

NOFA Notes



Quarterly newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Spring 2026



Lessons From Conversations About Land Access | Mid-Session Policy Updates | Fresh, Local Food for Seniors | The Farmer-Led Effort for More Herb Growing in VT | The Power of Mentorship

The Brass Balagan, a local Vermont street band, leads the crowd at the NOFA-VT Winter Conference from the check-in area to the keynote speech.



Dear friends,

Recently, the luminary Ira Wallace joined us at the NOFA-VT Winter Conference to share about her life's work saving, tending, and sharing seeds—both literal and metaphorical. In reflecting on her cooperative seed work, she emphasized abundance over competition—not fighting for thinner slices of pie, but laying a table with more pies.



As winter winds down and early planting begins, farmers across the state are laying the groundwork for bountiful tables in the months to come—proverbial pies baking in ovens across Vermont. Greenhouses shelter the quiet work of seeding and transplanting. Sugarhouses become all-night community centers as neighbors gather to boil sap into syrup for future sweetness. Barns turn into makeshift bedrooms as shepherds keep watch, ensuring newborn lambs make it through the cold nights. This is the patient, generous labor that makes a feast possible later. Farming is nothing if not a love letter to the earth and to community.

Inspired by Ira's vision of abundance, we've been asking how we, too, can help bake more pies this season. We're excited to share some of that work with you in this issue:

- We are so thrilled to support a series of Long-Handled Spoons Dinners across the state. Through small micro-grants, members are gathering with their neighbors around shared meals—strengthening community ties in a time of rupture and connecting over good, local, organic food: the ultimate community builder! The response has been a heartening reminder that the table remains one of our most powerful tools for organizing.
- We're delighted by the applications coming in for the Land Together Learning Network. In response to rising land prices and growing interest in collective models of land stewardship and collaborative business structures, this learning network offers participants the chance to explore both the rewards and challenges of tending land collaboratively, and to build the skills needed to access land together.
- We're also on the edge of our seats—and daily in the State House—advocating to ensure that food access programs like Farm Share, Crop Cash, and Crop Cash Plus remain funded so that all Vermonters can access fresh food and farmers are paid fairly. We're grateful that the Farm Security Fund (S.60) was passed unanimously out of both the House and Senate, and we're continuing to push for the accompanying funding appropriation to support the farmers that keep us fed as they recover from the impacts of extreme weather. (More on our policy work on page 8)
- And we've been inspired by the incoming applications for our Resilience Grants program. Farmers across the state are thinking creatively and proactively about how to keep one another safe, fed, and supported—no matter what challenges arise—so that we can always set an abundant table with nourishing, local, organic food.

Our membership has grown significantly over the past year. Your participation strengthens our shared power. Your energy provides the ingredients. Your generosity—opening homes, barns, libraries, and grange halls—creates the places where we gather and serve those pies. Thank you for living into Ira's dream of a world where there is more for everyone.

Stay tuned for opportunities to gather in person with fellow members this spring. We hope to see you soon!

Warmly,

Grace Oedel
Executive Director, NOFA-VT

NOFA-VT

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.

PO BOX 697

Richmond, VT 05477

802-434-4122

info@nofavt.org

nofavt.org

Board of Directors

Abbie Corse

Misse Doe Axelrod

Maggie Donin

Sophia Kruszewski

Becky Maden

Melisa Oliva

Mieko Ozeki

Earl Ransom

Nick Sibley

Mike Thresher

Stoni Tomson

Alexis Yamashita

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.

To find a full directory of NOFA-VT's staff and contact information, visit NOFAVT.ORG/STAFF.



Top to bottom, left to right: Ira Wallace shares her wisdom in the keynote conversation; Earl Ransom and Amy Huyffer of Strafford Organic Creamery serve up ice cream; Attendees make art to be displayed at future events; Dani Baker teaches a popular workshop about growing perennial vegetables on farms or gardens; During their workshop, Marita Canedo and Olga Cruz share the new Vermont Way Foods “farmers cheese”, made with Vermont Organic milk and guaranteed fair labor through Migrant Justice’s Milk With Dignity Program (coming to stores soon!); Kids enjoy some time in the snow at the Children’s Conference.



EMERGING THEMES FROM CONVERSATIONS ABOUT Alternative Land Access

By Mia Smith, NOFA-VT Farm Business Advisor

NOFA-VT has received a growing number of requests from members seeking land to steward. As a result, we have been exploring the challenges of land access and supporting efforts to create new and alternative pathways for collective land stewardship.

As one part of this work, we have been hosting a monthly webinar series featuring projects from outside of Vermont that highlight alternative land access models and innovative collaborative business structures. The goal—and key takeaway—is to show new ways that farmers across the country are finding to break down systemic barriers, collaborate, and care for land together.

By this April, our webinar series will have hosted nine sessions with over 400 participants from 20 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces. This series has featured innovative land access and cooperative farming projects from across North America—from Tourne-Sol Co-Operative Farm in Canada to Appalachian Rekindling Project in Kentucky, La Finca Cooperative in Maine, and Commons Land in Minnesota. Most session recordings are available on the NOFA-VT YouTube page.

Attendees include land seekers, farmers, farmworkers, educators, lawyers, and others committed to building long-term, affordable, collective land access. Participants leave each session inspired—one shared, “There are a lot more folks looking at land alternatives than I thought!” Another reflected, “This helps my farm dreams move forward.” The enthusiastic response to the series has affirmed the need for more education and support around alternative paths to land tenure. We are excited to share some emerging reflections from this series and related work.

Collaborative relationships and alternative business models require deep communication and trust among partners. When rooted in strong relationships, collaboration offers powerful benefits: shared responsibility, labor, ideas, and resources. Alexis Yamashita, a former member of the Acorn Community Farm in Central Virginia and founding member of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance in Maryland, spoke to the power of community: “Having equitable voices in decision making, and being able to live at a place where you decide where your interest is and what you want to contribute your energy to, is really an amazing

experience. It makes you see that it is possible for us to organize our efforts in many different ways.”

“Human power is the limiting factor—and with collaborative land access and cooperative business structures, there is endless potential,” said Sarah Newkirk, Farm Manager at Osamequin Farm in Massachusetts. Sarah described their farmer members as parts of a whole. With so many ideas and sources of inspiration, the ability to prioritize and think both short- and long-term requires direct communication and deep trust. Trusting that each member is doing their part—especially in shared labor and responsibility—allows communities to grow their capacity, creativity, and resilience.

Planning for change—whether navigating labor shortfalls, crop failures, shifts in team dynamics, or increasingly common floods and droughts—is essential to the resilience and longevity of collective projects. D and Maggie of Rock Steady Farm in New York have been evolving their growing practices and business model for over a decade. D emphasized the importance of tending to the human dynamics within a business—romantic relationships, family planning and care, injury, work-life balance, and more. They also prioritize regular feedback from staff and community members to remain accountable for making needed changes. “That may be part of our magic sauce,” D shared, “We are pretty adaptive—sometimes it feels a little too adaptive—but we are still here after a decade.”

Time and money are other key limiting factors in any project. This webinar series has shown that there are many ways to structure business and labor management to meet goals. Tourne-Sol Co-Operative Farm in Canada operates with a clear co-operative model for managing funds and prioritizes paying a fair, substantial wage so workers can build savings and equity independent of the land and farm business. Through its co-op structure, the farm accesses medical benefits, leverages assets for reinvestment, and shares profits among worker-owners through cash or co-op shares. Tourne-Sol Co-Operative Farm champions the idea that sharing the load supports sustained work-life balance across the farm team.

Worker-owners can build resilient, redundant work environments while prioritizing work-life balance. At Humble Hands Farm in Iowa, community members formed a land co-op to purchase property previously slated for a confinement hog operation, making it accessible to two founding farmers who gradually purchased the land. These two farmers then established a worker-owned co-op to challenge the traditional “family farm” model and create a new narrative around land access, equity, and resilient production practices. As a team, they bring intentionality to conflict management, and their financial investments are dynamic, with community resources held in a separate “Commons” account that supports the farm and passes with it to the next generation.

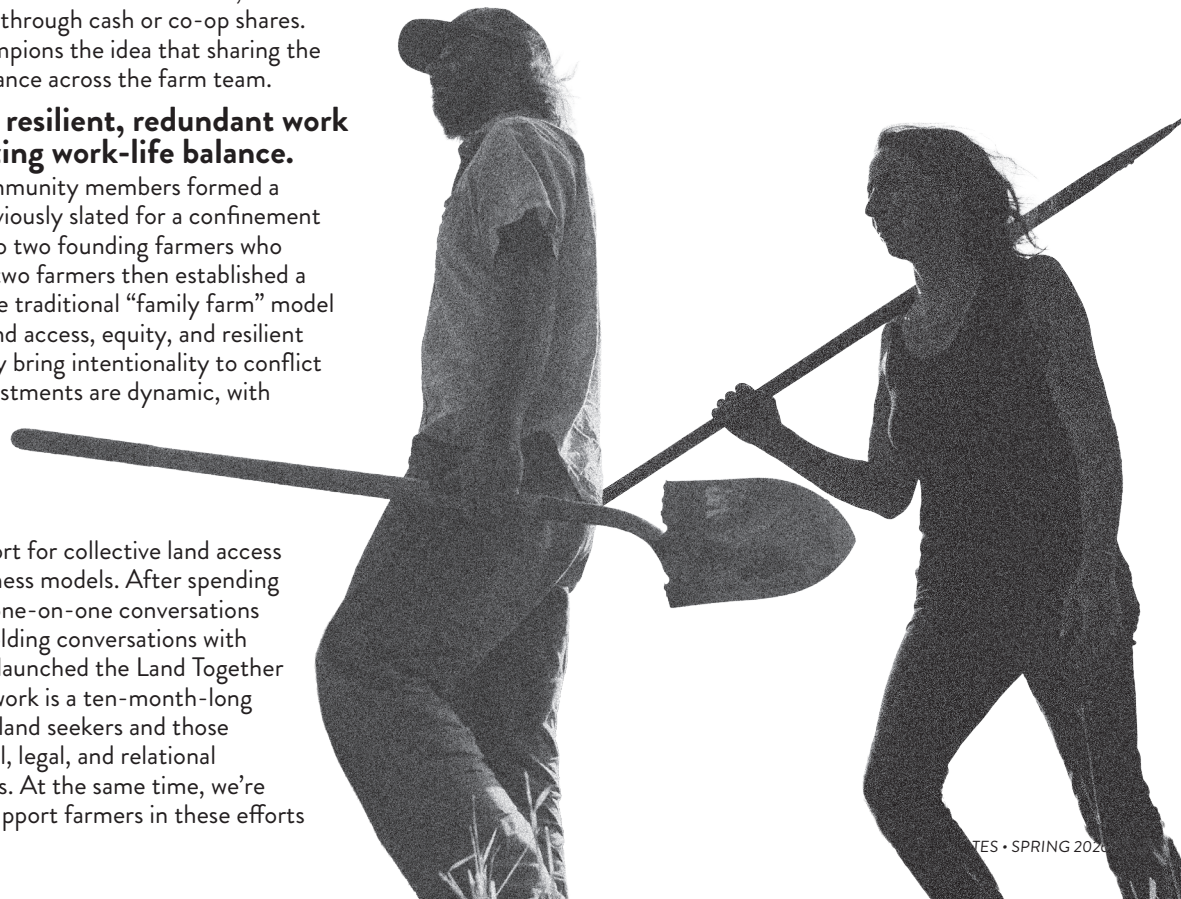
NOFA-VT is deepening its support for collective land access and cooperative and alternative business models. After spending time in 2025 conducting dozens of one-on-one conversations with farmers around the state and holding conversations with partner organizations, this spring we launched the Land Together Learning Network. This learning network is a ten-month-long cohort program designed to support land seekers and those with land to share in building financial, legal, and relational skills for successful collective projects. At the same time, we’re strengthening our own capacity to support farmers in these efforts

and are conducting a research-based landscape analysis of existing models, structures, and tools for collective projects. Our goal is to leverage NOFA-VT’s organizational resources—both time and money—to expand long-term land access, while advancing strategies to increase equity in land access, decommodify land, remove it from the speculative market, and keep it in agriculture.

Along the way, we have learned from many innovative organizations, farms, funds, and lenders across the Northeast and nationally. As we evaluate the viability and utility of various tools and structures, and continue learning alongside the Land Together Learning Network over the coming year, we will keep you updated on emerging opportunities and ways to get involved.

As Antonio LaSalle of La Finca Cooperative shared, “For us, a lot of it is throw it at the wall and see what sticks. There’s a lot of trial and error. There’s a lot of maneuvering and adjusting. That’s the nature of co-ops, the nature of farms, and the nature of farming in the climate we farm in now—both the literal climate and the political climate. That flexibility is going to be part of it all, always.”

At NOFA-VT, we remain open, flexible, and excited to pursue this work alongside all of you. ◇





Bringing the Farm to Seniors' Doors

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



Kale growing on Evening Song Farm in Cuttingsville, one of the farms that participates in NOFA-VT's Senior Farm Share Program.

For nearly 25 years, NOFA-VT has partnered with the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAAIL) to administer the Senior Farm Share Program, a federally-funded nutrition program that helps limited-income seniors access fresh produce. Through partnerships with twenty Vermont farms, over 1,000 seniors living in nearly 90 housing sites receive a small CSA share—valued at \$50 per participant—for part of the summer. The cost is fully covered by federal funds and paid directly to the farms.

Beyond providing fresh produce, the program fosters connection. Seniors can enjoy the company of their neighbors during distribution, learn ways to cook and preserve produce, and develop or deepen relationships with the farmers who grow their food.

This program also relies heavily on collaboration. Each spring, NOFA-VT staff process applications, check eligibility, and connect housing site coordinators—often a Vermont Support and Services at Home (SASH) representative or resident service coordinators—with farmers to finalize distribution logistics. While the budget per share is set, the program offers flexibility in the dates and number of distribution weeks, delivery method, and how residents receive their produce (e.g., a pre-bagged share versus

selecting items at a market-style set-up in a community room at their place of residence). This customization allows both farmers and site coordinators to tailor the program to the participants' needs.

After each season, we survey coordinators and farmers to gather feedback on the program's logistics and impact. Common themes that emerge include increased access to fresh produce, healthier diets, improved food security, and more opportunities for physical activity and social connection. Coordinators note:

“The residents really look forward to the fresh fruits and vegetables. Most of them are waiting for me at the door or in the community room when I do the delivery.”

“Most of my residents have transportation challenges. Having access to fresh vegetables delivered to their door improved food access and community connection.”

“We do visually see lowering blood pressures and improved activity with prep!”

“Senior Farm Share is often the only fresh produce some of our residents consume. It encourages them to try new vegetables, take advantage of fresh produce at food shelves, and consider securing community garden space at their housing sites.”

Our staff visited several participating farms last summer—Birdsong Farm in Stockbridge, Evening Song Farm in Cuttingsville, and Boardman Hill Farm in West Rutland—and the resulting conversations highlighted the program's value from the farmers' perspective. Each farmer described it as simple to administer, aligned with their community-driven values, and a valued source of additional income without the burden of additional labor. Kara Fitzbeauchamp of Evening Song Farm called it a “cherry on top.” Farmers noted that the \$50 per participant cap, a federal limitation, is a barrier; with more funding, they could provide more meaningful amounts of produce or extend the season.

Greg Cox of Boardman Hill Farm has taken part in the Senior Farm Share Program for as long as he can remember. He emphasized the program's deeper purpose: “This isn't a giveaway. This is repaying people.” By catering to participants' preferences and treating them with respect, the program empowers seniors to access healthy, local food while fostering community.

Another year of the Senior Farm Share Program is coming up! Applications will be available in late April and will be posted on the NOFA-VT website at nofavt.org/senior-farm-share-program. ◇



From Two Farmers to a Whole Network: the Story of the Vermont Herb Growers Initiative

By NOFA-VT members **Julia Etter of Nomad Farm in Bellows Falls** and **Sarah Shaw of Hillside Botanicals in Randolph**

Herbs hold a special place in many gardeners’ and farmers’ hearts. For some, they reconnect with ancestral traditions. For others, they represent a departure from extractive systems, and sometimes, it’s simply the plants that call to them. Producing herbs commercially adds another layer: financial sustainability. While billions of dollars of culinary and medicinal herbs are imported annually, growing demand for natural beauty products and supplements makes domestic production a viable opportunity.

Two Vermont farmers, Sarah Shaw of Hillside Botanicals and Julia Etter of Nomad Farm, are exploring how to amplify herb production through the USDA-funded Vermont Herb Growers Initiative, in partnership with the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association. The project aims to gather information on commercial herb production and build networks among farmers, covering everything from cultivation to post-harvest processing and market access.

Sarah and Julia first connected through NOFA-VT’s Journey Farmer Program, a peer-to-peer mentorship program for farmers in their first few years of running their farm. Their shared experience and challenges as herb growers led them to collaborate on a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant proposal to support the development of this Herb Growers initiative.

The Vermont Herb Grower’s Initiative builds on previous efforts to support herb growers in the state, including the Vermont Herb Grower’s Association and Vermont Herb Grower’s Cooperative (2000–2014). Drawing lessons from these earlier projects, Sarah and Julia are slowly developing the initiative with a focus on the economic and social potential of collaboration, while being realistic about the work involved.

“There’s all this work, on top of being, you know, farmers,” Sarah laughed recently. But she and Julia recognize that farmers are the ones who do the work from seed to sale every day, and their voices are essential to shaping the initiative. The project seeks to engage herb growers of all scales to share knowledge, build networks, and learn from each other.

Sarah Shaw is co-founder and co-owner of Hillside Botanicals, a certified organic herb farm and herbal product manufacturer established in 2018 in Central Vermont. She is also a certified Clinical Herbalist and works as a nonprofit consultant in the natural products industry. Julia Etter operates Nomad Farm, an organic certified diversified farm in Windham County, growing culinary and medicinal herbs, and raising chicken and pastured pork.

Collaboration remains the guiding force for the initiative. As Sarah notes, “The best exchanges about farming happen when farmers come together to share experiences and build common ground around shared needs.”

Learn more and sign up for updates at vtherbgrowers.com. ♦

Photos, top to bottom: A workshop at Hillside Botanicals; Herbs on a drying rack; Sarah and Nathan, farmers at Hillside Botanicals; Sage growing in the field.





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 current state policy campaigns, other bills we're tracking, and reflections from Margaret Loftus, a NOFA-VT member who participated in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's D.C. fly-in this February.

Spring 2026 Legislative Updates

By Jess Hays Lucas, NOFA-VT Grassroots Organizer, Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT Policy & Organizing Director, and Johanna Doren, Direct Markets & Local Food Access Director

NOFA-VT's State Policy Priorities

Farm Security Fund

The Farm & Forestry Operations Security Special Fund (S.60) has now passed unanimously out of both the House and Senate! Because there are differences between the versions passed by each chamber, a few more steps are required before the bill heads to the Governor for his signature. We are tracking it every step of the way and will let you know when there are key

opportunities to take action to ensure the bill is passed into law this session.

While we work to keep the bill moving forward, we are also engaging in the budget process, urging the legislature to appropriate funds for the Farm Security Fund in the state budget so the program can begin this year. In February, NOFA-VT members and partners shared powerful testimony with the House and Senate Appropriations Committees advocating for \$15.6 million for the fund to

Did you know? The Farm Security Fund has become model legislation for other states! Senator Michelle Hinchey of New York recently introduced a bill (S.8707) modeled after S.60, which is under consideration by New York's Senate Agriculture Committee.

ensure Vermont's farmers have the support they need to recover from extreme weather.

Local Food Security

NOFA-VT is grateful to have received \$450,000 in one-time funding during the 2025 legislative session (for FY26) for Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share. This funding has allowed us to maintain increased food security while directly supporting local Vermont farmers. Because the funding was a one-time allocation, NOFA-VT is once again requesting \$500,000 in ongoing funding this legislative session to support these proven programs for FY27. The state's investment in these longstanding food security initiatives has an outsized impact on Vermont communities, ensuring that low-income Vermonters can purchase fresh, local food, while Vermont farmers receive a reliable, fair price for their goods—a win-win!

A bit more about these programs:

- **Crop Cash:** Doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits for fruits and vegetables at Vermont farmers markets and leverages federal funding to match state funds.
- **Crop Cash Plus:** Extends Crop Cash to include meat, dairy, eggs, bread, and more—benefiting hundreds of farmers and thousands of low-income Vermonters.
- **Farm Share Program:** Subsidizes 25–75% of the cost of a CSA share for families across Vermont, ensuring more equitable access to local food and fair compensation for farmers.

With FY26 funding, we have successfully expanded Crop Cash and Farm Share to help meet the demand for these important programs. State funding is helping us shorten program waitlists, bring more funds to local farms, and ensure more households can afford a consistent supply of local food. Specifically, funding has had the following impacts:

- **Farm Share:** Supported over 530 households—more than 1,450 individuals.
- **Crop Cash (2025 season):** Invested \$200,000 across 40+ summer and 20 winter farmers markets and farm stands, generating over 10,500 SNAP transactions.
- **Crop Cash Plus:** Expanded Crop Cash beyond produce, doubling the number of farmers receiving income and adding \$77,000 in farmers market spending between July and December, boosting

farmer revenue and food security for low-income Vermonters.

- **State support impact (FY25–FY26):** Leveraged approximately \$1.6 million in local food purchases through additional community contributions and SNAP dollars at farmers markets.
- **Current season projection:** Directing over \$850,000 in revenue to Vermont farms through Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share.



Adequate Funding Appropriations

Public funding for the Farm Security Fund and our local food security programs marks a crucial step forward on the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, a plan we are implementing with a coalition of partners to ensure all Vermonters are food-secure by 2035.

Governor Scott's budget did not include funding for Crop Cash (Plus), Farm Share, or the Farm Security Fund, so it is up to the Legislature to include these allocations in their budget this session.

The House Agriculture Committee has included our requests in their budget memo to the House Appropriations Committee. As of early March, we anticipate that the House Appropriations Committee will consider this recommendation as they develop their version of the FY27 budget. Next, we will advocate for the Senate to include our requests via the Senate Appropriations Committee. Once both chambers have developed their budgets, they will come together to reconcile any differences.

Other Bills We Are Tracking

Municipal Exemption for Agriculture & the Right to Grow Food

On May 30, 2025, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that farming is not exempt from all municipal regulation, overturning nearly 40 years of precedent and legislative intent. This new authority allows municipalities to determine where farming may or may not occur, potentially requiring new permits, increased operational costs, and additional regulatory hurdles for farms, many of which already face financial vulnerability. Agricultural and land access advocates warn that the ruling could create a patchwork of local regulations that undermine farm viability, food production, and the stability of Vermont's agricultural economy.

NOFA-VT is partnering with a diverse group of farming organizations to advocate for a clear and consistent regulatory framework for farmers, and to return the "ag exemption" to its original intent.

This broad coalition of Vermont's agricultural and land access organizations is coming together to host an informational webinar on Tuesday, March 24th, from 9:30-11:00 am to discuss this change in state policy affecting farms across the state. Join representatives from organizations including Rural Vermont, Vermont Farm Bureau, Agri-Mark, Cabot Creamery, NOFA-VT, the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance, Vermont Farm to Plate, and the Land Access and Opportunity Board to:

- Learn what the ruling means for farms and communities
- Hear updates on the coalition's work at the State House
- Understand the proposed compromise
- Share your thoughts, questions, and experiences

We hope to see you there! You can pre-register to receive the webinar link at ruralvermont.org/municipal-exemption-2026.

Act 59 (Vermont Conservation Plan)

The Vermont Conservation Plan—also known as 30x30, Act 59, and Vermont's Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act—calls for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) to develop a statewide conservation plan in consultation with the Agency of Natural Resources and with input from communities, landowners, and partners across Vermont.

After eighteen months of inventorying, studying, and community input, an expanded

draft Conservation Plan framework has been developed by VHCB, and they are seeking public input before it is finalized and sent to the state legislature in June.

It's important that feedback from farmers and farmworkers is included in this final round of community input. To this end, we hosted a listening session at the NOFA-VT Winter Conference in February and will host a virtual listening session on Wednesday, March 25th, from 12:00-1:00 pm. This conversation is intended for farmers, landowners, and others interested in ensuring that working lands are included and benefit from the State's conservation plans. You can learn more and register at nofavt.org/act-59-meeting.

S.208 and S.209

NOFA-VT supports S.208 and S.209, two bills that will help make our communities safer, particularly for those targeted by immigration enforcement. S.208 requires agents to identify themselves by name and agency, and limits the use of face masks. S.209 prohibits immigration detentions in certain sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, and places of worship. Both bills are being championed by a host of allies, including Migrant Justice.

As NOFA-VT's Policy Steering Committee, a group of NOFA-VT members who lead the direction of our policy work,

considered taking positions on these bills, they reflected on the heavy reliance on immigrant labor in Vermont's food and farm systems, and on our responsibility, as a farming organization primarily made up of white people, to show solidarity and support. They also referenced the Declaration of Independence, specifically its list of grievances against King George, including: "He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance."

As of early March, both bills passed nearly unanimously through the Vermont Senate and are now in the House Judiciary Committee. ◇

Member Leadership at the State House

By Jess Hays Lucas, NOFA-VT Grassroots Organizer

Together, we are working hard on the ambitious set of policy goals shared above. We accomplish this important work together as a NOFA-VT community—and at the center of that community are our members.

We are grateful when members invest their time, energy, and heart to lead this work. From envisioning what's needed for farm and food security to developing and advancing our policy goals by engaging neighbors, networks, and legislators, members are driving impactful, long-lasting change.

Please enjoy these reflections from members who participated in a recent State House Day, and sign up to join in our next one on April 9th!

"As I told my daughter about the day I spent at the State House, she noted my voice filled with more and more excitement. The atmosphere in the halls, hearing rooms, and cafeteria is open, alive, and attentive; I exaggerate, but it felt like everyone you passed or spoke to was taking you in, while at the same time keeping an eye on everyone else. The efforts that NOFA-VT made last Wednesday to inform and support each of us was effective and extraordinary. I look forward to participating again later in the session if NOFA-VT needs me!" –Susan Smiley, NOFA-VT member in New Haven

"Visiting Vermont's State House last week felt like a small leap of faith. I had no obvious skin in the game; I'm not a farmer, and I'm not a recipient of food subsidies. But I am an eater and community member. The last time I remember being in a state house was during a middle school trip in Rhode Island, and



Christina Bertorelli talks with her state representative, Thomas Stevens, at a NOFA-VT State House Day.

walking into the State House in Montpelier felt unfamiliar and slightly intimidating.

As I walked in, I reminded myself that this is a house built for everyone. With NOFA-VT's support, I was prepared for conversations with my representatives about the Crop Cash (PLUS) and Farm Stand Match programs.

While speaking with my representatives was initially nerve-racking, I quickly settled in once I remembered that they are, quite literally, my neighbors. They live just a few miles down the road, likely ski and bike the

same hills I do, and shop at the same farmers markets. That realization grounded me.

It was deeply fulfilling to do my part; to speak my piece directly to the source, at a local level. The experience felt like a step toward deepening my relationship with place, food, and community here in Vermont. I'm already looking forward to my next visit to the State House and to continuing to build these skills." – Christina Bertorelli, NOFA-VT member in Huntington ◇

One Farmer's Experience Speaking Up in Washington

By Margaret Loftus, NOFA-VT member and farmer at Crossmolina Farm in West Corinth



This February, I had the amazing opportunity to attend the Winter Meeting of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC). Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT's Policy and Organizing Director, and I flew out of Burlington on a -13°F Monday morning in February and spent four days in Washington D.C. (it was a balmy 38°F one day, so we explored without coats!).

NOFA-VT is a member organization of NSAC, a vibrant coalition of farmer- and food-focused policy, advocacy, and farmer-serving organizations from across the country. NSAC works to advance federal policy reform in support of sustainable food systems, natural resources, and rural communities.

At the meeting, we met folks working on sustainable farming and food access initiatives from places like Kentucky, Idaho, and Alaska. We connected with organizers from Minnesota, fresh from the front lines of resisting ICE in the Twin Cities; flower farmers from California; pastured poultry farmers from Illinois; a vegetable grower from the Navajo Nation; and a mushroom farmer from Massachusetts—just to name a few.

We attended a full briefing by the wonderful NSAC staff about the docket of policy and advocacy issues they are currently working on, including:

- Reform and strengthen federal crop insurance and USDA disaster relief programs to keep farmers on the land.
- Expand federally-funded credit options to support more diverse farm operations.
- Protect and increase farmer participation in federally-funded school and supplemental nutrition programs, including SNAP reforms and Farm to School initiatives.
- Strengthen local supply chains through additional federal investments and support.
- Expand local and regional meat-processing programs so more farmers can meet the demand for sustainably raised local meat.

Next, we brushed up on our lobbying skills to prepare for meetings with our representatives on Capitol Hill. I practiced with other farmers—telling my personal stories, explaining how the issues affect our communities, outlining the consequences of inaction, and finally

presenting a clear ask: “We would like you to support...” or “We need you to allocate funds for...”

With our skills, stories, and asks sharply honed, we headed to the Hill the next day. More than 150 meetings took place with NSAC members, including senators and representatives from 46 states, as well as with staff from various USDA branches, including the Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, Farm Service Agency, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Maddie and I met with staff from the offices of Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Becca Balint, along with Senator Peter Welch and his staff. It was empowering to share directly about some of the issues facing Vermont farmers. We discussed the skyrocketing cost of health care and its impact on farmers and farmworkers. I also shared my own family's experience this past December, when we had to make difficult choices about our own health insurance.

We raised concerns about increased ICE presence in our communities and on our farms, highlighting the constitutional and human rights issues, as well as the potential labor and economic impacts on Vermont farms.

At both our meetings with USDA staff and in our conversations with our congressional delegation, we emphasized the vital importance of the SNAP (EBT) program. Alongside rural and urban farmers and farm advocates from across the country, we spoke with USDA staff about how essential SNAP benefits are for bringing local, healthy food to underserved areas. Many farms and farmers markets, including ours, have faced challenges with both the authorization and reauthorization processes. Together, we called for a more streamlined and accessible system and increased staffing to speed up the authorization process.

It's easy to get lost in the news, the doomscrolling, and our daily farm work, forgetting that we live in a democracy that we can and should participate in. This visit to Washington, D.C. served as a great reminder to continue showing up and speaking out. ♦



Mentorship on the Path to Organic Certification

Zea Luce, NOFA-VT Organic Practices Specialist

Thanks to the support of their mentor, Jeff Carpenter of Zack Woods Herb Farm, Margrit (née Mikulis) and Jay Malouf of Chantry Farm in Brattleboro received their organic certification this past Halloween—a date they will always remember! During NOFA-VT’s Farm Beginnings program, they were matched with Jeff and continued working together through the Transition to Organic Partnership Mentorship Program in 2025.

As new farmers, they have been tending their land since 2017, but officially started their farm in 2023. Their “slow to grow” approach has allowed them to develop their farm with great purpose. Sharing interests in organic practices and applied biodynamics, they took a biodynamic course in 2019 at Threefold Community Farm in New York. Both also maintain off-farm careers: Jay is a certified arborist with over 35 years of experience, and Margrit is a licensed naturopathic doctor specializing in Ayurvedic medicine and Lyme disease.

Jeff and his wife Melanie have been in the organic herb business for over 26 years. They started Zack Woods Herb Farm in 1999 to grow high-quality raw materials for their herbal products and have since shared their expertise through teaching, consulting, and their book, *The Organic Medicinal Herb Farmer*. Jeff and Melanie sell their herbs in both retail and wholesale markets for skincare, wellness, and immune-support products.

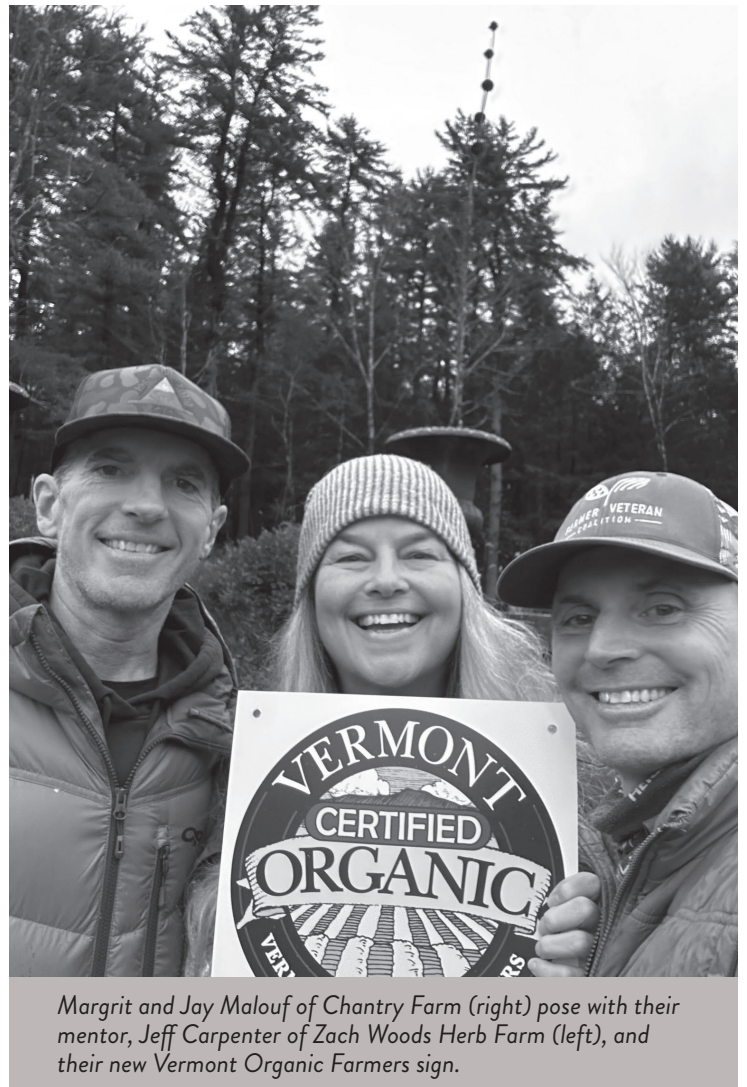
Margrit and Jay grow medicinal herbs that Margrit uses in her practice, including bitter melon, ashwagandha, dong quai, schisandra, saffron, mint, and holy basil, as well as forested crops like Siberian and American ginseng and rare plants such as Himalayan valerian. Margrit produces her own formulations, encapsulating, freeze-drying, and making extracts. They plan to expand into value-added products online and locally in the coming years.

Reflecting on their mentorship, Margrit said, “Both of our main crops are medicinal herbs. Because of Jeff’s experience and our shared interests, we’ve been fortunate to lean on him, especially through the organic application process. He reminded us that the team at Vermont Organic Farmers is eager for us to succeed, which has built our confidence exponentially. I highly recommend this program!”

Why pursue organic certification? Margrit explained: “Farming is intentional for us; agriculture is spiritual, and we look at our farm as an organism. Following organic standards helps us support the health of our farm, which relates to community health. It gives us a framework to refine our practices and ensures consumers know what to expect from our products.”

Their mentorship covered topics from crop planning and soil fertility to post-harvest processing and equipment purchases. Margrit shared, “Jeff gave us guidance on processing that simplified our ‘lot’ system, saving hundreds of hours of record-keeping over the life of our farm. It was a perfect moment of wisdom.” They also visited Foster Farm Botanicals in Calais to see a farm with large-scale herb production and experience the farm’s advanced techniques, which Margrit described as incredibly valuable.

Cultivating these learning experiences is at the heart of the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Margrit and Jay’s progress, guided by Jeff, exemplifies the value of mentorship and hands-on support in achieving organic certification. Congratulations to Chantry Farm! ♦



Margrit and Jay Malouf of Chantry Farm (right) pose with their mentor, Jeff Carpenter of Zack Woods Herb Farm (left), and their new Vermont Organic Farmers sign.



Vermont Family Farmer of the Month

By Kevin Haggerty, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

The Vermont Family Farmer of the Month Award recognizes outstanding farms for their commitment to sustainable agriculture and innovative projects. Administered by NOFA-VT in collaboration with the VHC Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Shelburne Farms, and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, the award highlights farms that strengthen Vermont’s agricultural resilience and demonstrate environmental stewardship. We are honored to introduce our latest awardees.



Grass Cattle Company, Charlotte - October, 2025

Steve Schubart fell in love with raising cattle while ranching in California before college. Inspired by that experience, he founded Grass Cattle Company in 2016 with two clear goals: to raise animals in ways that regenerate the land and produce food he and his family are proud to share with their neighbors.

Today, Grass Cattle Company sells beef, pastured poultry, and eggs directly to consumers, modeling a meat production system rooted in transparency, community, ecological stewardship, and care.

Grass Cattle Company was awarded \$12,000 to construct a new farm building that will house a walk-in freezer and a flexible workspace for packing orders. This addition is key to the farm’s sustainable growth. It will improve operational efficiency and safety, streamline workflow, and create the capacity to launch mail-order sales. Over time, the new facility will support the farm’s long-term economic viability by smoothing seasonal demand with steadier year-round sales, positioning the farm to meet a growing niche in the regional food economy.



Cobble Creek, Monkton - November, 2025

John and Patti Padua’s shared love of growing trees brought them together in college and led them to found Cobble Creek Nursery in 1986. For nearly four decades, the nursery has supplied hardy stock—including ornamental and native shrubs, as well as flowering, fruit, and shade trees—to customers across Vermont.

Now, as their son Caylen returns to the farm, the Paduas are preparing for an intergenerational transition of management and ownership.

To support this next chapter, Cobble Creek Nursery received \$12,000 to construct a purpose-built office and employee space. For 40 years, John and Patti’s home has served as the farm office and a warm refuge for staff during inclement weather. The new building will allow John and Patti to step back and enjoy this phase of life while giving Caylen the dedicated space he needs to lead the nursery into the future.

Applications are available to any small or medium-sized farm in Vermont. The next round of applications will open in April. To learn more, visit VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG.



Did You Know?

You can cultivate a lasting legacy by making a tax-smart gift to NOFA-VT directly from your IRA through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)!

Rules for giving through a QCD:

Age: You must be 70½ or older to donate a QCD.

Contribution limit: The maximum an individual can donate in a year, across all charities, is \$111,000. If filing jointly, spouses can also donate up to \$111,000 from their IRA.

Eligible accounts: QCDs can be made from traditional IRAs but not 401k or other retirement accounts.

Process: Your IRA administrator must send the QCD directly to NOFA-VT.

Reasons for giving through a QCD:

Lowers your taxable income: Unlike withdrawing funds and then donating them, QCDs are excluded from your taxable income.

Satisfies your IRS-required RMD: If you are 73 or older and need to take a Required Minimum Distribution, a QCD counts toward your annual requirement.

Makes a meaningful impact: If you don't need the full distribution from your IRA, a gift through a QCD makes a big difference to NOFA-VT.

Giving through your IRA through a QCD is an impactful, tax-smart way to support NOFA-VT and continue to ensure that Vermont is home to thriving farms and agriculturally-rooted communities that support the long-term wellbeing of the earth and all its people—especially if you don't need all of your required distributions for living expenses. Consider speaking with your financial advisor to see if this strategy fits your charitable goals.

NOFA-VT's EIN is 22-3260420, and our mailing address is PO Box 697, Richmond, VT 05477. If you would like to make a gift, please reach out to Erin Buckwalter, Deputy Director of Development & Engagement, with any questions: erin@nofavt.org, 802-419-0043. Thank you!



Thank You for Your Support!

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

Abigail Weinstein & Kathy Redman, Northport, NY
Adrienne LaPierre, Montague, MA
Alexis Mattos, Greensboro Bend, VT
Alexis Parent, Essex, NY
Amanda Bickford & Jeremy Perkins, Manchester Center, VT
Amanda Iglesias, Colrain, MA
Amy Parent, St. Albans, VT
Anisah Madden, Burlington, VT
Annabelle Murray, Charlotte, VT
Anthony McIntyre
April Richard, West Dover, VT
Asa Waterworth, Burlington, VT
Ashley Turka, Waitsfield, VT
Avenir Farms of VT, Cornwall, VT
B Diaz, Colchester, VT
Back Roads Granola, Brattleboro, VT
Barbara Brody, Underhill, VT
Barbara Cipolla, Waterbury, VT

Barbara Defelice, East Thetford Center, VT
Becca Perrin, Craftsbury, VT
Becka Warren, Montpelier, VT
Ben Wilke, Winooski, VT
Benjamin Hutchins, Newark, VT
Benjamin Shaman, West Chester, PA
Betsy Dunham, Starksboro, VT
Bonneau's Vermont Maple, Lowell, VT
Brian & Kathy Somers, Barnet, VT
Brian Parent, Barre, MA
Brosseau Sweet Corn, Highgate Center, VT
Browns River Maple LLC, Essex Junction, VT
Butterfly Bakery of Vermont, Barre, VT
Caitlin Strong, East Hardwick, VT
Candi Branon, Fairfield, VT
Cassie Plummer, Corinth, VT
Champlain Valley Hops, Starksboro, VT
Chancey Clark, Underhill, VT

Charlotte Reimanis, South Strafford, VT
Chris Anderson & Carl Bucholt, Manchester, VT
Chris Brabant, Barnet, VT
Christine McCue, Chelsea, VT
Clare Hemphill, Fernadina Beach, FL
Clark Family Mountain Maples, Waterville, VT
Clayton Buckwalter, Fuquay Varina, NC
Cold Shoulder Ridge Maples, Westford, VT
Colleen Norden, Middlebury, VT
Collin Schmelzenbach, Dorset, VT
Conscious Homestead, Winooski, VT
Courtney Doubleday, Putney, VT
Curtis Mraz, Middlebury, VT
Dahe Stoddard, Cabot, VT
Daniel Ducharme
Daniel Pollard, Windsor, VT
Danielle Raymus & Callie Bright, Essex, VT

Dave Davis, Underhill, VT
Dave Morley, Amherst, NH
David & Renee Wahler, Stowe, VT
David Daigle, Greenwich, CT
Derek Punt & Kim Corrow, Colchester, VT
Destiny Lachance, Morgan, VT
Dorothy Kinney-Landis, Fletcher, VT
Douglas Bent, W. Braintree, VT
Dylan Rodgers, Newbury, VT
Eddie Blumenthal & Carolyn McKenna, Hartford, CT
Eddie Furci, Burlington, VT
Edward Lee, Shutesbury, MA
Effie Mae Elfer, Lowell, VT
Eliza Byrne, Amston, CT
Elizabeth & Gavin Leckie, Pelham Manor, NY
Elizabeth Devane, Newfarne, VT
Elizabeth Holden, Morris Plains, NJ
Elizabeth Hollenbach, Jericho, VT

Ellen Appel Bronstein, Newfane, VT
 Elliott Stewart, Cuttingsville, VT
 Emilia Perez, Burlington, VT
 Emily Baldwin, Waterbury, VT
 Eric Stebbins, Milton, VT
 Eric & Wanda Conroy, Bridport, VT
 Erik Reimanis, South Strafford, VT
 Erika Chagnon, Richford, VT
 Ethan Illingworth, Westminster, VT
 Evan Branon, Fairfield, VT
 Faith Raymond, Montpelier, VT
 Farmer Hodge's Roadside Stand, N Fairlee, VT
 French Hill Maple, Swanton, VT
 Gage Coe, Orleans, VT
 Georgette Garbès-Putzel, Jericho, VT
 Gg Glasson, Newport, RI
 Gina Stewart, Cuttingsville, VT
 Ginger Nickerson, Montpelier, VT
 Goodrich's Maple, Cabot, VT
 Goose Edenson, West Townshend, VT
 Green Mountain Peanut Butter, Hardwick, VT
 Heavenly Maple LLC, Sheldon, VT
 Helena Lam, Rochester, VT
 Holton Family Maple, Wolcott, VT
 Isaac Dezotelle, Belvidere Center, VT
 Isabel Dunkley, Westford, VT
 Jackie Earle-Cruikshanks & Allan Sirotkin, Middlebury, VT
 Jacob Strom
 James Bell, Fairfax, VT
 James Nagle, Colchester, VT
 Jasper Hill Farm, Greensboro, VT
 Jaxon Hanson, Putney, VT
 Jay Petrillo, Williston, VT
 Jenifer Morgan-Davie, Richmond, VT
 Jessica Bourbeau, Sheldon, VT
 Jessica Cook, Waterbury Center, VT
 Jessica Owens
 Jessica Ratcliff, Bristol, VT
 Joan Buttrick, E Dummerston, VT
 Joanne Carr, Enosburg Falls, VT
 Joelyn Mensah, Brookfield, VT
 John Capen, Dorset, VT
 John Bruce, Bristol, VT
 John Crossley, Woodstock, VT
 John Dunham, Starksboro, VT
 John Hutton International, New Haven, VT
 Jonathan K. Morley, Amherst, NH
 Jonathan Park
 Joseph Agrillo, Wilmington, VT

Joseph Angell, Randolph Center, VT
 Julia Blike, West Lebanon, NH
 Julia Murdick, Colchester, VT
 Julia Ramsey, South Royalton, VT
 Julie Dobrow, Lincoln, MA
 Julie Elmore, Colchester, VT
 Kara & Sean O'Sullivan, Sunderland, VT
 Karen Brightly, Burlington, VT
 Karen Kinzer Molina, Wilmington, VT
 Kate Blofson, Jericho, VT
 Kate Gilmore, Newbury, MA
 Kate Wettergreen, Burlington, VT
 Katherine Verman, Burlington, VT
 Kathryn Shuster, Westminster, VT
 Kathy Maxwell, Point Reyes Station, CA
 Katie Collette, Jeffersonville, VT
 Katie Nolan, Washington, NH
 Kaye Goodman, Coram, NY
 Kelie Bowman, North Bennington, VT
 Kelly Brown, Brattleboro, VT
 Kerry Brosnan, Burlington, VT
 Kevin Jones, Chester, VT
 Kevin Self, Myersville, MD
 Khonsu X & Titan Potter, Groton, VT
 Kim Bourbeau, Sheldon, VT
 Kim Fodor, Shaftsbury, VT
 Kimberly Backus, Westfield, VT
 Kristin Burdick, Lyme, NH
 Kyle Branon, Fairfield, VT
 Laila Reimanis, South Strafford, VT
 Laura Angers, Bethlehem, NH
 Laura Black, Shrewsbury, VT
 Laura Heil & Evan Maslack, St. George, VT
 Lauren Robinson
 Lavender L, Montpelier, VT
 Liel Green, Northampton, MA
 Lisa Hastings, West Roxbury, MA
 Liz Butterfield, Brownington, VT
 Liz Sunde, Willard, VT
 Long Cloud Farm, Bridport, VT
 Lu Weber, Burlington, VT
 Lucy & Richard Hersey, Brewster, MA
 Lynne & Stephen Hale, Charlotte, VT
 Madeline Mann, Fairfax, VT
 Maple Ridge Farms LLC, Newport Ctr, VT
 Marci Sudlow, Danby, VT
 Maria Burnett, St. Albans, VT
 Maria DeRosia, East Fairfield, VT
 Mark Sylvester, Richmond, VT

Mary Walz, Hyde Park, VT
 Matthew Angell, Randolph Center, VT
 Max Rose & Katey Troutman, Shoreham, VT
 Mayo's Maple Farm, Richford, VT
 Meadowsend Timberlands LTD, East Orange, VT
 Meg Langworthy, Ferrisburgh, VT
 Meghan Martell, West Topsham, VT
 Melissa McClure, Brattleboro, VT
 Mia & James Moore, Montpelier, VT
 Michael Bradshaw, Burlington, VT
 Milton Fowler, Randolph, VT
 Mollie Wills, Barre, VT
 Monica John, Underhill, VT
 Moya Hallstein, Barnet, VT
 Muriel's of Vermont, North Hero, VT
 Natalie Branon, Fairfield, VT
 Natalie Coughlin, Underhill, VT
 Natasha Littrell, Bennington, VT
 Nathan Wechsler & Co., Lebanon, NH
 Noe Garcia, Alburgh, VT
 Nomadic Maple, Franklin, VT
 Norman Shorey, St. Albans, VT
 North Country Credit Union, Burlington, VT
 O'Donnell Farm, Westfield, VT
 Oakley Smith, Lincoln, VT
 Olivia Mancivalano, Cuttingsville, VT
 One Hive Foundation, Boston, MA
 Opeyemi Parham, Montpelier, VT
 Ox Pasture Maples, E Berkshire, VT
 Paige Heverly, Randolph Center, VT
 Pat Gagner, Saint Albans, VT
 Paula Caron, South Burlington, VT
 Pitchfork Pickle, Burlington, VT
 Pleasant Valley Firewood & Maple, Underhill, VT
 Princess Van Gulden, Craftsbury, VT
 Ralph & Wendy Zimmerman, Newport Center, VT
 Rebekkah Young, Castleton, VT
 RJ Branon, Fairfield, VT
 Rob Freeberg & Judy Fink, Dummerston, VT
 Robert Ceglowski, Rupert, VT
 Robert Russo
 Rooted Farmers, Hanover, NH
 Rossana Rossi, Chelsea, VT
 Ryan White
 Sabrina Koetter, Burlington, VT
 Samantha Devenger, Eden, VT
 Samantha Green, Burlington, VT

Samuel Coe, Orleans, VT
 Sara Farnsworth, Jericho, VT
 Sarah & Scott VanBeck, Iowa City, IA
 Sarah Lyons, Hardwick, VT
 Sarah Sussman, Hinesburg, VT
 SHAAAG Maple, Jeffersonville, VT
 Shannon Sudeth, La Farge, WI
 Shea Newton, Hinesburg, VT
 Silver Lake Syrups, LLC, Barnard, VT
 Steffan Asper, Johnson, VT
 Sunset Lake Cannabis, Burlington, VT
 Susan Gallagher, Huntington, VT
 Suzanne & John Curran, Grand Isle, VT
 Sydonia Axis, Plainfield, VT
 Tammy & John Thibeault, Irasburg, VT
 Tanner Stewart, Cuttingsville, VT
 Tarn Leveret, Alexandria, NH
 Taryn Colonnese, Roxbury, VT
 Terry Smith, Montpelier, VT
 The WaterWheel Foundation, Burlington, VT
 Thomas Sutton, Burlington, VT
 Three Kings Maple, Fairfax, VT
 Tilia Tea Company, Barre, VT
 Timothy Johnson, Shelburne, VT
 Timothy Aikey, Colchester, VT
 Todd Erceg, Woodstock, VT
 Tre McCarney & Karen Polihronakis, South Burlington, VT
 Tucker Maple Sugarhouse, Westford, VT
 Two Sons Bakehouse, Hyde Park, VT
 Vanessa Bedoya, Cuttingsville, VT
 Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, Waitsfield, VT
 Waibel Maple LLC, Richford, VT
 Walden Mutual Bank, Concord, NH
 Warm Green, Barnard, VT
 Wayside Maple LLC, Cambridge, VT
 Westford Farmers Market, Westford, VT
 William Davis, Underhill, VT
 Willow Smart, Milton, VT
 Woodpecker Ridge Farm, East Fairfield, VT
 Xochiquetzal Berry, Warner, NH
 Yianna Rhodes, Newport, VT
 Zachary Dezotelle, Belvidere Center, 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!

Evan Simons

Clark Family Mountain
Maples

Three Kings Maple

Chancey Clark

Cold Shoulder
Ridge Maples

Pat Gagner



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



Northeast Organic Farming
Association of Vermont
PO Box 697
Richmond, VT 05477
Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage

PAID
Permit No. 37
Richmond, VT

It's CSA sign-up season!



Community Supported Agriculture

For a list of CSAs in your area, go to: NOFAVT.ORG/CSAS