertile soil for our wintertime dreaming.

Ira Wallace is a person who keenly knows the importance of the seeds we sow. She has dedicated her lifetime to researching, experimenting, farming, saving, protecting, and distributing organic, open-pollinated seeds.

She is a person who knows the value of collective thriving. She has lived in and founded income-sharing communities that expand our sense of what generosity can look like and how collectivism can protect us all.

She is a person who knows the need for bravery in hard times, having led Southern Exposure Seed Exchange to participate as a plaintiff in the 2011 Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association v. Monsanto lawsuit.

She is a person who knows that making change must also be delicious—bringing heirloom tomatoes back into our diets, knocking on neighbors’ doors in search of the best collard patch from which to save and share seeds.

Ira Wallace has spent her life offering some of the seeds we will need to cultivate a bold, juicy, just, and collectively thriving future for all. I hope you’ll join us at the conference in February, bringing your own dreams and seeds to swap. Until then, may you be nourished by a good pot of soup and the steady promise of the returning light, a cycle that never gives up on us.

In community, and with love,

Grace Oedel
Executive Director, NOFA-VT

NOFA-VT

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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.

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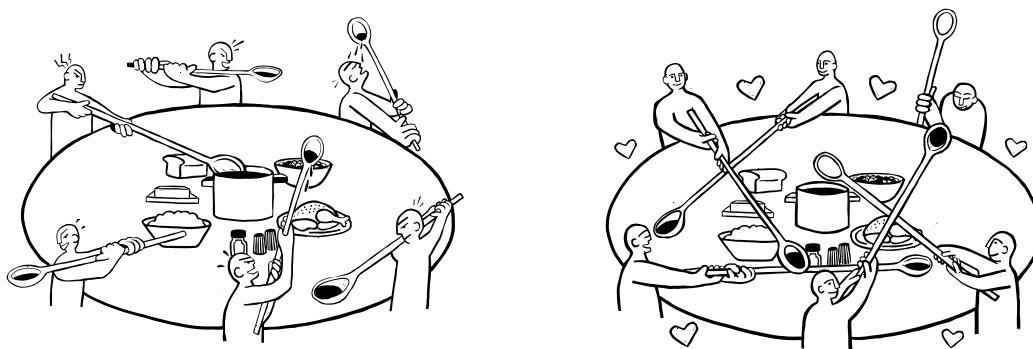


Connecting the Dots Together at Monthly Member Meetings

By Jessica Hays-Lucas, NOFA-VT Policy Organizer

NOFA-VT members are coming together in community and power, and there's always a spot for you!

This year began with the rollout of a multitude of destabilizing and harmful federal policies, but in that quaking moment, our commitment to keep each other fed and ensuring our community of farmers has the support they need and deserve anchored our collective response and illuminated the path forward. Together, we have been learning new ways to stand side by side with immigrants and in solidarity with farmworkers. We took action in person in Middlebury and White River Junction to share our demands with the US Department of Agriculture: honor our contracts, stop targeting immigrant communities, and strengthen the food and health programs we rely on. And we reminded each other of the story of the long-handled spoon, emphasizing the joy and power in keeping each other fed.



That thread continues in our virtual monthly member meetings. A season in, we're seeing the promise of our community coming together with shared purpose: to cultivate hope and joy, offer and receive support, and take collective actions that move us toward the world we need to thrive.

We open each of these monthly meetings with an offering of beauty. Sometimes it's a poem, perhaps by Vermont organic farmer-poet, Katie Spring. Sometimes it's a song that brings peace or memories of a dear friend. We're creating space for inspiration and joy.

Each meeting also includes space for support. Sometimes this includes practical resources offered by NOFA-VT staff members or our allies. Other times, it's the care that members share for one another. One member, struggling under the grueling demands of drought, said, "So often I feel like I need to pretend that everything's okay, so people don't worry about me. But really, everything is not okay. It's hard. It's a relief to have a space to say that, and know that everyone understands." Farmers, eaters, homesteaders, gardeners—we're all in this together, and everyone has a role to play in bringing about the future we need.

We are committed to growing our collective action. Members are already collaborating to raise our collective voice, engaging with reporters, legislators, and neighbors to build support for the passage and funding of the Farm Security Fund, and exploring steps we can take together toward food security and affordable healthcare for all. Jacob Powsner, a sugarmaker at Baird Farm in Chittenden and a member of NOFA-VT's Policy and Organizing Steering Committee, has guided the vision and implementation of the member meetings. Jacob says, "Certainly, the community and solidarity are working. We're learning about work being done that is often unseen." We are listening to each other, finding light, power, and joy, and discovering new ways to shape what's possible together.

Upcoming virtual member meetings are scheduled on the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 6-7:15 pm. We look forward to seeing you at a member meeting soon!

Upcoming Member Meetings:

Tuesday, January 20
6-7:15 pm
Virtual

Tuesday, February 17
6-7:15 pm
Virtual

Tuesday, March 17
6-7:15 pm
Virtual

Visit NOFAVT.ORG/MONTHLYMEMBERMEETINGS to see agendas and register.



By Hand Farm's Journey From Idea to Sustainable Business

By Mia Smith, NOFA-VT Farmer Business Advisor



In the crook of a hollow in Newfane, VT, tucked along a road that winds beside the Smith Brook, sits By Hand Farm. At first, the brook feels incidental, but when you look out over Laura Xiao's flower fields, it's hard to tell where the farm ends, and the lush surrounding ecosystem begins.

Laura is the owner and sole farmer at By Hand Farm, a 1/4 acre flower farm operating on leased land. Laura's path to flower farming was circuitous: She has a deep love of cooking and worked as part of a trail crew, which helped reveal her passion for outdoor, physical work. "I started farming," Laura said, "when I realized working with food is fulfilling...and brings in values around sustainability." She centers no-till and organic practices in her production, while also considering the broader impacts of her work. Laura shares that her farm's name honors "all the farmers and landworkers of the world, past and present." By Hand Farm produces gorgeous blooms for a small CSA, her local farmers market, and weddings. Laura focuses primarily on annuals but is adding perennials that grow quickly and tolerate future transplanting.

In addition to running By Hand Farm, Laura works part-time growing vegetables at nearby Milkweed Farm in Westminster. During a visit to Milkweed Farm this past

summer, co-owner Jonah Mossberg spoke of Laura with obvious reverence, highlighting her can-do nature and deep knowledge of the art and science of farming. This is evident at her home farm. As she shows visitors around the farm, Laura gestures to the careful planning and thoughtful cultivation she has implemented, insisting she's just beginning to figure it all out—humbled by and dedicated to the lifelong learning that farming demands.

On a visit to Laura's farm during a particularly bleak day last March, when there wasn't a flower in sight to distract us, Laura was focused on the numbers side of her business. She was analyzing the cost of production for her different market channels—CSA, farmers market, and wedding flower enterprises—so that she could price her products accurately, and, ultimately, pay herself a salary. This is one of the goals that led Laura to enroll in NOFA-VT's Journey Farmer Program, a year-long learning cohort for Vermont farmers and land stewards in the first years of running a farm. The program is shaped by participants' interests and goals, helping them develop farming skills while learning together in a community of peers and mentors.

For Laura, the program provided tools and structure to identify her production costs and connect with other farmers. "I wanted to meet other people in the same stage of business," she said, noting that many of the farms in her community are vegetable growers with 5-10 years of experience. In the Journey Farmer program, Laura shared that, "everyone was on the same page about being hungry for information, so people were not shy about asking questions, and that was helpful to be around." One surprising takeaway for Laura was the opportunities she had to learn from different types of growers: a livestock farmer shared strategies for harvesting and selling all their product at once, which Laura realized mirrored her approach to dried flowers. She now separates her fresh and dried flower enterprises, recognizing each has its own value and timing. The cross-farm collaboration prioritized in the Journey Farmer program fosters dynamic, emergent learning, where participants blend tried-and-true methods with creative solutions developed through shared challenges.

In addition to workshops led by farmer presenters on topics like financial planning, climate risk assessment, and labor management, each Journey Farmer participant is paired with a mentor for one-on-one guidance. This year, Laura worked with Bo Dennis from Dandy Ram Farm in Monroe, ME. Bo, who in addition to farming runs the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association's (MOFGA's) beginning farmer programs, is no stranger to sharing his knowledge. Like Laura, Bo got his start farming vegetables and has since transitioned to flower production for weddings. "Working with him has been awesome because I feel like he has kind of a similar vegetable-turned-flower farmer story," Laura

shared. Bo helped her think strategically about markets, realizing that weddings opened up a whole new opportunity, and encouraged her to pivot away from a local farmers market that wasn't aligning with her production and business goals. "He's awesome, and has been really generous about sharing."

Laura's biggest takeaway from her participation in the Journey Farmer Program was the structure it provided. She likened her farm business to a body: "Your core is the planning and financial side, your head is what the public sees—the sales and marketing side, and your limbs are the production." The program's sessions mirrored this framework, and she "really appreciated the mindset shift." Laura added that the program "centers you as a person and the income you need to live in the world. Figuring that out first, and then working backward to

determine how the farm income fits into that bigger picture wasn't something I had really thought about before."

Few of us enter farming careers asking ourselves, "How will I pay for my mortgage, snow tires, children of the future—let alone my retirement?" But with increasing extreme weather, shifting market trends, and a desire for work-life balance, many farmers are reflecting on how to align their businesses with their values in a corporate-dominated food system that doesn't prioritize those values. The Journey Farmer Program strives to offer the holistic, resilient farm business planning farmers need to explore these questions. Check out more details on our website at nofavt.org/journeyfarmer or reach out to Farmer Services Program Facilitator, Megan Browning, at megan@nofavt.org or 802-419-0073. ♦



Top: Laura Xiao at By Hand Farm.

Right: Workshop attendees show off their bouquets after attending Laura's Small-Scale Cut Flower Production & Floral Design Basics workshop.





What We're Focusing On for the 2026 State Legislative Session

By Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT Policy & Organizing Director

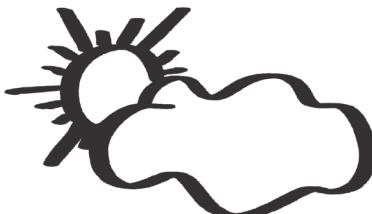
On January 6, 2026, the Vermont Legislature convenes for the second year of the 2025-2026 legislative biennium. NOFA-VT staff and members will be there every step of the way, organizing and advocating for policies that meet the needs of our communities. Whether you're writing to your representatives every week or aren't totally sure who they are, there are ways for you to make an impact. Together, we can take actions toward change that keep Vermonters fed and farmers on the land. Read on for what's coming up and how you can get involved.

Farm Security Fund (S.60)

We all know that farming is a complex business, but as climate impacts intensify and extreme weather becomes the norm, the challenges are growing. Our farmers need support to be able to focus on learning, adapting, and accessing the resources necessary to recover when disaster strikes. Last legislative session, we made incredible progress together by introducing and advocating for the passage of the Farm Security Fund, S.60, which is continuing to make its way through the legislature. The Farm Security Fund will provide farmers with immediate financial assistance to ensure they can recover from the impacts of extreme weather and climate disasters.

Thanks to the actions of so many of you, the bill gained strong support in the first year of the biennium, passing unanimously out of the Senate last March. The House Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry Committee took it up, expanded eligibility to include certain forestry operations, and updated the name to the "Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund" to reflect its broader working lands focus. It passed unanimously out of that House Committee and has now advanced to the House Appropriations Committee, where we're hopeful it will be taken up and passed out early in the coming session.

After it passes out of House Appropriations, the bill will head to the full House floor for a vote, then return to the Senate to review and reconcile the House changes. Once both chambers approve a compromise version of the bill, it will finally go to the Governor for his signature. There will be opportunities to take action at every step and



we know it will take all of us to ensure this bill is passed, funded, and implemented. Stay tuned for regular updates!

Alongside the bill, we are requesting \$20 million in one-time funding to support the implementation of the Farm Security Fund starting in July 2026. This amount is based on an average of farmers' documented losses due to extreme weather events over the past three years.

How you can help right now: Call or write your House representative and urge them to support the Farm & Forestry Operations Security Special Fund (S.60) and appropriate \$20 million for FY27. Share a few sentences about why this matters to you personally.

If you're not sure who your House representative is, you can look them up at legislature.vermont.gov/people.

Local Food Security

Food security can and should be achieved for everyone who lives in Vermont. The State of Vermont can make policy choices that will ensure food security for everyone who lives here. We also know that Vermont's food security depends on a viable and climate-resilient agricultural sector. Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share, NOFA-VT's core food security programs, help ensure that everyone, regardless of income, can purchase healthy, fresh, local food, and that Vermont farmers receive a reliable, fair price for their goods.



Over the past two fiscal years, the State of Vermont has provided one-time funding of \$300,000 (FY25) and \$450,000 (FY26) for these programs. This investment is thanks to so many of YOU raising your voices with your legislators – thank you! This session, we'll return to the statehouse to advocate for our full request of \$500,000 in ongoing funding for these critical programs in FY27. Here's what this funding will support:

- Crop Cash doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits for fruits and vegetables purchased at Vermont farmers markets. The program is partially federally funded, but a local match is also required. State funds allow us to continue to meet increased demand while maximizing federal funding.
- Crop Cash Plus expands the list of Crop Cash-eligible items to include meat, dairy, eggs, bread, and more, extending the program's impact to all agricultural vendors. State funding is necessary to continue this critical program so that hundreds more farmers can benefit, and thousands of low-income Vermonters can purchase more of the local, fresh food they need to increase their food security.
- The Farm Share Program has subsidized CSA shares for limited-income Vermonters for over 30 years. The Farm Share Program pays for 25-75% of the CSA cost. State funding will allow us to support up to 700 households in purchasing a consistent supply of locally grown food, while ensuring farmers receive a fair and consistent wage to feed their neighbors.

Investments in these programs reflect Vermonters' commitment to keeping each other fed and supporting our farmers. Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share are critical baseline programs that we must continue. The State of Vermont has demonstrated leadership by investing in vital food security programs that continue to be pivotal in meeting the needs of our community members.

How you can help right now: Call or write your House representatives and Senators to ask them to support an appropriation of \$500,000 in FY27 for Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share. Share a few sentences about why this matters to you personally.

Food Security Roadmap

We are on the road to food security in Vermont! NOFA-VT is proud to be a partner in the Food Security Coalition, a coalition of organizations working to implement the Food Security Roadmap to 2035. This collective effort is working to ensure that everyone in our state has access to the food they need and want. In 2026, we are advancing a slate of policies alongside our partners that will keep us moving forward on the road to food security. These include the Farm Security Fund and Local Food Security requests already described, along with support for the Land Access & Opportunity Board's operations and programming, funding and operational support for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters program at the Vermont Foodbank, increased funding for the Working Lands Enterprise Fund, support for continued State administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and more.

If you want to get involved in improving food security in your community, consider joining your regional Food Security Network,



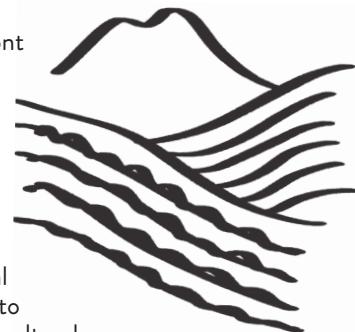
organized by our friends at Hunger Free Vermont. Learn more at hungerfreevt.org/food-security-networks.

Further, if you represent a business or organization that would like to join these efforts to ensure food security for everyone in Vermont, the Coalition is actively recruiting Allies. Allies are organizations that publicly support the Roadmap goals, objectives, and/or strategies. Becoming an Ally will grow our collective power and provide your organization with tools to share information and participate in Roadmap issues related to your organization's work. You can learn more about the Coalition and becoming an Ally by reaching out to helen@nofavt.org.

Food security is a policy choice, and we can achieve it. Join us as we follow the roadmap toward food access, farm viability, and climate resilience.

Right to Grow Food

In May 2025, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that farming is not exempt from all municipal regulation. In contrast to prior interpretation, the court determined that the "ag exemption" in 24 V.S.A. § 4413(d)(1)(A), the Municipal Zoning Statute, applies only to aspects of the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) aimed at reducing agricultural water pollution. The court concluded that municipalities may regulate all aspects of farming, beyond those related to water quality, thereby setting a new precedent in stark contrast to the previous, longstanding statewide understanding that farming is exempt from municipal zoning regulations.



This decision could have far-reaching effects, changing how and by whom farming and food production are regulated in Vermont. Vermont is home to over 6,500 farms (USDA 2022 census data), most of which are community-scale, and fewer than 9% are dairy farms. Granting municipal authority over farming could introduce additional burdens to farms from new permitting requirements to regulatory hurdles and operational costs—especially for small-scale farmers growing food near village centers or on limited land, threatening both farm viability and local food access.

The ability to grow food, including on small parcels, is essential to our collective food security. If this issue impacts you directly or you want to learn more, reach out to our Policy & Organizing Director, Maddie Kempner, at maddie@nofavt.org or 802-419-0072.

Health Care

We are deeply concerned about the impact of the expiration of enhanced premium ACA tax credits on thousands of Vermonters—especially farmers. Access to affordable health care is critical to farmers' success and well-being. As self-employed workers, we



know that farmers are more likely to rely on the ACA marketplace (known here in Vermont as Vermont Health Connect) for their health insurance than the general population. According to national statistics, 27% of farmers and ranchers rely on the marketplace for healthcare, compared with 8% of the general public. Many farmers and farmworkers in our community also rely on Medicaid or Medicare, and upcoming changes and cuts to those programs could have serious effects, too.

If you are impacted by these changes, please consider sharing your story with us. We are beginning to strategize about the best ways to organize on short and long-term health care solutions, and if you're interested in organizing with us on this, please get in touch with our Policy & Organizing Director, Maddie Kempner, at maddie@nofavt.org or 802-419-0072. ☺

Bring Your Vision and Values to a NOFA-VT State House Day!

Come to the State House and add your voice to the movement for farm and food justice. Together, we'll advocate for NOFA-VT's key policy priorities, including passing and fully funding the Farm Security Fund and securing robust support for Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share.

State House Days run from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. We start with a short, accessible training: an overview of the bills we're working on, where they stand in the legislature, and time to practice sharing our own stories. Then we'll help you connect with your legislators—often over lunch—and, when possible, sit in on relevant committee meetings to observe discussion and support those providing testimony.



No prior experience with policy, advocacy, or “lobbying” is needed. We'll prepare you, accompany you, and support you at every step. Reimbursement is available for lunch, mileage, and childcare. You're welcome to join us for whatever portion of the day you can. If you're interested in offering committee testimony, just let us know in the form below, and we'll follow up to plan the day together—no surprises.

We have seven NOFA-VT State House Days scheduled: January 15, January 28, February 10, February 19, March 12, March 17, and April 9. Sign up, and stay tuned for additions or changes.

Our collective voice—and your voice—is crucial. Thank you for being part of a movement that's making real, lasting change for Vermont farmers and all of us who depend on them!

**SIGN UP TO JOIN
AN ADVOCACY DAY!**





Does the Organic Certification Process Need an Update?

Nicole Dehne, Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) Certification Director

One of the founding principles of organic farming is continuous improvement. Traditionally, this principle has referred to on-farm practices—farmers striving for better ecological outcomes, healthier animals, improved soil health, and systems more resilient to extreme weather. Increasingly, however, this same idea is being applied to the organic certification process itself. Farmers, inspectors, and certifiers are now asking: How can we improve the way we certify organic farms and facilities? What parts of the process work well, and what parts need to change?

Over the past five years, a series of new organic regulations—while grounded in good intentions—have significantly increased the administrative and compliance burden for organic producers. These updates were meant to address fraud and close long-standing loopholes in the rules, which were largely exploited by large corporately owned organic businesses. For example, the Origin of Livestock (OOL) rule, implemented in 2022, clarified that it was against the organic regulations to raise youngstock conventionally and then “transition” them into organic production. This was a positive step that created a more level playing field by requiring all certifiers to hold all farms, large and small, accountable to the standard of raising young animals organically from the start. However, the impact is that the new rule also requires certifiers to collect and verify additional information, and adds time to inspections as livestock movements and purchases require more careful review.

In 2024, the National Organic Program (NOP) also implemented Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE), the most sweeping rule change since its founding. Designed to deter fraud, SOE expanded the scope of who must be certified, increased recordkeeping requirements, and introduced new fraud-prevention expectations for all operations. These changes directly support organic integrity, but they also resulted in more complex applications and longer, more detailed onsite inspections. As a result, many producers now must navigate growing layers of paperwork, new verification steps, and shifting interpretations—changes that

do not always translate into meaningful improvements on the ground given Vermont producers’ long record of integrity and excellence.

This tension creates an important moment for reflection. If continuous improvement is truly a core principle of organic agriculture, then it must apply not only to farming practices but also to the certification process. Today, certifiers are beginning to ask critical questions: How can we strengthen organic integrity while reducing unnecessary burden? How can the system become clearer, more accessible, more efficient, and more supportive of farmers—without compromising the values at the heart of organic agriculture?

The path forward is not yet clear. There is broad agreement that unnecessary burden should be reduced, but exactly how to do that is still being explored. For instance, at a NOP certifier training in early 2025, NOP staff offered several ideas for easing workload while maintaining integrity. One example was reconsidering whether inspectors truly need to visit every field on a farm during an annual inspection, or whether inspecting a representative percentage would be sufficient. Others are raising deeper questions: Should a yearly onsite inspection be required for every operation? Could long-standing certified farms—those with 25 years of compliant history, for example—move to an every-other-year inspection cycle? And could inspections for clearly “low-risk” operations be streamlined without compromising organic integrity?

The industry has begun using terms like “risk-based certification” and “scale-appropriate certification” to describe these new ideas. Interest is strong—recently, the National Organic Coalition hosted a webinar attended by more than 150 consumers, farmers, inspectors, and certifiers to discuss strategies for reducing unnecessary certification burden. But these concepts are not without controversy. Concern for some stems from the belief that the strength of the organic label has always depended on consistency and transparency. If some operations are verified and inspected differently from others, how will that affect

enforcement? Could it create a perception of unfairness or uneven oversight? Others worry that reducing paperwork or moving away from annual onsite inspections could make it harder for certifiers to detect fraud or catch small problems before they escalate.

Both sides make valid points. At Vermont Organic Farmers, we are excited about this concept and want to find ways to reduce the certification burden while maintaining organic integrity. We believe the path forward must keep those most impacted by the changes—Vermont’s farmers and small business owners—at the center of the conversation. In our experience, farmers want a certification process that maintains high integrity while eliminating requests that feel less meaningful or trivial.

As the organic community advances these conversations, it remains clear that continuous improvement applies not only to farming practices but also to the implementation of the certification process itself. Reducing certification burden should not weaken the system, but rather make it more efficient and supportive of the farms and businesses we certify. The challenge ahead is ensuring the consumer continues to value and trust the label, while ensuring the process works for farmers. The conversation is just beginning, but the commitment to continuous improvement offers us a path forward to create a process that works better for everyone. ◇





Facing Climate Change Together in the Northeast Kingdom

By Kevin Haggerty, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

As Vermont faces the escalating impacts of climate change, farmers and the broader agricultural community are confronting a growing list of challenges, including drought, excessive precipitation, flooding, and other extreme weather events. In the past two consecutive summers of flooding, producers across the state suffered over \$80 million in documented losses, along with long-lasting damage to soils and pastures. These direct impacts ripple throughout Vermont's food system, disrupting supply chains, damaging critical municipal infrastructure, threatening food security, and straining community mental health. They also deeply impact the working landscapes that sustain rural livelihoods. Building a vibrant, just, and climate-resilient food system will require broad, systems-oriented adaptation planning and investments that not only move food from farm to table, but also honor the interconnected and diverse nature of Vermont's foodways.

In the late spring of 2024, NOFA-VT partnered with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's Food Systems team to pilot a multi-phase, community-scaled food system resilience planning process in Vermont. Originally developed between 2020 and 2022 to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters on local and regional food systems, the program was re-designed to bring together diverse stakeholders in a community-led process to reimagine community food systems in the face of climate-related disasters. The process has two interconnected phases: the first focuses on research and coalition-building, bringing together communities to identify shared goals, assess strengths and vulnerabilities, and develop a prioritized action plan. The second phase translates these priorities into action, guiding communities to implement projects to strengthen food system resilience through collective, locally driven efforts.

This unique planning process complements NOFA-VT's Organic Practices Program (OPP) team's ongoing farm-focused adaptation planning efforts, and the OPP team was excited to collaborate as a community partner with Iowa State's team to pilot the program for the first time in the Northeast.

Rooting the Project in the Northeast Kingdom

To pilot this place-based initiative, NOFA-VT and the Iowa State team wanted to find an agricultural community where the process and resulting project could have a significant impact and where there were already strong local organizations that could augment and sustain the collaboration beyond our pilot process. Considering the impacts of recent flooding, the region's significant agricultural heritage, and deep

cultural connection to grassroots organizing, the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) was an ideal fit. In the late summer of 2024, the OPP team began collaborating with community partners across the NEK's three counties to bring this project to life.



NEK Farmer Resilience Cohort members brainstorm visions of community resilience.

Phase 1: Food System Analysis and Action Planning

Informed by conversations with local farmers, NEK Conservation Districts, the Center for an Agricultural Economy, Salvation Farms, Green Mountain Farm-to-School, and Farm to Plate, NOFA-VT and Iowa State's team launched the first phase of community planning in December 2024. Through two rounds of facilitated meetings, the team worked with farmers, food businesses, nonprofits, and state and local officials to map the local food system, assess strengths and vulnerabilities to climate-related disturbances, and develop regional priority projects that would enhance long-term food system resilience.

In the first round of meetings across Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties, participants engaged in two activities. The first



Breadseed

was a tabletop scenario simulating stakeholder responses to natural disasters, helping develop a regional understanding of the current level of preparedness and response to system shocks. This was followed by focus group discussions of recovery efforts and mitigation strategies. The meeting results were analyzed to understand how the agricultural community's socioeconomic characteristics and existing structural elements of the local food system (farms, markets, distribution channels, etc.) influence the region's capacity to withstand disruptions while maintaining community food security. Based on this analysis, Iowa State developed a list of potential priority projects that would enhance the region's capacity. On the list of potential projects were aggregation systems, local food awareness campaigns, emergency preparedness planning, and policy initiatives.

In the second round of meetings, priority projects were discussed with the community and participants went through a guided prioritization process. Through multiple rounds of discussion and voting, attendees identified three key initiatives to advance during the second phase of the project: increasing farm financial resilience, strengthening community connectivity, and supporting skill-building for NEK farmers.

Phase 2: NEK Farmer Resilience Cohort

As the project transitioned from winter planning into implementation, the three community priorities—increasing farm financial resilience, strengthening community



farm in Craftsbury, the site of one of the cohort's gatherings this summer.

connectivity, and supporting farmers through skill development—began to shape the Northeast Kingdom's resilience project. To address all three goals, the OPP team, Iowa State, and participating farmers developed a summer farmer-to-farmer learning cohort, providing NEK farms with the space to explore multiple dimensions of community resilience.

To support this new NEK Farmer Resilience Cohort, NOFA-VT staff drew on best practices developed through the Jack Lazor Memorial Soil Stewards and Farmer Agroforestry Cohorts, while grounding the program in agroecological, action-oriented principles. The three-part series brought farmers together to build collective power, explore holistic resilience—financial, social, and ecological—and prepare the group to carry forward a community initiative beyond the formal cohort program.

Twenty-six farms from across the Northeast Kingdom participated in the cohort, including vegetable growers, livestock producers, sugar makers, new farmers, and long-standing pillars of the agricultural community in a truly inspirational collaborative learning environment. When it launched in August 2025 at Sweet Rowen Farmstead in West Glover, participants gathered in a circle to share openly about financial challenges facing the farming community and their visions for the region's agricultural future. Through small group discussions, participants explored strategies for embedding resilience into their business plans, markets, and supply chains. As the sun set over the farm's rolling pastures, the conversations turned to the role that communities and state institutions must play in helping small farms achieve financial security and a dignified quality of life for farmers and their employees.

The second and third gatherings carried the same energy. At Breadseed Farm in Craftsbury, cohort members talked late into the evening about the vital role farms and food businesses play in rural communities. They reflected on the loss of third spaces like granges, the isolation felt by many across the NEK, and the need to revitalize rural gathering spaces, strengthen collective organizing, and sustain dialogue around community resilience. At the group's third gathering at Joe's Brook Farm in Barnet, the cohort focused on building resilience into production systems, exploring how to protect, adapt, and transform farms in the face of our changing climate. Conversations emphasized that navigating disasters has always been a part of farming, yet participants openly addressed the mental and emotional toll of these more frequent disasters and how addressing these impacts is essential to sustaining Vermont's resilient agricultural landscape.

The final meeting wrapped up with a discussion on sustaining the group's momentum. Cohort members outlined both short- and long-term objectives to address key social and economic gaps in the NEK food system and agreed to continue meeting together to define the structure, goals, and governance of an ongoing NEK farmer resilience group.

Looking Ahead to Future Community Resilience Planning in Vermont

As the pilot of Iowa State's Resilient Food Systems planning program wraps up in the Northeast Kingdom, NOFA-VT is excited to continue supporting community-scale efforts to strengthen Vermont's food system resilience. Looking ahead to the next growing season, the OPP team will continue to support the NEK farmer cohort as they self-organize and advance collective actions. Additionally, building on this cohort's success, NOFA-VT plans to replicate the approach in other regions, perhaps creating a toolkit for others around Vermont and beyond to use with the goal of fostering viable, ecologically sound, socially just agricultural systems for all. ♦



Wrap-Around Support on the Path to Farm Viability

By Reid Miller, NOFA-VT Farmer Business Development Program Director



Agriculture is a vital economic and community cornerstone in Vermont, yet many of the state's farmers are facing increasing vulnerability. After a year of below-average precipitation in 2022, followed by extremely wet seasons and widespread flooding in 2023 and 2024, this year's statewide drought delivered another devastating blow. For more than 15 years, our Farmer Services team has approached business development through a systems lens, but as climate-related challenges have intensified, it has become clear that we must deepen and expand our services to better support the environmental resilience of Vermont farms.

In the fall of 2023, NOFA-VT launched our Organic Practices Program to bring more capacity to our work to support farmers in implementing organic practices and increasing their climate resilience. This work complements the offerings of our

“The tools we have learned from this process enable us to better address pest and disease pressures, and to better manage nutrient delivery in our garden. These are critical skills for a viable market garden, and they are skills that we increasingly need as we see weather, pest, and disease patterns shift and destabilize. We may not be able to predict much in the next five years, but we feel better equipped to respond to whatever occurs.”

-Jeremy Tonachel-Read of Birdsong Farm in Stockbridge

Farm Business Development Program and similarly lives under our broader Farmer Services umbrella. These two complementary programs allow NOFA-VT to provide more holistic wrap-around support for farmers, including helping them assess their current climate risks and identify adaptation strategies to increase their resilience. We call this approach “wrap-around” because staff from both programs bring deep expertise across all aspects of the farm system, allowing us to strategize holistically about how different decisions affect both the economic and environmental outcomes of a farm.

For climate adaptation planning, staff from each program typically visit a farm together. We center our approach on a farmer’s goals for their business and quality of life, focusing on the whole farm system—including environmental, market, distribution, and supply chain risks. The resulting climate adaptation plan is co-created with the farmer(s) and outlines actionable steps to advance farmer’s goals and increase their overall resilience. This plan can be further supported with in-depth technical assistance focused on individual practices as well as financial analysis to help prioritize actions or develop a strategy for accessing the capital needed to implement key projects and practices outlined in the plan.

Over the past eight months, we have worked with more than 40 farms to develop climate adaptation plans and implement organic practices, while fully integrating a business development lens into the planning process. Unsurprisingly, after four seasons marked by dramatic swings in water availability, water management emerged as the most common priority across participating farms.

While the needs varied, projects ranged from installing gravel drainage and swales to adding water storage tanks, completing earthwork to re-direct water into ponds, upgrading irrigation systems, and installing water meters to detect underground leaks.

The second most common project focus area was minimizing tillage and building soil health. Farmers identified a range of investments—broadforks, tarps, cover crops, pasture

“I now have more physical resources (e.g., irrigation equipment) to better care for my crops, as well as greater planning resources that will help me anticipate climate challenges rather than just react to them. I really appreciate the planning spreadsheet to identify risk factors for my farm business. It was great to have someone else’s eyes on my farm from an outsider perspective, and now I feel like I have the capacity to plan for risk factors.”

-Julia Etter of Nomad Farm in Brattleboro

reseeding, and compost—as key strategies for strengthening their soils and reducing climate-related risk. As they reviewed the results of their climate assessments, farmers weighed implementation options by considering the urgency of need, upfront costs, and the expected rate and longevity of the return on those investments. Throughout this process, our team served as strategic thought partners at both the systems level and on the finer details, analyzing risk and adaptation options through business and environmental lenses, and providing wrap-around support as farmers increased their resilience on their path to long-term farm viability. ♦

Start looking forward to the 44th annual

NOFA-VT winter Conference

FEBRUARY 14 & 15, 2026 | COLCHESTER, VERMONT

As always, the conference includes a full slate of workshops, affinity group roundtables, activities, and more. Early-bird registration is open, and you're invited to get your ticket at a discount through January 10. (And don't forget your additional member discount! Find the code in your email, or reach out to katie@nofavt.org if you need it resent). Full details of the conference agenda will be available on January 11 when normal registration opens. In the meantime, enjoy a sneak peek into a few conference details we're particularly excited about this year.



Spend the Morning With Ira Wallace

The conference will kick off on Saturday with a keynote conversation with the seed saver extraordinaire herself: Ira Wallace. Ira is a powerful leader, gardener, teacher, and author, known for her stewardship and safeguarding of heirloom seeds and her contributions to the Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, a cooperatively-owned seed company.

It's an honor to welcome Ira to the conference, and we look forward to learning from her lifetime of experience.

Fun for the Next Generation

We're not leaving all the fun to the adults! The Children's Conference is back this year for kids ages 5-12 years old. On Saturday, February 14, kids can expect a day full of nature and farm-related games and activities. We'll let our favorite kid review from 2024 sum up the experience: "It was the best day of my life!"

(Parents and caregivers are not required to attend the Winter Conference—you're welcome to drop the kids off for an engaging day of learning and fun!)

In Loving Memory

We've lost several members of the organic farming community this past year and in remembrance, there will be a space to honor and commemorate all those who have recently passed. **We invite you to bring a photograph or tangible memory of someone you'd like to commemorate to add to the display or use the materials available to contribute.**

New Location

We're excited to bring the NOFA-VT Winter Conference to Saint Michael's College in Colchester this year! NOFA-VT makes a significant financial investment in the conference each year to provide high-quality programming, and the move to Saint Michael's College will provide cost savings, allowing us to retain the same ticket prices this year while continuing to deliver a deeply enriching conference.

More Details and
Registration Available at
NOFAVT.ORG/CONFERENCE



Planting Seeds for Future Generations

By Brooklynne Sundseth, NOFA-VT Membership & Development Manager

“A legacy gift locked in my commitment and gave my contribution some sense of permanence.”

-Peter Vandertuin, Brattleboro

When Peter first became aware of NOFA-VT in the mid-1970s, he didn't know it would begin a lifelong commitment to helping meet the needs of his community. “I joined around that time and attended some of the first summer conferences—I remember camping on a sports field at Johnson State,” he recalls.

Growing up in a strict Calvinist household, Peter described his early personal rebellion that, over time, led to a deep awareness of ethical and social justice. For him, this meant living his life in a way that supported people's foundational human needs. A designer and builder by trade, Peter built a career providing sustainable, affordable housing. Additionally, he said, “Supporting NOFA-VT fulfilled my desire to help provide healthy and ethical food.” In this way, his deeply-held values became the guiding lights for his life.

A few years ago, Peter reached out to learn more about making a modest legacy gift to NOFA-VT, explaining that his personal will reflects his values and belief in supporting nonprofits that work for social change and justice. Through his legacy gift, Peter hopes to strengthen NOFA-VT's work well into the future. He views his legacy gift as a means of attracting and educating future generations to the work of NOFA-VT, adding that he trusts NOFA-VT to make “the wisest possible use of the funds.”

Peter also hopes to encourage others to consider making a legacy gift to a mission they care deeply about, remarking that people often automatically leave “most or all of their assets to their children without considering whether the need is really there.” He understands it is a highly personal decision, but reiterated, “the significant value a legacy gift could give to organizations such as NOFA-VT.”

For Peter, leaving a legacy gift was a simple but meaningful process. “I wasn't familiar with the term 'legacy,' but that's exactly what I wanted—to put my money where my beliefs are,” he says. “A legacy gift locked in my commitment and gave my contribution some sense of permanence. I sincerely hope others will join me in making legacy gifts to NOFA-VT.”

Interested in joining Peter in building a lasting, sustainable food system?

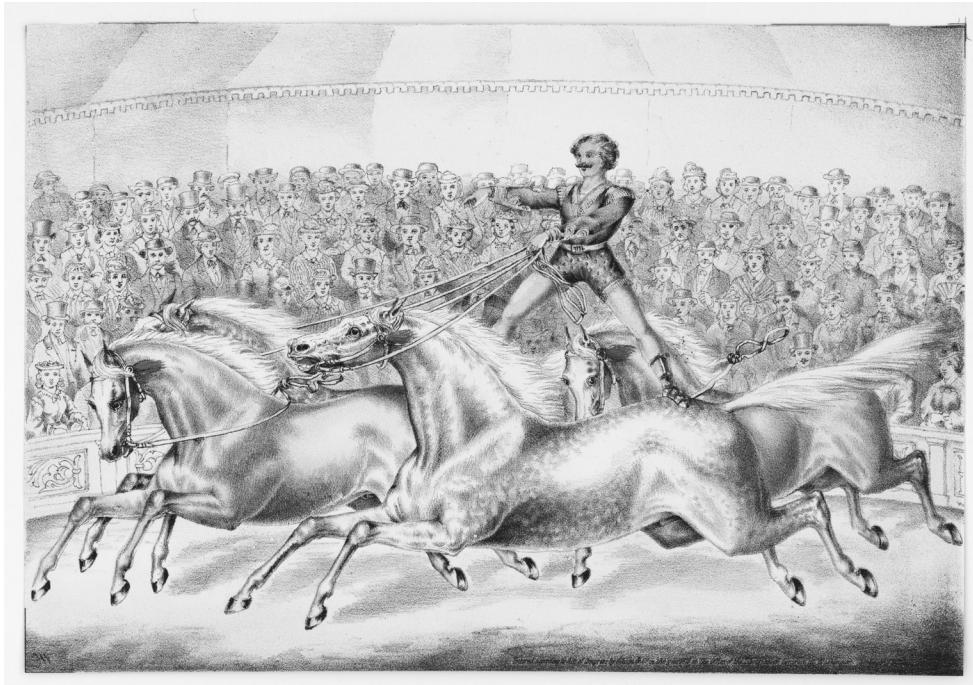
To learn more about making a legacy gift to NOFA-VT, please reach out to Erin Buckwalter, Deputy Director of Development and Engagement at erin@nofavt.org or 802-419-0043. ♦



Riding Three Horses to Agrarian Justice

By Elizabeth Henderson, member of the NOFA Interstate Council

Elizabeth's essay *Riding Three Horses to Agrarian Justice* distills a keynote talk she delivered in 2019 at the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, emphasizing that farmers must balance building their farms and networks with challenging the dominant agricultural system, while joyfully shaping a vision for the future.



At NOFA summer conferences in the past, we held a fair that culminated in a horseback riding demonstration. Dale Perkins rode bareback with his feet first on one, then two, and finally bridging three horses as they leapt through a flaming hoop.

This is a stirring metaphor for the work we need to do!

Horse # 1 – Fighting back: reacting to the endless flood of challenges and threats.

We must protest against the many toxic, endocrine-disrupting inputs that lock farms into corporate-dominated systems. Expose misleading food labels like “bioengineered” for GMOs. Resist the cynical, greedy billionaires who conspire to gut social services, harm the environment, and widen income inequality, putting democracy at risk.

This also includes protecting and incrementally improving programs that our sustainable agriculture movement has already won: increasing conservation payments to our farms, advancing organic research, maintaining cost-share programs for organic

certification, and safeguarding the integrity of the organic label.

Horse # 2—Building: our farms, gardens, co-ops, local food networks, and the alternative solidarity economy—our liberated territory where we practice food sovereignty.

For more than 50 years, through organizations like the NOFAs and the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) across the Northeast, we have made tremendous progress learning to grow food without harming the planet while nurturing our communities. We helped create the organic label, the gold standard that has helped build a market that supports our farms and sustains our vision of resilient, community-based agriculture.

I have spent most of my life and energy helping build this alternative framework through organic farming and offering food to my community through a CSA model. The Principle of Fairness from the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has been

a guiding star: “Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities. Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice, and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings.”

Recognizing that the National Organic Program (NOP) never fully encompassed these values, I worked alongside the Farmworker Support Committee (CATA), Rural Advancement Foundation International, and Florida Organic Growers to create the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP), developing Food Justice Certified as an add-on to the organic label.

Farmers operate on two levels—as suppliers and as employers—and AJP addresses both. As suppliers, farmers need the guaranteed right to associate freely without fear of retaliation, especially as buyers consolidate and small farms risk predatory or unfair contracts. As employers, farmers, and other food businesses follow AJP labor standards, ensuring workers can raise concerns about wages, hours, and safety, and resolve disputes fairly. AJP has driven long-term transformation in our food system, fostering a cultural shift toward empowerment, transparency, justice, and fairness. The AJP Toolkit offers resources to help farms strengthen both pricing and labor policies.

As organic has become more mainstream, pressure has mounted on the National Organic Program (NOP) to accommodate corporate approaches to organic production. NOP auditors have failed to censure certifiers who allow mega-dairies to skirt pasture requirements or certify hydroponic soil-less operations as organic, despite the clear mandate in the organic regulations that organic growing be rooted in the soil, prioritizing the health of the soil. Organic farmers are resisting with new add-on labels such as the Real Organic Project, signifying food grown in soil and animals raised outside of a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) environment, and Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC), which encompasses the same set of values as the Real Organic Project label, while also adding provisions around humane and fair treatment of the humans and animals that are part of the farming ecosystem.

As farmers make choices for our farms, ancestral peasant wisdom counsels us to rely on our own resources and those of our closest

cooperators and supporters, harnessing our autonomy from the concentrated wealth and power of agribusiness. The sustainable agriculture and local foods movements have slowed the decline of farm numbers, but losses continue. Most farm products move through brokers, distributors, processors, and retailers—entities dedicated to profiting from the value others produce without any assurance that producers are compensated fairly.

Horse #3—Shaping our vision: our movement for agrarian justice is perhaps one of the most critical social movements of our day. Our capacity to turn sunlight into food may hold the key to transforming the whole system.

To realize our vision of a just, agroecological farming system worth sustaining, we need comprehensive domestic fair trade that balances the interests of farmers, farmworkers, and the land, while expanding access to local, high-quality organic foods for people of all income levels.

A draft program for system transformation begins with replacing subsidies that prop up constantly falling farm prices—subsidies that ultimately benefit large processors and import-exporter operations—with a system of price supports paired with supply management. This is the foundation of parity pricing, which functions much like a minimum wage for farms and has deep roots in policies developed during the Great Depression. Understanding that history is key to understanding how parity can stabilize markets, protect farmers, and rebuild a food system that values producers rather than exploiting them.

In practice, twenty-first-century parity would mean restoring price supports and supply management for the staple commodities such as grains and beans, along with reestablishing farmer-held grain reserves. These would function as buffer stocks in years of poor harvests or climate-driven disruptions, stabilizing both supply and farmgate prices.

For perishable crops like fruits and vegetables, parity would encourage farmer-, community- or worker-owned cooperatives to invest in value-added processing. When seasonal abundance threatens to depress prices, these co-ops could freeze, can, dry, or otherwise preserve produce for year-round use. By making diverse crop rotations economically viable, a modern parity system would also help return livestock to family farms, strengthening ecological balance and local food sovereignty.

Paying farmers a truly fair price may raise food prices slightly—perhaps by three to five percent—but if we also raise wages for food chain workers, who make up roughly 17% of the entire workforce, they will be able to absorb that increase. Farmworkers must be included in those wage gains; fair prices are only fair if they cover fair wages, and these two priorities must move in lock step.

To support this shift, we need the government to enforce existing anti-trust laws and rein in the consolidation that undermines farmers' livelihoods. We also need meaningful contract reform so that farmers selling to larger entities can secure fair, transparent contracts and exercise their protected right to freely associate without threat of retaliation—allowing them to form hubs or cooperatives that strengthen their bargaining position. Limits must also be placed on how much of the shopper dollar middlemen can capture.

At the same time, we must confront and dismantle the structural racism inherent in our food and farming systems: inequitable access to land, training, capital, and government programs; limited access to healthy, culturally appropriate food; and the persistent hierarchies that relegate people of color and women to the lowest-paid and least empowered roles.

A just food system also requires taxing billionaires and reallocating the billions now funneled into commodity payments and crop insurance subsidies for the largest farms, redirecting those funds toward the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and related nutrition programs so that low-income households can purchase the high-quality food our farms produce.

Farmwork itself must be transformed into a respected, well-compensated profession, with farmworkers granted the same rights and benefits afforded to other sectors: collective bargaining, overtime pay, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, and paid sick leave. Immigration reform must be grounded in human rights, offering a clear and attainable path to legal residency and citizenship without punitive measures, prohibitive fees, or bureaucratic barriers. Finally, if we hope to expand the number of community-based, family-scale organic farms, we must invest in farmer training, including pathways for farmworkers to become farmers with access to land and other resources.

Once we stand up for the changes that low-income food workers need, we will find ourselves aligned with some of the most energized social movements of our time and

in deep solidarity with the most forward-thinking voices in the labor movement. Without farmworkers and all food chain workers as allies, farmers will never have the collective power required to create the structural changes necessary for our farms to become the radiant centers of well-being we imagine. Our path forward depends on figuring out how to move together—farmers, workers, advocates, and communities—and bringing the entire food movement with us.

The escalating violence of the climate emergency only intensifies the urgency of this moment. Our agrarian movement is rich with ideas, experience, and time-tested practices, and we are increasingly recognizing that good process—how we work, not just what we do—is central to real transformation. Achieving agrarian justice requires a stakeholder-driven approach that respects differences, embraces diversity, honors our ancestors and the Indigenous roots of our practices, and creates space for both bold young innovators and voices from the margins. If we commit to this inclusive path, we can build a broad, powerful coalition rooted in the profound interconnectedness of soil health and social justice, and together bring to life a food system grounded in agroecology, health, justice, and equity. ♦

About the author:

Elizabeth Henderson started farming in 1979, and from the very beginning, she committed to organic practices. She learned from books like Farmers of 40 Centuries and hands-on visits with French peasant market farmers. In 1986, she was asked to share her perspective on U.S. agriculture—a daunting opportunity at a time when few women spoke publicly on sustainable farming. Nervous but focused, she discovered that intensity sharpened her message. Over the next two decades, she delivered keynote presentations at organic farming conferences nationwide.

*As one of the first organic CSA farmers, Elizabeth spent over 30 years farming in Wayne County, NY. Today, she mentors new farmers, gardens, and works to influence agricultural policy with NOFA and its partners. She is a member of the NOFA Interstate Council, the organization that provides coordination to all seven Northeast Organic Farming Association state chapters. She co-authored *Sharing the Harvest* (Chelsea Green, 2007), serves on the Board of the Agricultural Justice Project, and is Honorary President of URGENCI, the international CSA and solidarity economies network. Her decades of experience continue to inspire and guide the next generation of farmers.*



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 the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's 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:



von Trapp Farmstead, Waitsfield - August, 2025

While growing up on the von Trapp Farmstead, his family's farm, Sebastian von Trapp witnessed firsthand the challenges small farms face in selling fluid milk. Informed by this experience, when Sebastian and his partner Molly Semie returned to the farm in 2007, they began transitioning the farm away from fluid milk sales and toward artisan cheese production. Eighteen years later, von Trapp Farmstead milks 45-50 cows and uses their certified organic milk to produce four styles of artisanal cheese and two flavors of farm-fresh yogurt, all sold throughout New England. Sebastian and Molly are committed to the ecological value of grass-based farming systems, believing that producing high-quality cheese and yogurt is just as important as storing carbon, building soil health, and raising healthy, happy animals.

Over the years, von Trapp Farmstead has partnered with neighboring food businesses to age and distribute select cheeses. This year, they began bringing this work back to the farm to strengthen their model, but quickly reached the limits of their aging and storage space. To address this, von Trapp Farmstead was awarded \$12,000 to expand their walk-in cooler, increasing their ability to age cheeses on-site, enhance quality, and grow their business sustainably.



Janine Farm, Colchester - September, 2025

Growing up in Rwanda, Janine Ndagijimana found joy in gardening with her parents and growing food for her family. When Janine and her family came to the United States in 2007, she found herself craving the foods of the African diaspora. Motivated to increase her community's access to these vegetables, Janine became involved with New Farms for New Americans, growing African eggplant and other specialty crops. Since then, Janine Farm has grown dramatically, now cultivating eight acres of African eggplant and two acres of peppers, maize, pumpkins, amaranth, and beans. She sells to individuals, restaurants, and the Vermont Foodbank. She also harvests and sells seed from her eggplant varieties to seed companies that preserve and distribute culturally relevant crops. Through these efforts, Janine Farm has become a hub for food security, ecological resilience, and connection for New Americans. Janine Farm was awarded \$12,000 to purchase a Perfecta cultivator and an I&J cultivator. Together, these implements will boost efficiency, enhance soil health, and reduce weeds. The efficiencies she gains will let Janine grow her business, reach new markets, and spend more time with her family.



Blackbird Organics, Plainfield - October, 2025

Kagen Dewey and Elise Magnant met while working at Foote Brook Farm in Johnson, where they were inspired by the intersection of environmental stewardship, ecology, and community that characterizes small-scale agriculture. Motivated by this experience, they started Blackbird Organics in Plainfield in 2018. Now in its seventh season, Blackbird Organics grows six acres of diversified vegetables on 20 acres of prime farmland. They sell to two local cooperatives, operate a CSA, and vend at the Capital City Farmers Market in Montpelier. Kagen and Elise are energized by the community they have built around their farm, their vision for a sustainable world, and stewarding a vibrant landscape.

Blackbird Organics was awarded \$12,000 to improve their wash-pack area and expand it to a properly-sized facility to support the farm's long-term growth. They will use the funds to stabilize the barn's foundation, extend the concrete slab, and install plumbing. This project will double the usable wash-pack area, improving post-harvest efficiency as production grows to meet their business goals and customer demand. ☺

Applications are available to any small or medium-sized farm in Vermont. The next round of applications is due Tuesday, January 20. To learn more, visit VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG.

Thank You for Supporting Organic Agriculture and a Strong Food System!

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

Abigail Vranjes, Saint Albans, VT
Adam Terko, Jericho, VT
Aidan Saturley, White River Jct, VT
Alain LeBlanc, Lowell, VT
Anna Beach, Barre, VT
Anna Isaacson, Hancock, VT
Anna Smith, Lincoln, VT
Apple Tree Vermont, Northfield, VT
Bonnie & Neil Kennedy, Chelsea, VT
Brandon Ostrander & Hannah Brendle, Williston, VT
Bryton Moeller, Richmond, VT
Cameron O'Connor, Montpelier, VT
Can Do Sheep Services, Randolph Center, VT
Carole Hakstian, Burlington, VT
Catie Calabrese, Richmond, VT
Chris Murphy, Essex Junction, VT
Chris Olsen, Dummerston, VT
Colleen Senterfitt, Waitsfield, VT
Congregational Church of South Hero, South Hero, VT
Couture Trucking, Inc, Troy, VT
David Giese, Bristol, VT
Debbie & Jon New, South Burlington, VT
Denise Lynch, Hyde Park, VT
Derrick Cline, Rutland, VT
Donald Van Nostrand, Essex Junction, VT

Ed & Jeanelle Episcopo, Fredericksburg, VA
Elsie Kiley, Charlotte, VT
Eric Hill & Sarah Marianacci, Jericho, VT
Everlasting Acres, Pittsfield, VT
Flower Moon Farm, Waterbury, VT
Foam Brewers, Burlington, VT
Graham Melville, Middlesex, VT
Grahame MacKugler, Richmond, VT
Gretchen Steen, St Johnsbury, VT
Heather & Barry Woodworth, Essex Junction, VT
Hop and Stuff, Inc, Williston, VT
Ian Hartman & Timea Kasa, Bristol, VT
Jacqueline Thomas, Winooski, VT
Janet Morrison, Middlebury, VT
Jessie Casella, Vernon, VT
John Quinney, Charlotte, VT
Julia Huessy, Burlington, VT
Justice Gudorf, Denver, CO
Karri Ingerson, Burlington, VT
Kristen Lindberg, Montpelier, VT
Kristina Harff, Charlotte, VT
Linda Elrick, South Burlington, VT
Linda Hecker, Guilford, VT
Lindsay St. Pierre, Williston, VT
Lois Safdie & Charles Bader, Eugene, OR
Lunar Acres, Bakersfield, VT

Maple Ridge Meats, Benson, VT
Marc Richter, Charlotte, VT
Margarita Ivanova, South Royalton, VT
Mark Balmforth & Henria Aton, Montgomery Center, VT
Matt Bristol, Calais, VT
McDonald Farmstand, Danville, VT
Meagan Langton, Burlington, VT
Megan Linehan, Burlington, VT
Meredith & Patrick Mobilio, Proctorsville, VT
Michael Wright, Colchester, VT
Michelle Wakerley, Colchester, VT
Mike Jenack, Winooski, VT
Mimi Wright, South Londonderry, VT
Moss & Mana, New Haven, VT
Mossy Well Farm, Guilford, VT
Neil Silins, Brandon, VT
Old Tradition's Farm, Castleton, VT
Patricia Okane, Burlington, VT
Phillip Seiler, Williston, VT
Rebecca Carbone, Watertown, MA
Reed & Chris Cass, Cromwell, CT
Reed Carr, Williston, VT
Ridge Vermont Craft Roasters, Monkton, VT
Robert & Linda Sweet, E Fairfield, VT
Robert & Theresa Paquin, Shelburne, VT

Roos Farm, Weathersfield, VT
Rosemary D'Elia, Jeffersonville, VT
Sana Me, West Wardsboro, VT
Settledown Farm, Randolph Center, VT
Shacksbury Cider, Vergennes, VT
Smugglers Notch Distillery, Jeffersonville, VT
Speeder & Earls Coffee, Burlington, VT
Stacia Betley, Manchester, NH
Steven Lindemann, Burlington, VT
Sumner Hill Lavender Farm, Stamford, VT
Sweet Family Farm, Bellows Falls, VT
Tammy Miller, Bethel, VT
Tavish MacLeod, Somerville, MA
The Happy Cow Farm, Newport Center, VT
Tim Fisk, Greenfield, MA
Vermont Forest Cemetery, Roxbury, VT
Victor, Linda, & David Caamaño, Danville, VT
Wasted, Burlington, VT
Wayne & Peg Hartz, Surry, NH
Wes Dunn, Richmond, 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!

Graham Farms LLP
Therrien Farm Inc.
Allen Bros, Inc.
Brent Lindstrom

Sana Me LLC
Only Vermont LLC BDA
Vermont Dog Eats
Chantry Farm, Inc.

Bonnie and Neil Kennedy
Alain LeBlanc
Roos Farm



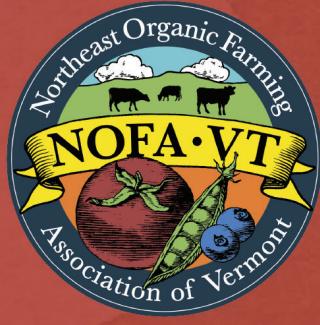
Learn more about the benefits of certified organic, locally grown at VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC



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