

# Agriculture

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Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Hold a Harvest Festival to Celebrate Local Agriculture (Richmond)
- Establish a Local Foods Retail Center (Manchester)
- Provide Year-round Access to Local Foods (Bellows Falls)
- Develop Trails to Tour Local Farms, Arts, and Other Islands Highlights (Grand Isle)

## *Supporting Local Producers*

- Already, assets like the farmers' market, Local First Vermont campaign and statewide local foods promotion have sparked consumer interest in the concept of local foods. It is important to keep in mind the *range* of reasons why someone might get involved with local foods, interest in the local economy, environmental concerns, finding fresh foods, community building, drawing in tourists.
- An early question that will come up is defining "local." Since there is no single accepted definition, having a clear definition is the next best thing. Many groups use a 100-mile radius; this measurement is big enough to include a variety of products but small enough to be easily recognized as local. It also mirrors the work done in others regions of the country. To view a map of your 100-mile circle, visit [100milediet.org](http://100milediet.org). Some adjust this measurement. For example, the Hannah Grimes Center uses 150 miles, which brings their territory out to the seashore. State organizations, like the Agency of Agriculture, tend to use state borders. Others take a more bioregional approach –local foods advocates in Lamoille County, for example, emphasize eating from within their watershed.
- The Project Team can look to several other models for how other groups navigate the questions around local foods and bring consumer interest to a higher level.
  - **Tiffany Mannion** at the **Hannah Grimes Center** ([hannahgrimes.com](http://hannahgrimes.com)) is a great starting place.
  - The **Northeast Organic Farmers' Association** works with both producers and consumers. Their website is [nofavt.org](http://nofavt.org).
  - **Vital Communities** provided an early foundation for the localvores movement and promotes local foods in the Upper Valley region. Their website is: [vitalcommunities.org](http://vitalcommunities.org)
  - A community-based group that promotes connections between local farmers and consumers is **Rutland Area Farm and Food Link**. [rutlandfarmandfood.org](http://rutlandfarmandfood.org)
  - **The Vermont Fresh Network** works on farmer-chef partnerships for local food ([vermontfresh.net](http://vermontfresh.net)) or call Meghan Sheradin (802) 434-2000). Groups are also working on local foods in schools, particularly **VT FEED** (Food Education Every Day) [vtfeed.org](http://vtfeed.org).

- **Local Agriculture and Community Exchange** recently opened a store in Barre which specializes in local food and includes educational and community components. They are online at [lacevt.org](http://lacevt.org).
- The Burlington Community and Economic Development Office hosts a **Burlington Food Council**: ([www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/foodcouncil.html](http://www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/foodcouncil.html))
- The Massachusetts-based **Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture** (CISA) organization has a useful, comprehensive guide to starting your own buy local campaign. Ordering information at: [buylocalfood.com](http://buylocalfood.com)
- These groups can provide information:
  - **Vermont Agency of Agriculture** ([vermontagriculture.com](http://vermontagriculture.com))
  - **Intervale Center** ([intervale.org](http://intervale.org))
  - **Food Venture Center** ([www.edcnv.org/programs/northern\\_enterprises/food\\_venture/](http://www.edcnv.org/programs/northern_enterprises/food_venture/) or 802-849-2000)
- **Hinesburg** participated in a VCRD Community Visit in which local foods emerged as a priority project. The report on their work, including contact information, is available at [vtrural.org](http://vtrural.org).
- **Salvation Farms** works specifically on reducing food waste by bringing excess food to Vermonters in need. The organization offers materials to help start local gleaning projects. Visit them at: [salvationfarms.org](http://salvationfarms.org). Or, contact **Theresa Snow** to arrange a visit to their center in Wolcott (802-888-5055).
- **Tom Gilbert** at **Highfields Institute** in Hardwick offers consulting on composting at any scale. He is available at 802-475-5138 or [highfieldsinstitute.org](http://highfieldsinstitute.org).
- One more way to combine local foods and waste management is to organize local bulk orders. For advice on how to set up a local order, contact the bulk ordering coordinator for the Adamant Coop: [www.adamantcoop.org/buying.php](http://www.adamantcoop.org/buying.php).

## *Community Gardens*

- **Jim Flint** of **Friends of Burlington Gardens/Vermont Community Garden Network (VCGN)** is probably the leading resource in Vermont for creating and sustaining a community garden. Contacts: [burlingtongardens.org](http://burlingtongardens.org), 802-861-GROW. **New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF)**, Montpelier, is interested in some aspects of community garden work and offers grants up to \$2,500. Contact **Ginny Callan**, [Callan@grassrootsfund.org](mailto:Callan@grassrootsfund.org) (802) 229-1734 or visit [grassrootsfund.org](http://grassrootsfund.org).

## *Farmers Markets*

- The **Trust for Public Lands** has a goal of conserving land for *people*. The combination of landscaping a lot in downtown while supporting the working agricultural landscape surrounding the downtown could appeal to this organization. See [tpl.org](http://tpl.org)
- The **Project for Public Spaces** is another organization that might have an interest in the farmers' market / downtown gathering space combination. It provides training, technical assistance, and information to communities. See [pps.org](http://pps.org).
- The **Northeast Farming Association (NOFA-VT)** in Vermont provides support for developing farmers' markets. See [nofavt.org](http://nofavt.org).
- At **Vermont's Agency of Agriculture**, a good resource for local agriculture and marketing is **Helen Jordan** who can be reached at (802) 828-3828. See [vermontagriculture.com](http://vermontagriculture.com).
- The **US Department of Agriculture** promotes rural development in many ways, including assisting towns and non-profits develop community facilities and establish farmers markets. Contacts: [usda.gov](http://usda.gov).
- **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)** provides support to conserve historic properties. They also have an interest in viable agriculture in Vermont. Contacts: [vhcb.org](http://vhcb.org), (802) 828-3203.
- The **University of Vermont's Department of Community Development and Applied Economics** has assisted some communities in strengthening their local farmers' markets. Contact **Dan Baker** at (802) 656-0040 or [dbaker@uvm.edu](mailto:dbaker@uvm.edu). Another resource is **Allen Matthews** at UVM's **Center for Sustainable Agriculture** (802) 656-0037 or [allen.matthews@uvm.edu](mailto:allen.matthews@uvm.edu).

## *Food Center*

- Vermont has a strong brand reputation to begin with, particularly in food, crafts, and arts. Tourists tend to respond to phrases like "Vermont Produce", "Vermont Made" and "Vermont Grown". The **Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing** ([vermontpartners.org](http://vermontpartners.org)) and the **Tourism Data Center (UVM)** ([uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/](http://uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/)) have research on visitors' interests. Also, check with VDTM before designing a building to make sure you catch important infrastructure details, such as providing space for bus tours.
- There are several organizations that can provide an overview of the funding sources possible for a Local Foods Center.
  - **Vermont Economic Development Authority** ([veda.org](http://veda.org))
  - **Vermont Community Loan Fund** ([vclf.org](http://vclf.org))

- **Agency of Agriculture** ([vermontagriculture.com](http://vermontagriculture.com))
- **Small Business Development Center** ([vtsbdc.org](http://vtsbdc.org))

## *Theme Festivals*

- Many different options exist for funding a Harvest Festival. Area businesses might sponsor in return for advertising. Larger statewide organizations might be partial sponsors. Some places charge entrance fees or suggested donations. There can be fundraisers at the event itself. A small fee could be charged for sellers if there is a market. In-kind donations can also cover some costs.
- **Shelburne Farms, the Intervale, Vermont Fresh Network, and Danville** all have sizeable Harvest Festivals. **Manchester, VT** and **Keene, NH** have both competed for the size of their pumpkin carving events. In early summer you can visit Vermont traditions like the **Strolling of the Heifers (Brattleboro)**, **Maple Festival (St. Albans)** and **Dairy Days** in early June. Also, talk to people who have started new festivals. The **Heart of the Islands Open Farm / Open Studio** tour introduced participants to Grand Isle County agriculture and many of the new Localvore groups have started their own local foods celebrations.
- It is also important to work with general events planners to be sure that the date you choose avoids conflicts and can get onto their calendars early. The **Area Business Associations, Regional Chambers of Commerce**, and the Vermont tourism website [vermontvacation.com](http://vermontvacation.com) are all places to check in with.
- Several statewide organizations will have early deadlines for publishing festival information. Check with **Vermont Life Magazine**, the **Vermont Agency of Agriculture** and **NOFA-VT** to find out if they could promote the event.
- Ongoing involvement from area farmers is crucial to planning a successful day, one that meets the needs of both festival-goers and the businesses the festival is meant to support. Technical assistance may be available to help farmers prepare to open their business for visitors. **UVM Extension** often works with farmers on how to run successful workshops and/or presentations. Beth Holtzman will know the best options at UVM (802) 223-2389. Also try **NOFA-VT** and the **Vermont Farm Bureau** ([vtfb.org](http://vtfb.org)).
- Another useful group for information and advice are others who do public events on a tight budget. Seniors and church groups are veterans of these events.