

NOFA Notes



Quarterly newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Fall 2026



Collective Land Ownership | Big Steps Forward for Local Grain Processing and Distribution
A Fair Future for Vermont Dairies | Regional Agroforestry | Grassroots Organizing and Mutual Aid

Cover: Nando Jaramillo of Moon and Stars VT stands amongst the fields during cover cropping at a workshop hosted by NOFA-VT this July.



NOFA-VT

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.

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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.

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



Beloved NOFA-VT community,

We are approaching the time of year we set aside for gathering and gratitude. I hope this issue finds you warm and nourished: about to feast at a long table with friends and neighbors, root cellars full of the season's harvest, plenty of hay in the barn, a kettle on for tea, and wood by the stove.

Since this year's announcement of the world's first trillionaire, and especially in this season of giving thanks and gratitude, I've been reflecting a lot on what makes us rich. We read headlines in the paper that the stock market has never had a higher valuation, yet on those same pages, we read that more children are going hungry. Something seems off with how we define wealth.

I start by taking inventory of the times I have felt truly rich this year. In the summer mornings, when I head outside before my kids wake up to pick dew-wet berries for their breakfast as birds begin to fly across the rosy pinks and oranges of dawn. When a dairy farmer friend texted me that he threw a surprise extra case of cream on the Farm Connex truck, so we in turn hosted a party churning and scooping ice cream for our whole neighborhood. When I got my car stuck on a class-four road in mud season, and four people I didn't know helped push it out, then shared brownies with me on their porch.

In *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*, Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, "What if our metrics for well-being included birdsong, the crescendo of crickets on a summer evening, and neighbors calling to each other across the road? [...] Wealth is having enough to share, and the practice for dealing with abundance is to give it away."

What I hope you will find in this issue of NOFA Notes is that kind of metric for wealth: wealth defined by people improving the health of the land, strengthening their relationships with their communities, and committing to the wellbeing of all. A measure of a wealthy place is one in which people have found their particular gifts and offer them generously. From members gathering to strengthen mutual aid networks to farmers sharing land, from folks growing extra food for those with less in their bank accounts to experienced growers sharing their time to mentor new farmers, this issue documents just a tiny slice of the richness of our community.

I know that over our own feast table, we'll be reading aloud from the poetry of the newly departed, sorely missed luminary of organic farming, Wendell Berry: "And we pray, not for new earth or heaven, but to be quiet in heart, and in eye, clear. What we need is here."

In gratitude,

Grace Oedel

Executive Director, NOFA-VT

Re-learning Community with the Land Together Learning Network

Megan Browning, NOFA-VT Farmer Services Program Facilitator

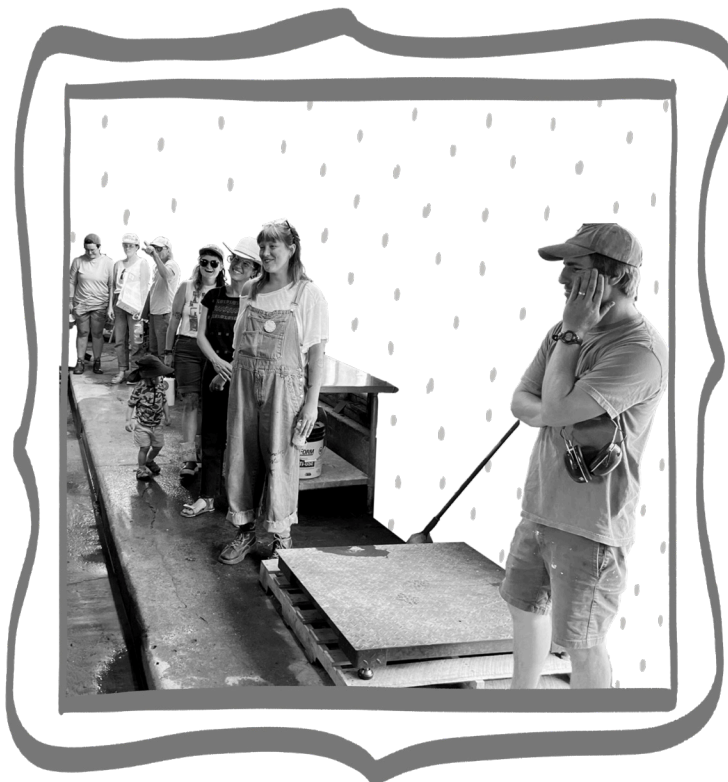
“Who is the boss?” asked participant Julie Wolcott at the most recent gathering of NOFA-VT’s Land Together Learning Network, hosted at The Farm Upstream in Jericho. The rest of the group responded with laughs. In a business with five co-owners, this is a question with a complicated answer!

The Farm Upstream is just one of several Vermont-based agricultural businesses founded around collaboration, with a legal structure designed to support that shared vision. With five co-owners of the business, four of whom live on the property, the work, risks, and rewards are all shared. It takes time and intention to build trusting relationships and establish functional structures for operating as a collective, especially when our culture and legal system are centered around the individual and the nuclear family. There is a lot of learning and unlearning to do.

In a time of rapidly increasing land costs and a great deal of farmland transitioning ownership, those interested in growing food to feed their communities are approaching shared land access as a way of overcoming the challenges of modern agriculture. NOFA-VT’s membership is asking questions like, “How can we pool our resources to share the cost of getting on the land and keeping it in agriculture?” and “How can we build relationships and a shared vision to function—to grow and live—on this land together?” and “What structures and systems are needed to carry out shared decision-making for mutual benefit?”

With NOFA-VT’s new Land Together Learning Network, we are convening a group of land seekers and landholders who are committed to skilling up in relationship frameworks, communication skills, governance structures, and the financing and legal tools needed to share land successfully. For some, the vision is one of multiple businesses operating on one parcel of land, and for others, the plan is to build a cooperative structure where many people come together to run one farm.

At The Farm Upstream, one major benefit of having multiple owners is that everyone inherently wants everyone else to succeed. Each member-owner brings something to



Jake Kornfeld gives a tour of The Farm Upstream in Jericho.

the farm that helps the business as a whole to thrive. There is a lot of trust among the group, along with clear systems for building budgets, making decisions, and running the various enterprises of the farm business. Two separate LLCs—one that owns the land and one for the farm business—make it possible for a new farmer to join the business in the future with a \$1,500 buy-in, without also having to take on the risks of land and home ownership. This all took significant time and effort to put in place, and requires regular maintenance and adjustments that all the partners are willing to navigate. Using a system of sociocracy for governance, roles and responsibilities are shared among the owners. While the soil, plants, vegetables, and customers all require tending, so too do the relationships among the owner team and the many collaborative elements of the business.

So when it comes to a question like, “Who’s the boss?”, the answer has several parts. Jake and Tucker oversee most of the vegetable side of the business and typically manage day-to-day farm operations, but employees know to turn to Jac with questions about the CSA, Spencer about fruits and perennials, and Cory about flowers. Rather than following a traditional hierarchy, the management structure reflects the farm’s collaborative roots, with different people taking the lead in different areas. Hiring employees who understand and embrace that shared responsibility is key to making the model work.

NOFA-VT launched the Land Together Learning Network in partnership with the Vermont Law School’s Center for Agriculture and Food Systems and UVM’s Institute for Agroecology in response to



Stoni Tomson of New Tradition Farm and Sarah Jane Williamson of Jubilee Farm talk about their experience sharing land in Huntington.

concerns from our membership about the affordability of land, as well as the challenges of sharing land and building collaborative business structures. Through conversations with farmers and land stewards involved in shared land efforts, we heard a clear need for support in building relationships, developing organizational structures and shared vision, and navigating the legal and financial elements of collaboration. While a shared vision is a valuable first step, the practicalities of working, living, and growing food in community require intention, commitment, and regular practice. Following our shared land webinar series (recordings are available on NOFA-VT's YouTube channel), we created the Land Together Learning Network as a space for interested folks to pull back the curtain on both the rewards and challenges of growing food and operating businesses together, learning directly from farmers and land stewards engaged in shared land projects.

With thirteen participating groups of land stewards, the cohort launched with an in-person training in March focused on relational culture. Together, we learned resonant listening skills with Relational Uprising and began building connections and community among participants. Since then, we have met monthly, each time learning from a different model of shared land, including Rise and Root Farm and the Chester Agricultural Center in Chester, NY;

Jubilee Farm in Huntington, VT; Fable Farm in Barnard, VT; and The Farm Upstream in Jericho, VT. Before moving back to virtual gatherings and wrapping up in winter 2027, we will visit Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, VT, and Kindred Collective in Fletcher, VT. We hope to launch another cohort this spring.

In addition to learning from a variety of different models, we're aiming to build skills that will support participants in growing food collaboratively. While many participants are eager to learn about legal structures, all of the farms we have learned from emphasize communication, trust, and shared governance as central to long-term success. To that end, we prioritized resonant listening and Nonviolent Communication training as part of our early learning. We continue to grow our collection of resources to support collaborative groups, and in the fall and winter, we'll turn our attention to governance structures, financial tools, and legal structures. Participants will also be matched with business planning services and one-on-one mentorship as they move forward in developing their shared land projects.

At our recent visit to The Farm Upstream, we spent the first hour connecting and hearing from two cohort participants about the specifics of their shared land projects. Participants had time to reflect, ask questions, and learn from each other's experiences before touring the farm with Jake Kornfeld, one of the owners. As we explored the farm, we asked questions and discussed lessons learned from this project in its early stages of establishing as a cooperative business. While participants arrive at each visit with background information about the farm and a growing understanding of shared land models, we continue to ask deeper and more interesting questions as our learning evolves. We closed the visit with Grace

Oedel, NOFA-VT's Executive Director, who introduced Nonviolent Communication as one tool for communication and conflict transformation that participants can draw on in their own shared land projects.

"These farm visits have been the highlight of my summer," shared Ryan Eastman, a participant in the cohort. Ryan recently moved back to their father's dairy farm and is thinking ahead about creative and collaborative ways to move through the generational transition on the farm. "When we started this group, everything seemed so unclear," Ryan shared, "but now we're getting a lot more clarity on what things might look like at our farm in the future." Our goal is for each gathering to build on the one before and to ask more and better questions as we work to understand the challenges and complexities of sharing land and building potential pathways that can support future collaborative agricultural endeavors. ♦



The Land Together Learning Network traverses land collectively farmed by Eastman Farm, Fable Farm, and Kiss the Cow Farm.

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 across the state for their commitment to sustainable agriculture and innovation. Administered by NOFA-VT in collaboration with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Shelburne Farms, and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, this award highlights Vermont farms that contribute to a resilient agricultural landscape and demonstrate environmental stewardship. We are honored to introduce the latest award recipients:



Hamilton Cattle Company, Brandon, VT

Jamie Hamilton fell in love with raising animals at a young age. When the opportunity to take over a beef herd from a retiring farmer in his hometown of Brandon arose, Jamie moved back to Vermont in 2020 to start Hamilton Cattle Company. Since then, he has grown the farm from a small hobby herd to more than 400 Red Devon-Angus crosses that graze the hills of Brandon and Chittenden. Jamie manages all day-to-day operations himself and sells his beef through a number of retail markets.

As the herd has grown, the need for an upgraded cattle handling system has become clear. To better and more safely manage his herd, Hamilton Cattle Company received a \$12,000 grant to purchase an Arrowquip cattle chute with an integrated scale and RFID reader. The system will allow Jamie to efficiently track weight gains of individual animals and the herd as a whole, while making grazing decisions that benefit both the health of the herd and the land.



Boardman Hill Farm, West Rutland, VT

Since its founding in 1982, Boardman Hill Farm has been a fixture of Vermont's farming community. Originally motivated to positively impact their Rutland community and relocate the food system, Greg and Gay Cox have spent the past 40 years producing vegetables, flowers, berries, pork, chicken, and eggs for their neighbors. Beyond food, Boardman Hill Farm is also a hub for the agricultural community, as a founding member of the Rutland Farmers Market, Vermont Farmers' Food Center, and the agricultural training program Rutland Commons.

To expand the capacity, multi-functionality, and efficiency of their current storage infrastructure, Boardman Hill Farm received \$12,000 to convert a portion of their barn into a four-season, multi-use facility for crop storage and processing. Greg and Gay believe this addition will allow the farm to increase its winter sales and position the farm for long-term viability.



Firefly Farm at Burke Hollow, West Burke, VT

In 2019, Michelle LaRocque-Tipton and Ben Tipton purchased their dream property in West Burke and moved back to their home state to farm commercially with their family. Over the past six years, Firefly Farm at Burke Hollow has grown into an intensive, diversified, multi-generational farm operated by Ben, Michelle, their son Makail, and Makail's partner Anna. Together, they offer vegetables, fruits, eggs, maple syrup, pasture-raised chicken, and value-added products through a CSA, year-round farm stand, and three farmers markets.

Led by Makail, the farm is transitioning its production systems away from fossil fuels and tractor power. This past February, they purchased a team of draft horses and initial horse-drawn implements, but tragically, one of the horses died unexpectedly just three weeks after arriving. To support the farm's continued transition to horsepower, Firefly Farm at Burke Hollow received \$12,000 to purchase a new horse for their team and the remaining implements needed to fully shift their systems away from their tractor. ♦

Applications for the next round are open through September 28. Applications are open to any small or medium-sized farm in Vermont. To learn more and apply, visit WWW.VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG.



From Field to Flour at the Champlain Valley Grain Center

Becca Perrin, NOFA-VT Farm to School Local Procurement Specialist



Todd Hardie and Tyler Murray at the Champlain Valley Grain Center.



Organic rye grown by Granite Grains.

On a sweltering day this past June, a few NOFA-VT staff had the opportunity to visit the new Champlain Valley Grain Center in Ferrisburgh and get a firsthand look at what's taking shape there. For interwoven local food systems die-hards like ourselves, what we witnessed was nothing short of thrilling: a delivery of organic Redeemer wheat berries from Granite Grains in West Haven, rye and bourbon whiskey patiently aging in dozens upon dozens of oak barrels, a massive Morrisville-made New American Stone Mill, and rye bread baked with a 160-year-old sourdough starter from the family of Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater in Glover.

As a multi-purpose processor, bakery, distillery, packer, and distribution hub, the Center's mission is to support farm families, protect the working landscape, bolster organic agriculture, and create lasting local jobs. For years, Vermont has felt the absence of this kind of centralized infrastructure to support its burgeoning grain chain. Despite robust consumer demand and an increasing number of farmers growing grain, the state has lacked the facilities to receive, store, and mill local grain at scale. Now, the Champlain Valley Grain Center has opened its doors to help solve that problem.

The force behind this ambitious project is Todd Hardie, whose history speaks to the very interconnectedness the Center embodies: he is the founder of Honey Gardens Apiaries and Caledonia Spirits, the makers of Barr Hill Gin, where he demonstrated the power of local ingredients by sourcing raw honey from his own hives and organic rye berries from his Greensboro grain-growing operation, Thornhill Farm. When asked about the initial inspiration for the Grain Center, Hardie points to a persistent bottleneck of in-state processing for growers, while emphasizing statewide interdependence. He notes that

the Center is designed to receive grain on the day of harvest, offering centralized storage, milling, and packing services that farmers simply couldn't access locally before.

Hardie envisions the Center as more than just a link in the supply chain. The Center works directly with farmers like Tyler Murray of Granite Grains in West Haven, who grows dozens of acres of organic wheat, corn, and rye for them and who was paired with Todd Hardie in a peer-to-peer mentorship through the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Rather than competing with established local grain producers like Nitty Gritty Grains of Charlotte, the Center partners with them to mill organic corn and wheat for their markets. And the whiskey? It's not just a side project. "Whiskey is complementary to flour production," Hardie says, pointing out that distilling builds more value into a commodity crop and helps expand the market for local grain.

The value-add cycle continues in the Center's on-site bakery, where hearty rye bread is baked with a very unique ingredient: a starter that originated with the Schumann family in Europe over 160 years ago and made its way to Vermont with the Bread and Puppet troupe. Working with baker Shea Flannery of Shea La Vie Bakery in Middlebury, the Center is finishing trials on a product lineup that will hit local markets soon, including a 100% whole wheat loaf and the special rye bread. These breads, along with sifted and whole-grain flours, will be available through the ACORN food hub and the Middlebury Coop very soon, giving consumers and chefs alike access to truly local baked goods. Meanwhile, Thornhill Farm whiskey—distilled from rye grown by North Hardwick Farm and Early Riser corn developed by Jack Lazor of Butterworks Farm, a late mentor

of Hardie's—will soon appear on shelves in Champlain Valley liquor stores.

The opening of the Center coincides perfectly with the work of NOFA-VT's Farm to Institution team, whose project, *On The Rise*, aims to increase the volume of Vermont-grown grains and baked goods served in local school cafeterias by addressing supply, demand, and distribution gaps across the state. The Center is already supporting this vision, supplying whole wheat flour for scratch-made pizza dough in Addison County schools. With NOFA's partnership, the Center plans to expand wholesale flour and bread sales to schools across the state this year, recognizing K-12 cafeterias as one of the most powerful markets for building a lasting, scaled-up local food economy.

The Champlain Valley Grain Center is a multifaceted market development windfall for Vermont grain farms and local markets alike. By connecting the dots between farmers, bakers, distillers, and consumers, Todd Hardie and his partners are building a resilient, integrated local grain chain that will nourish Vermonters for generations to come. By providing a reliable outlet for their crops, the Center gives farmers the confidence to scale up production, knowing their harvest has a home in bread, flour, or barrel, and that the entire cycle stays rooted in Vermont's working landscape.

Stay tuned for more updates as NOFA-VT, the Champlain Valley Grain Center, and our partners continue to support a more robust grainshed in Vermont! ♦



NOFA-VT | Direct Markets

Announcing: Bumper Crop!



Now, Vermont businesses and organizations can give the gift of a delicious visit to the farmers market.

By Andrew Graham, NOFA-VT Farmers Market Specialist

This summer, NOFA-VT launched a new way to support local farmers and make it easier to shop at farmers markets: Bumper Crop, a new farmers market voucher program. Inspired by a successful program operated by the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets, Bumper Crop vouchers are distributed by businesses or organizations. They could be given out as a benefit for employees, a perk for customers, or in any way the businesses chooses. The vouchers can then be used to purchase just about any food or beverage at participating markets—including hot, prepared food. (The only exceptions are products containing alcohol or cannabis.)

There are also several instances of farmers markets and local food shelves collaborating to use Bumper Crop as an innovative food security program for their communities. For example, The Richmond Food Shelf obtained a grant from their local Rotary Club to sponsor several hundred dollars' worth of Bumper Crop, which they handed out in \$10 increments to clients accessing food at the

food shelf. Those clients could then use their Bumper Crop vouchers at the Richmond Farmers Market (or other markets of their choosing) to acquire more food, supporting local farmers in the process.

About half of the farmers markets in Vermont currently participate in the program, with more markets signing on all the time. Participating markets can be found in the NOFA-VT farmers market directory by selecting "Bumper Crop" under the payment methods category.

We are actively recruiting businesses and organizations to participate in the Bumper Crop program! Businesses are only responsible for paying for vouchers that are actually redeemed at markets, plus a small printing and admin fee. If you are part of a business or organization that is interested in giving the gift of fresh, local food to their employees, customers, or community, please reach out to andrew@nofavt.org to learn more. ♦



A Just Transition for Vermont's Dairy Farms

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

Currently, the dairy sector occupies 80 percent of agricultural land in Vermont. It remains the most economically important component of the state's agricultural sector. In 2025, the state's dairies maintained 117,000 cows, producing 599 million pounds of milk. Vermont's dairy industry contributes an estimated \$2.2 billion annually to the state's economy and provides 62 percent of the milk consumed in New England. By keeping land open, dairy farms are also a major asset to tourism, which is the leading economic driver of the state's economy. If it weren't for dairy farms, Vermont would look less like a Norman Rockwell painting and more like the deep woods of northern Minnesota. But the red barn with black-and-white cows standing in a green field has become an anachronistic icon fronting for an ever-consolidating industrial model of dairy farming.

Today, the dairy industry is undergoing an accelerating trend of consolidation, with a concomitant loss of small and mid-sized farms. But the trend isn't entirely new: this sector has been on the ropes since the farm crisis of the early 1980s. In 1950, there were more than 11,000 dairies in Vermont. Back in 1975, when you could still earn a middle-class income as a Vermont dairy farmer, the state had 5,000 dairies. By the end of 2010, the number was down to just over 1,000. Today, we have approximately the same number of cows and milk output as in 1975, but fewer than 400 farms left.

If we continue with business as usual, we are doomed to remain in a spiral of soil degradation and loss of small family farms. Our farms will be unable to cope with supply chain disruptions and will be increasingly vulnerable to climate extremes. Right now, the average age of a dairy farmer in Vermont is 63. Under current conditions, there is no viable path for a next generation to take up the mantle of the small family farm, let alone for new farmers to gain access to land and credit. If agriculture is to continue to operate within the free market, it will require reforming the misguided subsidies that encourage farms to increase production. At the same time, a just transition in the dairy sector will require built-in safety

nets to ensure that land caretakers are no longer forced to cut corners, expand their operations, and use extractive, degenerative practices just to stay solvent in the short term.

Dairy farmers invest enormous amounts of capital in equipment, infrastructure, inputs, and labor. We cannot expect farmers who are forced to carry substantial annual and long-term debt to be innovators and risk-takers. They have seen profit margins flatlined for 50 years while operating costs have skyrocketed. Meanwhile, equipment manufacturers and purveyors of copyrighted seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides rake in record profits. Added to this, the major purchasers of fluid milk, like Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) cooperative, have invested heavily in a vertical integration model and become major processors of dairy products. Giant consolidated co-ops like DFA are now farmer-owned in name only. In fact, their investment in processing puts them at odds with their farmer members, because the signature way they keep their processing costs down is to keep the price of milk paid to farmers perennially depressed. DFA claims to be addressing climate change by promoting dairy practices that make more milk from less feed, and as they push farmers to keep producing more, they keep the markets flooded and the price paid to farmers low.

Meanwhile, Vermont's dairy processing sector has announced a wave of closures in recent months—the most recent being the DFA plant in St. Albans—resulting in the loss of 80 union jobs. Big dairy consolidates to improve shareholders' bottom line, while abandoning local communities and farms.

On the bright side, the conventional dairy sector offers our greatest opportunity to transition to organic, regenerative practices that can draw down carbon, restore aquifers, enhance biodiversity, provide meaningful livelihoods, and ensure food security. On a global scale, agriculture accounts for roughly one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, with the dairy sector responsible for an estimated 14 percent of agriculture's share. Transitioning conventionally managed dairy acres to organic, regenerative, and agroecological

practices will have significant impacts in reducing climate pollution and environmental contamination.

Almost all legislative efforts to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions focus on transportation, renewable power, and energy efficiency. For a rural state like Vermont, this is an incomplete and anthropocentric approach. With our abundance of undeveloped landscape, solutions that leverage and support our farms and forest land represent a huge and too often neglected opportunity to mitigate and heal the land. Our agriculture and forestry sectors are crucial to real long-term sustainable solutions and should be prioritized in any comprehensive legislation addressing climate change.

A 2,500-head confinement dairy produces the equivalent amount of raw manure that a city of 400,000 people produces in raw sewage waste. By shifting



to a grazing model, nitrous oxide from chemical fertilizer and methane belches from thousands of concentrated cows could be reduced and eventually eliminated. With a grazing herd, 100 percent of manure is recycled as a valuable bio-digestible soil amendment, either while the cows are grazing or in the form of compost applied to pasture and crops. Studies have shown that well-managed grazing herds can sequester more carbon than they emit.

For decades, state and federal governments' response to the crisis in the dairy industry has been to fund projects that prop up the existing model of perpetual expansion and consolidation. Instead, dairy farmers need viable pathways to reduce their herds, get them back out on the land grazing, and diversify their operations, including by integrating silvopasture systems. Elements of agroforestry can be integrated into annual cropping systems, with perennial fruit and nut crops enhancing diversity, resilience, and profitability. All these incentives aim to re-establish a regional food system, to be served by regional processing plants and food hubs. In the process, the food dollars of our region's eaters would go to our region's farmers and food service workers, ensuring healthy nutrient-dense food for the population, a living wage for farmers and farm workers, and healthy ecosystems for our children.



The original New Deal in the 1930s had many flaws and built-in inequities along economic and racial divides. For instance, it excluded agricultural and domestic workers from receiving an established minimum wage. But it was the closest we've come to a successful democratic populist revolution in this country. The programs of that era offer a template for us to build upon. The New Deal sought to guarantee that any farmer willing to apply themselves to the work of tending the land could earn a living wage through a variety of initiatives that stabilized prices of agricultural products and reduced oversupply.

This past June, the office of Senator Peter Welch (D-VT) announced the introduction of a bill designed to transform the dairy sector that echoes some of those New Deal-era reforms, titled the Milk from Family Dairies Act (MFDA). The prototype for this legislation was initially drafted by the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) over a decade ago. Since then, NFFC and its member organizations (including NOFA-VT) have been lobbying Congress in support of the adoption of this legislation. The MFDA would radically reform the dairy sector through a non-monetized national quota system, granting incentives to support small and mid-size farms and offering large farms incentives to reduce herd numbers, thereby deconsolidating and reversing the trend toward CAFO-style operations. The bill articulates three main prongs:

1. Ensure market transparency and fair pricing for family dairy farmers.
2. Maintain reliable consumer access to reasonably priced dairy products.
3. Revitalize rural communities by supporting farms that milk fewer than 200 cows, which have been hit hardest by consolidation and price volatility.

Vermont has the highest percentage of organic dairy farms of any dairy state. Unlike the original NFFC draft, Welch's version of the MFDA primarily focuses on conventional farms because he has already promoted similar reforms for organic under the Organic Dairy Assistance, Investment, and Reporting Yields (O DAIRY) Act, reintroduced in 2025. But there are important supports in MFDA for conventional and organic dairies alike.

We can improve farm income and help save the planet by leveraging the system to pay incentives to land caretakers who embrace organic, regenerative, and agroecological practices. These practices can sequester carbon, protect air and water quality, eliminate pesticide use, transition

from fossil fuels, and increase food security. If we transition all agricultural land to these systems, we can begin reversing the effects of a warming climate within ten years. It's not a matter of getting rid of cows—it's a matter of adding back everything else and allowing them to get back to grazing on pasture where they can do the most good. This kind of farming is management-intensive and requires more human labor, but that can translate into an era of opportunity for many more future farmers.

If agriculture is to play a significant role in the State of Vermont's legal mandate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the dairy sector must undergo a just transition and adopt organic, regenerative soil health management practices. The MFDA is a promising first step in that direction. In the process, we can also bring resilience back into our food system and restore vital ecological functions to our landscapes. The convergence of the climate crisis and the dairy crisis presents us—citizens, eaters, and most especially farmers—with an opportunity to begin the grand adventure of transitioning our farms and forests to organic and agroecological management.

Imagine a world where environmentally friendly farming is supported by society in the same way we currently support essential workers such as firefighters, first responders, and the National Guard. A society in which the health of soil and the sanctity of biodiversity are considered the only true sources of national wealth and security. ♦

Cultivating a Farmer-Led Regional Agroforestry Transformation

By Kevin Haggerty, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

What would it take to build a food system that could withstand the disruptions we know are coming—and the ones we can't yet imagine? In Vermont, the past five years have offered plenty of reminders of how vulnerable our current system can be. Drought, flooding, COVID-19, and an economic system that often fails to support small-scale agriculture have all strained farmers and communities across the region.

In response, many farmers are experimenting with more resilient and just ways of stewarding the land and feeding one another, focusing on strategies that are more ecologically diverse, resilient, and rooted in place. One of these approaches is agroforestry: the intentional integration of trees, livestock, and crops into productive, biodiverse agricultural systems.

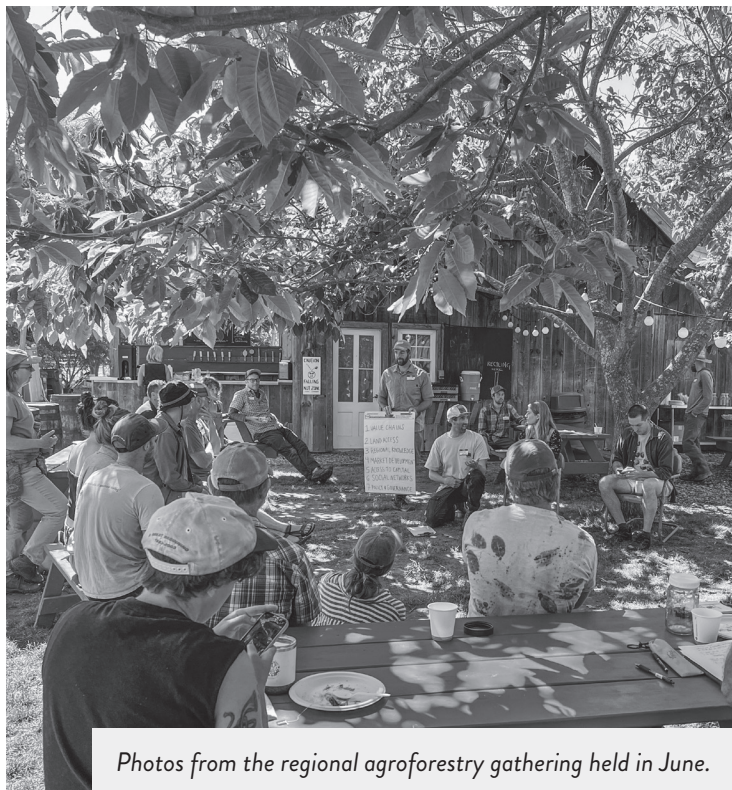
Agroforestry is not a new idea. Indigenous peoples across the Northeast have long stewarded landscapes in ways that integrated perennial plants, food-producing trees, and other forms of agriculture. European colonization forcibly displaced these longstanding perennial foodways and imposed Western agricultural systems, disrupting generations of ecological knowledge along with the foods and landscapes that knowledge sustained. Today, farmers across the region are working to rediscover and reimagine these perennial approaches for the farms and food systems of the present, developing systems for growing crops and raising livestock under tree canopies, and cultivating the genetic resources, infrastructure, and markets needed to make these tree-based systems viable farm enterprises.

To support this farmer-led movement, NOFA-VT has organized and facilitated a farmer agroforestry cohort, beginning in the spring of 2025. Through this cohort, a group of 15 farms from across the state has come together to form a dynamic learning community working to strengthen their shared knowledge of temperate agroforestry systems, while also fostering a network of peer support, mutual aid, and social

connection. This cohort gathers monthly on farms across Vermont, exploring topics ranging from plant propagation to cooperative marketing.

This model has quickly demonstrated the power of community-led, farmer-to-farmer learning spaces. What began as an educational program has evolved into a vehicle for expanding Vermont's capacity to support agroforestry. The cohort now facilitates farm-to-farm coordination, collective sourcing of planting stock and farm supplies, and efforts to establish hubs for specialized equipment sharing. The group is also exploring opportunities for shared marketing and working to build a stronger voice for advocating for state and local policies that support a perennial food system.

The emergence of grassroots agroforestry groups like Vermont's farmer agroforestry cohort is not unique. Throughout the Northeast, producers are coming together to form local groups, share knowledge, and collaborate to advance the agroforestry movement. From western Massachusetts to the Hudson Valley to Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, these farmer-led networks have been instrumental in building momentum for agroforestry across the region. But realizing the transformative potential of a perennial food system will require collaboration beyond state lines. To strengthen food security, build resilient agricultural economies, and care for both working lands and natural resources, farmers and organizers must connect across state and bioregional boundaries and work together toward a shared



Photos from the regional agroforestry gathering held in June.

vision. With this in mind, NOFA-VT hosted a regional agroforestry gathering in the summer of 2026, bringing farmers from across the Northeast to western Massachusetts to strengthen the region's farmer-led knowledge base, cultivate relationships across state lines, and collectively strategize about how to build a tree-based food system that nourishes our communities and our region.

This two-day gathering began with an afternoon touring Yellowbud Farm. Together, the group of 70 farmers walked the alley-cropped tree nursery and learned how Yellowbud propagates high-quality oak, chestnut, hickory, mulberry, persimmon, and honeylocust seedlings and how these trees intersect with regional food security to provide a delicious, regionally appropriate, and nutrient-dense foundation for a new foodway. As the tour ended, the group settled at picnic tables and on blankets to share an incredible meal of forest foods as the sun set over the farm.

The next morning, the group came back together in the shade of a chestnut tree at Carr's Ciderhouse, where Elspeth Hay, author of *Feed Us with Trees*, and Russell Wallack of Breadtree Farms shared guiding principles for building a food system that challenges conventions, de-commodifies land and food, centers humans as keystone species, and does not recreate a system born to fail. Building on this vision, the group spent the morning in small, facilitated working groups exploring some of the practical challenges facing the

agroforestry movement, from access to land and planting stock to developing viable markets and regional knowledge-sharing networks. Throughout the cider garden, conversations turned toward alternative models for land access, strategies for building value chains, and ways to strengthen collaboration and knowledge sharing across the region.

In the afternoon, the group left the cider garden to visit nearby agroforestry operations and see some of these ideas taking shape on the ground. At Preservation Farm and Orchard and Meadowfed Lamb, farmers led us through a mosaicked landscape of chestnuts, apples, lamb, and vegetables, demonstrating how their collective farm is reimagining what it means to manage a complex agroecosystem while building a viable farm business. Later, gathered in the chestnut processing center at Big River Chestnuts, Jono Neiger shared how he is building the value chains, processing infrastructure, and markets needed to establish a future chestnut economy in the Northeast.

From farmer groups like the NOFA-VT agroforestry cohort to regional gatherings of farmers committed to cooperation and coordination, the foundations of a perennial food system in the Northeast are already taking shape. And, in a way that only a meal of acorn noodles, silvo-pastured lamb, and chestnut-maple-bacon "brownies" shared in community can show us, this food system is not theoretical or some distant vision of the future. It is here, now, taking root all around us. ♦



NOFA-VT | Direct Markets

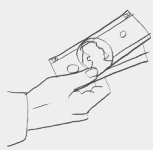
Share the Harvest

supporting NOFA-VT's Farm Share program

Share the Harvest this October with your fellow Vermonters! This month-long, community-driven fundraiser offers an opportunity to support NOFA-VT's Farm Share program—simply by eating, drinking, and shopping at local participating restaurants, breweries, and businesses!

Every dollar raised in the Share the Harvest fundraiser helps subsidize the cost of CSA shares for low-income Vermonters. By dining and shopping during Share the Harvest, you support local farms, increase food security in Vermont, and support restaurants and other food-based businesses in your community. A win-win-win all October long!

Visit NOFAVT.ORG/SHARETHEHARVEST to find participating businesses near you (and even a few you can order from online!).



1. During the month of October, eat out or shop at generous participating businesses.



2. Participating businesses donate \$ to NOFA-VT's Farm Share Program.



3. Farmers offer CSA shares at a subsidized cost to low-income Vermonters who then receive delicious, healthy food all season long!

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US SHARE THE HARVEST!



One Potato at a Time

By Jessica Hays-Lucas, NOFA-VT Community Organizer

“Grow potatoes. Grow relationships. Grow resilience. Feed each other.” This is the simple guidance from the Spud Club, an autonomous, decentralized, potato-growing mutual aid network with local groups, or “nodes,” across central Vermont.

Spud Club participants and NOFA-VT members gathered in July in Cabot to break bread, mash potatoes, and learn about how to support initiatives with the shared goals of food sovereignty and community resilience. Farmer Ama of Nama Farm prepared a delicious potato-based dinner featuring Spud Club potatoes, locally sourced meat and cheese, and her own veggies, herbs, salts, and seasonings—“indescribably wonderful!”

The gathering was a celebration of potatoes, community, and local food resilience. Farmer Ama grounded the dinner in the potato’s Peruvian roots, adaptability, and significance to ecosystems and movements across the globe. Amanda Franz, founder of the Spud Club, shared how the Spud Club came about: “Food growing is a collective process. It’s intended to be done in togetherness. So I was looking for a way to create systems for more people to grow food.” Potatoes made good sense because they’re adaptable, they’re easy to use, and they’re relatively storable. “I thought, ‘Okay! Potatoes!’”

And now, the Spud Club is a growing network with more than a dozen nodes, a mix of public and private. Nodes are autonomous; each node decides what to grow and how to distribute the potatoes. They might work with schools or food shelves, or host community dinners—any way of distributing food through a food justice lens, reaching folks who have less access to food and sharing the values and vision of the Spud Club. The collective Spud Club network is a place of mutual support for things like sharing seed potatoes, troubleshooting, hosting work brigades, distribution, and storage space.

One Spud Club node is the Pajj Wadley-Bailey Community Garden, a food sovereignty and reparations project by and for Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities in central Vermont. Kalé Camara shared, “Pajj’s Garden does it all. We offer space to grow, seed distribution, gardening support, and a healing space for BIPOC folks in Vermont... If—when—the food system fails, we will have

food. We will not leave anyone behind.”

Because of the Spud Club’s growing reach, storage space is an emergent need. The Spud Club is always looking for more space in existing root cellars within its networks. Looking toward creating a more food-resilient future, they’re also exploring creating additional root cellars. That might include small, temporary root storage structures made from repurposed bins and built into the side of a hill, or community root storage space that is larger and longer-term but would take more resources to create. Bill Chidsey, a NOFA-VT member who came down from Greensboro to learn about the Spud Club, said, “It keeps me alive to know that people are doing things like this. My follow-up is to look into some storage options. We’ll find something.”

Throughout dinner, folks underscored the constant work for systemic change. One person was interested in running for local office; another is currently serving and offered support. Yet another shared what they’ve learned from participating in local school board meetings and encouraged everyone to engage in theirs. Another shared stories from working at the State House to pass (and now to fund) the Farm Security Fund. Farmer Ama called this work “the spiritual force of speaking truth to power.”

There was an abundance of power, truth, and potatoes feeding spirits and bodies. Bill reflected, “This was a wonderful opportunity, and I felt so glad to be there. I left with action steps and fire in my belly.” Mutual aid networks like these do more than fill the gaps left by systems that fall short. They are ways to live into the world we’re creating, grounded in community and with the joy of being able to keep each other fed.

Learn more about the Spud Club on their website: theeverythingspace.com/spud-club. You’ll find roles, guidance and expectations, and ways to contribute. To contribute to Pajj’s Garden, visit: givebutter.com/donate-to-pajjs-garden-ygq06n. And, follow Farmer Ama Peyman of Nama Farm to keep up with Nama Farm’s delicious offerings and events! ♦



NOFA-VT member gathering in July at Nama Farm.



Mutual aid steps in when our governmental policies fall short. And too many policies are inadequate, not addressing our root challenges or our fullest possibilities. We want thriving rural communities that are nourished by our delicious and healthy food. We want farmers on land, and earning a decent living, with health care and the ability to care for children and elders. But right now—most notably with the federal Farm Bill—the policies fail our farming community.

To that end, we believe rather than waiting for the federal government to come up with the solutions, we need a Vermont Farm Bill. Our fall Member Meetings will be spaces for NOFA-VT members to shape and inform a Vermont Farm Bill. We’ll also begin to develop a shared analysis of what it will take to make it happen.

There’s a seat for everyone at this table—long-time farmers, farmers seeking land, families, new Vermonters, eaters, and producers of all types. We all have a stake in this and important insights to share. Come join in! You can find more details on our website at nofavt.org/member-meetings. Reserve your spot, or get in touch with jessica@nofavt.org if you’d like to host!

The Hidden Value of Appreciated Stock

If you own investments that have increased significantly in value, a gift of appreciated stock can be one of the most tax-efficient ways to support NOFA-VT. When you donate appreciated stock directly to NOFA-VT, you can generally avoid paying capital gains tax on the appreciation. NOFA-VT receives the shares directly and, as a nonprofit organization, can sell them without paying tax, allowing more of the assets to support the mission you care about.



Example: Suppose you purchased stock years ago for \$5,000. It appreciated \$20,000 over the years, and today it is worth \$25,000.

If you sell the stock first and then make a donation:

vs.

If you donate the stock directly to NOFA-VT:

- You sell the \$25,000 stock
- You pay federal and state capital gains tax on the \$20,000 you appreciated
- You then donate the remaining proceeds to NOFA-VT

- NOFA-VT receives the full \$25,000 value
- No capital gains tax is triggered on the \$20,000 appreciation
- You may be eligible for a charitable income tax deduction based on the fair market value of the gift, subject to federal and state rules and limitations

Donors often discover they can make a larger gift than they expected because they are using appreciated assets rather than cash. This strategy can be especially attractive for long-held stocks, mutual funds, or other investments that have grown substantially over time.

Please note: These examples are not tax advice, and individual tax benefits vary. Please consult your financial advisor, CPA, or attorney to decide on a donation strategy that best fits your goals.

“I keep an eye on my stocks, and when they’re high, I take the opportunity to maximize my giving to support causes important to me. Farmers are the foundation of a resilient food system, and I love supporting NOFA-VT’s work to ensure Vermont’s farmers have the support they need!”

- Cameron, Donor from Montpelier



NOFA Interstate Council's Vision for a Future of Resilient, Plentiful, Healthy and Locally-Grounded Food

For more than half a century, NOFA has been growing a vision of a verdant, fair, and delicious future rooted in thriving agri-CULTURE. Founded in 1971, NOFA is one of the oldest organic farming organizations in the country, with seven independent nonprofit chapters—Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Jersey—that work together regionally, nationally, and internationally through the NOFA Interstate Council (NOFA IC). This year at our retreat, longtime NOFA farmer leaders who have farmed, grown community, and worked for change reflected on the difficult, divided, and dangerous times in which we live. We discussed how NOFA has never been exclusively focused on farming in isolation, but rather has always been about growing our part of an expansive vision of how we could live, modeling that another way was possible. Another way of growing food, certainly—but also another way of being in

community, both locally and globally. A way of collective care, of love, and of fierce commitment to a thriving world for all.

Those roots remain the grounding that nourishes, strengthens, and guides our shared work and commitments to this day. When dominant forces in society value profit over people and planet, and try to divide us from our neighbors and distance us from our working lands, we know what to do, how to grow, and what will allow our full commitment to “support the long-term wellbeing of the earth and all its people” (from our vision) to flourish.

As a result of that retreat, a group of those longtime farmer leaders wrote about NOFA's long work of tending another way. The whole Interstate Council reaffirmed the values that have grounded our work for 55 years, and we are glad to share them with you now:



Our vision is that every person is able to live their life with healthy food, clean water and air, community, livelihood, dignity, and purpose within the means of our life-giving planet. We seek that vision on every level, from our households and farms to our communities, states, bioregions, nation, and world. For that vision to be fulfilled, every person, no matter their origin or circumstances, must have all their basic human needs met without degrading the air, water, soil, ecosystems, and climate which we have been given and on which we depend for our lives.

We strive to realize our vision through our way of life, in rural and urban communities where everyone is welcome, where we practice regenerative organic, agroecological farming and gardening, mutual interdependence through local trade, marketing and distribution, saving and sharing locally adapted seeds and breeds, teaching others, constantly learning more ourselves, and opposing the corrosive racism that undermines the promise of this nation. We celebrate diversity not only on farms but in all ways, recognizing its essential value as a cornerstone of health and a source of joy and curiosity.

We strive to realize our vision within a system that contradicts these values, that denies racial, social, political, and economic justice as well as basic physical needs, and that is rapidly degrading the soil, polluting the air and water with toxic pesticides and herbicides, depleting biodiversity, valuing only what can be sold for a price, externalizing the true costs, and disrupting the climate.

We believe that it is urgent to defend workers across the food system, especially marginalized immigrants who are cornerstones of our food system. To reduce the vulnerability of these workers, it is time to repair the exclusions and injustices our food system has inherited from white supremacy—from weak labor laws to food apartheid and the weaponization of food to a militarized border policing complex.

We believe it is just as urgent to prevent the liquidation of yet more farms at the hands of mega-corporations and investors. We must build momentum to make better farming possible where people can do meaningful labor, unwinding corporate control over our ability to satisfy basic human needs—and to break the cycle of off-loading harms onto the next vulnerable group or country. As Gandhi often reminded us, the world has enough for everyone's needs, but not enough to satisfy the greed of those who push for ever more profit.

In these turbulent times, NOFA's egalitarian eco-farming and healthy food vision is attracting growing numbers of families concerned with raising healthy children who wish to join with a dynamic grassroots community of landworkers and advocates to bring this vision to life.

NOFA is committed to working for a future of well-being for all, starting with the most marginalized. NOFA commits to joining alliances that will swell into the massive coalitions necessary for a natural organic future to emerge.



A Warm Welcome to Our New Staff!



Zymora Davinchi

Winter Conference Assistant

Zymora has nearly 10 years of experience in social equity, community organizing, program development, and working within Vermont's food system, including growing food on farms, managing garden spaces, developing fellowship programs, operating CSA's, advocating for BIPOC food sovereignty, and more. She was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, raised in Vermont, the Green Mountain State, with roots Down South by way of Tennessee, Virginia, and Alabama. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Public Communications with a minor in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and a Master's Degree in Public Health from the University of Vermont. She loves herbalism, being in nature, going to concerts, collecting vinyl, spending time with loved ones, and drinking tea.

Thank You for Your Support!

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

Blume Farm, Shrewsbury, VT
Bolser Farm LLC, Chelsea, VT
Cold Springs Family Farm, Hyde Park, VT
David Savage, Jefferson, NH
Earthen Groves Ecovillage, Jacksonville, VT
Flower Gap Farm and Creamery, Charlotte, VT
Georgia McDougall, Burlington, VT

Georgie Rubens, Burlington, VT
Glaston Orchard, Shaftsbury, VT
Good Hill Farm, Hardwick, VT
Green Dream Farm, Enosburg Falls, VT
Greensmith Collective, Sheffield, VT
Juneberry Farm LLC, North Troy, VT
Kyle Weatherhogg, Stowe, VT

LePage's Rising Sun Farm, Derby, VT
Marci Lutsky, Waitsfield, VT
Montshire Packing LLC, North Haverhill, NH
Northwoods Native Nursery, Swanton, VT
Peter Stone, Orwell, VT
Pinky Toe Chai, Brattleboro, VT
Purple Carrot Farm, Bennington, VT

Roberto Zapata, Jeffersonville, VT
Shed Light Farm, West Rupert, VT
Skyline Holsteins, Derby, VT
Stronghold Farm, Craftsbury, VT
Unforbidden Orchards, Shaftsbury, VT
Vermont Jersey Beef, Hubbardton, 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!

Bolser Farm
Cold Spring Family Farm
David Howrigan

Green Mountain Girls Farm,
Leaning Barn VT
Sorrel Field Farmstead

Stronghold Farm
Sunday Bell Farm
White Rock Farm



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



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Activist Toni Cade
Bambara pinpointed the
power of art in her famous
declaration that **"the role
of the artist is to make the
revolution irresistible."**

Thank you to longtime
NOFA-VT member,
Bonnie Acker, for using
her heart and creativity to
make our work irresistible.

Years ago, artist
Bonnie Acker gifted
NOFA-VT a set of tiny
collages that spoke to
the spirit of our work.
We've been slipping
them into thank-you
notes, handing them
out at events, and
leaving them around
the office for visitors to
discover ever since. This
summer, she created a
whole new collection of
mini artworks inspired
by NOFA-VT's
mission. Keep your
eye out for these
beautiful tokens of the
movement at your next
NOFA-VT event!