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Rural Studies Secures Grant for Food Systems, Community Development Projects

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The University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies (CRS) announces its engagement in multiple projects benefiting communities, entrepreneurs and local decision-makers in Vermont with funds secured by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). Project work by CRS staff and partner organizations will address program goals in the study of local and regional food system issues, community problem-solving, entrepreneurship assistance, and community-level information resources for Vermonters. Senator Leahy requested the \$228,410 in funds for these projects as part of the 2009 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) budget.

"This is an exciting time in Vermont with the many discussions taking shape about the future of agriculture and food systems, and these projects tap into this evolution," says Senator Leahy. "These investments will help Vermont's communities, entrepreneurs, economy and organizations to grow and thrive with the latest technology, resources and partnerships."

CRS staff will use this funding to engage in a broad range of projects that focus on different aspects of community and economic development and Vermont's food system.

"These projects reflect the growing importance of projects related to food systems and their connection to Vermont's economic vitality and citizen's health," says Center for Rural Studies' Director Jane Kolodinsky.

For example, CRS staff will be able to continue to support the new on- and off-campus Food System Research Collaborative and develop tools for sharing research and information and building partnerships for new food system work. CRS will continue to host and develop the [Vermont Planning Information Center website](#)¹, which acts as a clearinghouse of information for planning commissions, zoning boards, development review boards, and their staff and all others involved in land use planning and regulation in Vermont. CRS will also be able to continue its participation in the Vermont Land Use Education and Training Collaborative, which brings together organizations involved in education and technical assistance for local land use officials in Vermont.

CRS is also designated as the U.S. Census Bureau's Vermont State Data Center. The USDA funding will allow CRS to continue to advocate on behalf of Vermont data-users to the Census Bureau and provide data outreach to Vermonters through workshops, presentations and the [State Data Center website](#)².

Five partner organizations have also received funding through this program for related activities.

The Vermont Food Venture Center in Fairfax will receive \$12,500 to provide two two-day workshops and other technical assistance for food business entrepreneurs in Vermont. The workshop Recipe to Market covers all aspects of starting or expanding a value-added or specialty food business, and Selling Skills focuses on specific areas of bringing product to market. These two workshops are designed to be taken together or on

a stand-alone basis. Overall this assistance will be provided for approximately 35 growers and food product producers.

Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day) -- a collaborative partnership of three Vermont nonprofit organizations: Food Works at Two Rivers Center, the Northeast Organic Farmers Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) and Shelburne Farms -- will receive \$10,000 to provide statewide technical assistance. FEED utilizes a "3-C" (classroom, cafeteria, and community) approach to transforming the school food environment and positively influencing students to make healthier food choices. FEED works with local growers and school food service to strengthen farm-school partnerships; craft purchasing agreements; and support menu planning aimed at serving more locally-grown foods in schools. Students visit farms and are encouraged through Taste Tests to try new foods made with farm-fresh ingredients. Parent involvement further strengthens the connection to local food. Vermont FEED will utilize these and other effective strategies to support Farm to School initiatives in a dozen Vermont public schools in 2009/2010 school year, benefiting more than 30 teachers, 500 students and 15 small family farms.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development will receive \$8,500 for the Community Visit program. Over the last 15 years VCRD's Community Visits have provided a structure for major community revitalization efforts in 32 rural Vermont Communities. VCRD has brought teams of up to 40 executive level state, federal and non-profit officials and business leaders to help communities systematically explore key issues of local concern and set directions for the future. Community Visits have helped towns build youth programs, redesign downtowns, build senior or low income housing, merge town and village government, and pursue myriad goals set by local consensus. VCRD and its team listen first then lend all our resources as partners in support of the community's progress once it has set its own priorities.

The Vermont Center for Geographic Information will receive \$8,000 to continue maintenance and updates to the [Vermont Indicators Online website](#)³. This online community information tool supplies local decision-makers with essential local-level data from various sources. This funding will also go toward enhancements to include the data that will be released from the U.S. Census Bureau's new American Community Survey.

The Vermont Law School's Land Use Institute will receive \$5,000 to engage in a collaborative project to develop a series of training modules on development review for local land use officials in Vermont. These training modules will help fill the gaps to complete a curriculum for the local volunteers that have stepped up to handle the crucial and complicated aspects of development review and land use regulation in their communities.

The UVM Center for Rural Studies is a nonprofit, fee-for-service research organization that addresses social, economic, and resource-based problems of rural people and communities. The mission of CRS is to promote the dissemination of information through consulting, research, and community outreach. More information is available at www.uvm.edu/crs⁴.

For more information, contact Will Sawyer, project manager, Center for Rural Studies at wsawyer@uvm.edu or (802) 656-0892.

Links on this page:

1. <http://www.vpic.info/>
2. <http://crs.uvm.edu/census>
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4. <http://www.uvm.edu/crs>