The following chapters are the synthesis of public forum notes and interviews, statistical polling, written comments, trend line research, and the many other contributions from Vermonters described in the Introduction in Part One of *Imagining Vermont*. They reflect, to the best of the Council's ability, the essence of what Vermonters shared. The Council's purpose in these chapters is to reflect what we have gathered about important subjects, whether they are emotional, divisive or matter-of-fact. All of the information was organized into ten key issues areas: ***Vermont Culture; Population; Natural Environment; Working Landscape: Agriculture and Forestry; Built Environment: Development and Land Use; Economy; Education; Human Services, Health, and Safety; Infrastructure; and Energy.***

While each chapter encompasses a wide range of research and discussion, a common framework is used. Quotes from Vermonters illustrate specific points or show a range of opinions, and research and polling provide balance to the individual voices, lending authority or illuminating contradictions in the ideas expressed. All references, unless otherwise noted, are from the St. Michael's report *Vermont in Transition: A Summary of Social, Economic and Environmental Trends*, the companion volume to this report. When UVM's Center for Rural Studies web and telephone surveys are referenced, these percentages and data are found in the *Looking Ahead: Vermonters' Values and Concerns* reports.

The Council invites every reader to think about conclusions from the data and what directions it might suggest for Vermont. These chapters summarize what the Council heard; the Council's own conclusions can be found in Part Two of *Imagining Vermont*.

Working Landscape: Agriculture and Forestry

When most people talk about the "working landscape" they are referring to the land actively used in productive agriculture and forestry. Yet, to many Vermonters the working landscape also means additional public values including aesthetics, contributions to the tourism economy, and its central role in building a common sense of place and the Vermont quality of life. These values are all hard to quantify, but vital to the personal identity of Vermonters.

The Council on the Future of Vermont tested a number of value statements through phone and on-line polling. The highest ranked value in both polls was the statement, "I value the working landscape and its heritage." More than 97 percent of Vermonters in the phone poll and almost 93 percent in the on-line survey agreed with this statement. At forums throughout the state, both natives and newcomers claimed that they value the landscape and said they want to maintain the rural character of the state.

When the Council refers to the working landscape, it includes agriculture and the working forest – not just farms, but also value-added production, the growing of raw materials, and their processing and manufacture. The tremendous range of farm, forest, and value-added enterprises in Vermont is a significant factor in the state's economy. The Vermont landscape is a product of the state's history; it exists as the result of the innumerable personal and economic decisions of the landowners, farmers, and entrepreneurs who have lived and worked upon it.

Open land in Vermont has scenic value for Vermont residents and is a foundation of the tourism and recreation economy. The landscape provides a distinctive mix of fields, farms, forest, and waters that Vermonters cherish; and the heritage of multiple use, and traditional openness to uses for walking, hunting, fishing, skiing, and other outdoor activities in many ways epitomizes the neighborliness that Vermonters claim is also a core value in the state.

Traditionally, Vermonters imagine the working landscape as agricultural lands, primarily open lands used for dairy farming bordered with woodlands used for building material, fuel, and maple sugaring. Vermonters today do not think of windmills, quarries, gravel pits, surface mining, and like enterprises as part of the working landscape. This may be problematic as Vermonters look to the future of the natural resource economy as part of an effort to expand in-state economic development. Like composting and energy

development on farms, future technologies and economic opportunities may provoke new compromises and even a twenty-first-century redefinition of the working landscape.

Agriculture

There is great diversity in the shape of agriculture in Vermont today. Dairy and non-dairy, large and small-scale commodity production for export, diverse horticulture and husbandry for local consumption, specialty crops, organic farms, and a full range of entrepreneurial activity make up this dynamic economic sector.

Challenges

Vermonters cite many historic and recent threats to agriculture in the state. The loss of farms, rising costs, the volatility of the market, and the competition from agriculture in the West and Mid-West all challenge agriculture's economic success. But there are other challenges that are particularly pertinent to Vermont: the feeling that farmers have of being unsupported by the public, the changing nature of the labor force, rising land prices, the loss of the critical mass of farms to support infrastructure in some areas, and the loss of a vital agricultural identity in others.

- **Loss of Farms**

Many Vermont counties have been particularly hard hit by the loss of farms. All over the state, residents tell stories of how many farms there were historically and how few are now left. In Brighton, a participant said, "We used to have farms and now there's only one working farm in town – there used to be orchards, cows, sheep, chickens – people don't have time to stop and do that." From all forums, it was clear that those who do farm often can't support their operations from farming income alone; that many farm families have to work off the farm to support it.

Dairy farming has been an iconic part of the Vermont landscape for over a century, yet over time the state has seen a decline in the number of dairy farms and the number of people actively working the land. In 1947 over 11,000 dairies blanketed the fields and hills. That figure dropped to 2,370 in 1990, and by 2007 only 1,097 survive, over 200 of them having converted to organic production. While herd sizes have increased from a 1974 average of 49 to 120 in 2007, and milk production per cow has increased dramatically, neither has proceeded at the pace of large dairies elsewhere in the country where increased scale, lower costs of sheltering livestock, and easier, less expensive access to feeds have led to lower costs of production than in Vermont. Many Vermonters, including farmers, believe that the future will be either for those dairies that mirror the growth and efficiency of such large farms or for those that find small-scale or specialty niches. They fear that Vermont could lose the middle-sized farm. Even now, the top 1.2 percent of farms in Vermont produce 28 percent of total farm income. Organic operations, which tend to be smaller, receive higher prices for their output, but sustain higher costs of operation. The dairy industry as a whole is subject to a complex federal pricing structure, which has produced wild volatility in prices that has tested the limits of all operations and driven many out of business. In 2008 and 2009, high energy costs and declining milk checks underscore the fact that dairies in Vermont face all the ups and downs of a commodity marketplace that is largely out of their control. Still, as one Alburgh farmer put it, "I'm not dead yet, don't write my eulogy."

Dairy farm families who provide food for commodity exports throughout the New England milk shed say that they sometimes feel unappreciated even though their sales of milk, meat, and hay add up to almost 85 percent of farm income in Vermont. They serve as anchors to an agriculture infrastructure that includes slaughterhouses and veterinarians, feed and tractor dealers, farm suppliers and agricultural networks

that support the diversity of farm operations. One participant said, "If you lose the dairy infrastructure you lose all the infrastructure that provides the grounds for the working landscape." Most dairy farmers understand the opportunity and support the goal for the diversification of agriculture in Vermont, but they don't want Vermonters or the State of Vermont to forget about them and their role while focusing on supporting new enterprises.

While the number of dairy farms has declined dramatically, Vermont has seen an increase in the number of small non-dairy farms, which have grown by more than 800 since the mid-1980s. Altogether there are over 6,500 active farms in the state as measured by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which defines a farm as a unit that produces more than $1,000 in output a year. Many are very small, part-time operations. In 2002, 41 percent of the farms in Vermont had an income of less than $2,500 and only just over half of farm operations provided the principal employment of the farmer. Vermont lacks the marketing infrastructure to fuel the growth of some of these diversified enterprises. They need more facilities such as slaughterhouses, marketing and distribution hubs, cheese production and storage facilities, marketing cooperatives, and food processing and incubation centers. Many believe that expanding market infrastructure could boost sales and provide new opportunities for new agricultural ventures to start up and grow.

• Farm Costs and Aging Demographics

While the number of farm enterprises, experiments, and small operations is growing, the number of family farms with an income that can sustain the family without additional revenue has steadily declined over time. One Franklin Country resident pointed to the contradiction in having so many small farms with such a minimal income. He saw the need for farms to grow to an appropriate scale: "Otherwise there's not livable wage or family income and the next generation will have to give up on farming in Vermont."

All across the agricultural spectrum, farmers are getting older. The average age of the primary operator of Vermont farms, now in the mid-fifties, has increased steadily since 1978. Many farmers who spoke with the Council described how a farmer's work is never done and recognized that the lifestyle that they lead may not be what their children or grandchildren would like to take on. A forum participant explained: "Let's face it; farming is a lot of work! I told my daughters I don't want them to take over the family dairy farm we've built… I want them to get an education, a great job, and not have to get up at 3:30 AM and work fourteen hours a day." Young people who do want to take over farms in Vermont face serious obstacles in finding and being able to afford suitable land that is still in active cultivation.

Vermont farmers also have challenges in finding labor. One farmer described his difficulty in getting the work done. He has had to rely on imported labor and pointed out that the mobility of Vermont youth and their desire for education and opportunities impel them to leave the most rural communities and the farms for other lifestyles. A Franklin County farmer described how his people had come down from Canada and started out as farm laborers, sending money home just as immigrant farm laborers do now. In his view, the essential difference is that many of today's immigrants are here illegally and Vermonters have not given them a way to integrate successfully into communities, an issue he believes needs to be resolved.

• Global Climate Trends

The majority of the world's scientific community agrees that global climate change is real and having direct effects today. Some Vermonters and some farm experts and climatologists believe that global climate change will have a dramatic and potentially devastating effect on lands in the American West and Middle West. Global warming could expand desertification in the West. Places where there are now massive dairy operations could lose water rights, or see depleted aquifers; over time the aridity of the west could expand into the center of the country. Many scientists believe that while Vermont's climate will moderate, it will remain a wet place. While over time Vermont could lose its iconic maple trees as forest succession changes, agriculture here should be able to adapt and could expand to meet opportunities to contribute to regional or national food needs. While Vermonters are clearly not in full agreement about the potential changes that might occur to the climate, they want the state to work consistently to help agriculture compete with other regions and realize its best opportunities.

• Farming Methods and the Public

Vermont agriculture includes many different methods of farming, each with its own challenges and opportunities. Increasingly, cows in Vermont live permanently indoors, especially in the state's largest farms. Other dairies practice rotational grazing and grow hay, corn, and diversified feeds. Vermont celebrates its rapidly growing organic sector, which

includes dairy – goat, sheep, and cows – vegetables, and an increasing variety of specialty livestock and crops. The majority of Vermont farms are diversified in one way or another, incorporating maple sugar operations, beef cows, vegetables, poultry or sheep, logging, and other activities to provide supplemental farm incomes.

Different models of agriculture sometimes conflict with each other and create tensions within and outside the agricultural community. Many Vermonters express concern about the agricultural industry's promotion of synthetic hormones, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and genetically modified corn and other grains. Organic farmers worry about the effects on their crops of genetically modified organisms from neighboring farms. Small family farms are sometimes frustrated by regulatory oversight designed to deal with large farm issues. The needs of different sectors sometimes compete for limited public resources.

A number of farmers testified to the Council that they think that most Vermonters have forgotten what it takes to run a farm well. To many farmers, it seems that Vermonters cherish the ideal of the farm and working forest, but protest the working practices that farmers and forest managers deem essential to their economic survival.

Some farmers, especially those with larger dairies, feel that the state has grown away from them – that regulations have made business viability an enormous challenge, and that preserving the landscape at all costs has overbalanced the historic use of lands. A farmer in the Champlain Islands expressed it by saying, "We don't feel that Vermont is always for us." Dairy farmers described how neighbors complain about manure spread on their fields or a slow-moving tractor on the road. They say they are trying to do the right thing but face new neighbors who don't understand the nature of farming and, over time, can set conditions that undermine their operations. One respondent told the Council on the Future of Vermont that the "Northeast Kingdom has agricultural 'stink' and it affects the second-home market and tourism." Another said "There's a major prejudice against large dairy in the state. But really, we need to recognize the interrelatedness of farm diversity."

There is increasing pressure on farmers to control nutrient runoff from farms, and this has become a key issue with respect to the storage of manure and the way it is spread, especially on larger farms. The growth of herds can produce nutrients beyond the absorptive capacity of the land mass of a farm. Ironically, it is sometimes the attempt to manage farm waste in environmentally sensitive ways that impinges on the sensibilities of neighbors. Efforts to contain and aggregate manure in lagoons and spread it efficiently at times of the year that will minimize run offs can significantly increase the olfactory impact of dairy operations. The next wave in the solution may be in the development of methane digesters producing electricity, but existing models are only applicable at the larger farm scale.

Regardless of the size of their operations, farmers can feel over-regulated. Small farms, organic farms, and local diversified agricultural enterprises often feel that they are subject to "one size fits all" regulation that is not designed for their scale. They call for consistent standards but different levels of expectations for facilities of different sizes.

If family farms continue to disappear, one Vermonter claimed, part of Vermont's identity will disappear. What would this mean for Vermont – what would the state look like? Another noted all the old barns in decay and pointed to what she saw as the near poverty of many working farm families. She described how in the town of Wells the number of active working farms has gone from thirty-five to three in her lifetime, and she characterized this as a fundamental tragedy for the state that undermines both our values and rural heritage. "I do love Vermont, but I love the way it was."

Opportunities

- **Regional Market Expansion**

In Barre, a forum attendee told the Council, "I came from Boston. Boston needs to be fed." Vermont consumes only 5 percent of the fluid milk it produces, but it plays a central role as the largest producer in the New England milk shed. Dairy farms keep the land open in a way that horticulture and vegetable production do not. Experts say that the state's ecology makes it extraordinarily well-suited for growing grasses – hence the long history of ruminant agriculture. A number of forum participants expressed the belief that Vermont's geography, climate, soil, and ecology present great opportunities for Vermont to expand farm production for local consumption, commodity production in dairy for regional markets, and the development of value-added enterprises.

Many Vermonters claim that state support for agriculture is not commensurate with its importance to the people of Vermont and to the future of the state. They call for strategic investment in agricultural infrastructure, incentives to award positive developments, support for diversifying operations,

and increased help for the marketing and distribution of products. They believe that farms and food production could be a growth sector in the state's economy spurring new job creation and benefiting the state both through import substitution, which cycles dollars locally rather than exporting them, and the expansion of the export economy.

• The Vermont Brand

Much of Vermont's identity – its brand – is based on the state's rural or farm image, its low population, and the public perception that it is "clean and green." One forum participant called Vermont "a calm oasis of farms" surrounded by 60 million people. With this potential market, "the branding of Vermont could be the saving of it." A college student in Poultney put it even more succinctly while describing the tourism economy: "Vermont is a countryside dotted with dairy farms… people come to Vermont to see cows." One person claimed that for him the Vermont landscape was the "fulfillment of the sentimental values of childhood."

To some, the brand is intimately connected to the natural scale that the landscape lends to farm operations: "The weather is the same in other places; the syrup is the same; but part of the brand is the farm and the green hills." This ruralness is at the core of the Vermont identity. And the identity is inextricably tied to the special place agriculture has for Vermonters. At many forums, the Council was told that the state should use the Vermont brand identity to advance an economy that fits with the values and landscape of the state. The Council heard repeatedly that Vermonters want to hold on to what makes Vermont distinctive, and for most, that means agriculture and the working forest.

But, of course, farming is also a business and needs to be profitable to continue. Most Vermonters recognize that a state the size of Vermont can't compete in the production of low-cost commodities in the global marketplace. Commodity agriculture does have a place in dairy farming and its many products, and in energy products; but everywhere the Council went, people insisted that they want to advance both direct sales and capture the highest added value possible to keep production, jobs, and dollars circulating in state rather than export raw commodities.

Many who worry about the Vermont brand worry about the reality behind it – how crucial it is to the success of the brand to protect the working landscape, to make it real by supporting the economy that sustains it, and to provide antidotes to the threats of losing it. The farm and forest economy is in many ways Vermont's best tool to prevent the loss of the land.

• Buy Local, Local Foods Systems and Food Security

Vermonters believe that there are many exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs to expand the processing of the raw products of the working landscape to keep the value-added dollars in state. New markets can be developed globally through the web; artisan cheeses, ice creams, maple products, wines, meats, and a variety of innovative products provide optimism about the opportunities ahead and may give local farmers a special place in wider markets

The USDA estimated that in 1982, $3.8 million of farm output was sold directly to consumers in Vermont. This number had reached $9.6 million or 4 percent of Vermont agricultural sales in 2002. Many Vermont farmers are focusing on direct sales to Vermont consumers; one sign of this is the growth in farmers' markets in the past twenty years. When products are grown and consumed locally, farms can emphasize the uniqueness of their community connections and the freshness of their products. Vermont farms are making connections to local schools, hospitals, and other large organizations; they are finding in-state markets that can help increase and promote direct farm sales.

In Middlebury a newcomer to Vermont from the Middle West claimed that, "What's different about Vermont is that we stick up for our own locally grown

and produced things." Wherever the Council went, forum participants spoke passionately of how much they care about local purchasing and how they believe that Vermonters are more connected to where their food comes from than many people in other places. The state has an active "Local First" association of businesses and shares an ethic about supporting local agriculture and downtown businesses. Other groups, from localvore chapters, farmers' markets, and municipal farm committees to regional farming networks such as the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL), provide mutual support and common market development.

Many Vermonters today are concerned with energy and food independence and see them as inextricably connected to each other. There is land available for energy production and for the expansion of farm operations. New and expanded agricultural products and methods – biofuels, farm methane, greenhouses heated with local and renewable heating systems – all provide a basis for optimism that farmers will be leaders in developing power sources and adopting efficiencies that can advance their prosperity while reducing their own and society's impact on the environment. Many forum participants suggested that local production and consumption of agricultural goods could break the negative energy cycle in the international agriculture market. They see the growth of the local food movement in Vermont as central to the state's future success.

• Consumerism and Costs

Some Vermonters claim that on the whole, people who live here are not as susceptible to the consumer mentality as other Americans – Vermonters are willing to buy less and pay more for local and sustainably-produced goods to support the economic multipliers and community benefits. With all the concern in the early twenty-first century about the future of the energy, and especially the petroleum-based economy, many Vermonters believe that food will become more expensive and that this will tip the balance to support local agriculture. Others worry that locally-produced foods are more expensive, putting them out of the reach of working people and those of modest means. Everyone recognizes this challenge and many groups are working to address it. Active volunteer groups and farm entrepreneurs throughout Vermont are working to expand "local food systems" that map out local needs, where food comes from, what can be produced locally, and what infrastructure will be needed to expand local market independence and sustainability. A Burlington resident claimed that his city and Vermont are thirty years ahead of the nation in thinking about local food systems. To him, the culture of backyard sugarmaking, community or household gardening, and history of small farms provides optimism that Vermont can adapt and even thrive in the face of what he sees as tremendous challenges ahead.

Some of those who see this need for the transformation of Vermont agriculture believe that it is inextricably connected to the life-style changes that will be needed to prepare for and succeed in the future. In their view people will need to live closer to the land and produce less waste. They believe that the goals of self-sufficiency in energy and agriculture are key to Vermont's future opportunities and that Vermont's small scale and local assets can help Vermont be a model of sustainable development for other regions and states.

There is a continuum of perspectives on the challenges before Vermont, the nation, and the world that ranges from those who believe that we are currently in a short term recession that the market will correct over time to those who hold that peak oil, unsustainable patterns of consumption, global population growth, and global climate change will force revolutionary changes in the next generation. Some even believe that these changes may be catastrophic: ending business as we know it, undermining global transportation of cheap good and foods, requiring many more local farm operations, and renewing direct relationships to the land by many more of us. One participant spoke for many when she said, "My greatest fear is that we won't be able to take care of ourselves."

The Challenge of Unity

Even though agriculture is held in high esteem in the state, its diversity means Vermont has many competing models and visions for its future. Within the agricultural economy there are divisions, where factions don't recognize that they have common interests, don't work together, and become at odds politically. When this occurs, there can be missed opportunities for common action to boost marketing, development, and the bottom line success of all farm enterprises. The Council heard from both large scale commercial farmers and small scale growers that they feel that the Agency of Agriculture, state policies, and state leaders favor one group or the other.

As they consider the future for Vermont agriculture, some farmers and observers believe that Vermont should aim to expand local production for local consumption to address the issues of globalism,

climate change, and peak oil. They criticize large dairy operations as unsustainable. Others note that efficiencies of scale help lower the costs of production to allow the continuation and profitability of larger farm operations, especially dairies, thereby keeping land open and productive. Different constituencies sometimes attribute different meanings to the words "sustainable" and "viable"; but overall, most Vermonters want to see the economic success of agriculture, and want to see it as a keystone of Vermont's reputation as a sustainable green economy state. Most Vermonters express the desire to support agriculture in general and hope for a vital and prosperous future for farms in all their diversity.

Vermont's Forests and Wood Products

Vermonters love the woods: "the whole image of Vermont is tied up in the forest."

Most Vermonters know the history of land use in the state enough to know that at the beginning of the twentieth century the state was mostly open land with only about one quarter of its acres in forest. Today these proportions are reversed and Vermont ranks third in the nation in the proportion of forested land. Nearly three quarters of Vermont's six million acres are forested and could be considered commercially viable. Forested acreage has continued to grow at a rate of 2 percent a year since 1983. At the same time, the size of trees and overall biomass of the forest has been increasing well beyond the replacement rate. The Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation has stated that Vermont could sustainably harvest 1.3 million green tons annually of forest biomass beyond current cutting levels.

In 1997 harvests went to five main areas: fuel wood, 16 percent; saw logs, 30 percent; veneer logs, 1 percent; pulp, 25 percent; and logging residues, 28 percent. Forest managers naturally seek the highest value use for what they cut, and the removal of trees for one purpose can enhance the development of future forest products. Cutting pulp and fuel wood, for example, thins out forests and removes less desirable species, contributing to future harvests of more valuable saw logs. With the precipitous decline in the production of paper in Vermont and its downturn in New England, there has been a collapse of the pulp economy in Vermont. This undermines the multiple incomes that are needed for the viability of many forest-based operations.

> *"As long as Vermonters* **think** *we have a working landscape, we aren't going to have enough fire in the belly to make a real economy or save Vermont."*

Challenges to Working Forests

While the size and health of the forests have increased over time, forestry as an economic sector has not. Forestry faces many of the same challenges that agriculture does, such as heightened international competition, high energy and insurance costs, labor shortages, and finding markets for the specialized products manufactured by Vermont's relatively small-scale producers.

The changing proportions of forest to open field reflect changes in Vermont's economy. As farms have disappeared, many fields that were once open have gone back to forest. The expansion of the forest thus reflects the failure of past rural economies that kept the landscape much more open; in particular the fall of the nineteenth-century sheep economy, recent loss of dairy farms, and more recent mechanization of agriculture with its greatly enhanced labor productivity. Much of that land has not become what might be called "working forest." Historical patterns of ownership, especially the expansion of rural scattered-site housing, have resulted in much of the land being held in smaller and fragmented pieces and not managed for optimum production. Therefore, while the area of land covered with trees has grown significantly, the area of "working landscape" has contracted and the economy behind it has suffered. At an industry forum, a leader in the forest products sector challenged commonly held beliefs that Vermont has a thriving forest economy. Such misapprehension, he believed, has undermined the viability of the industry that has stewarded the forest for generations. "As long as Vermonters think we have a working landscape, we aren't going to have enough fire in the belly to make a real economy or save Vermont."

It is important to remember that in Vermont, most of the forest is private property. Even after the sales of the Champion Lands in the Northeast Kingdom in the 1990s, which added significantly to public ownership, only about 19 percent of the forest in Vermont is state or federal land. Private ownership and public interest have been in conflict from time to time, and many who live near forests or who work within the forest products

industry claim they want to keep public purchase at a minimum. Environmental groups are often on the other end of the argument, advocating for and working to expand state and federal forests, designated wilderness areas, and conserved lands with easements that, to some in the industry, may be the thin end of the wedge of restricting future forest management.

Even though most decisions around the use of the forest are private, there are so many public values associated with these decisions that there can be considerable conflict around the use and control of the natural resource of the forest – even in privately owned lands.

Vermonters recognize a tension between the working economy of cutting trees and the recreational and scenic aspects of the landscape. One forum participant described a contradiction between the way different people see nature and feared that in the end Vermont could become a nature theme park and Vermonters would lose their capacity to make a living in dynamic balance with the land. Others described the breakdown of larger forests, "parcelization," where land is broken up and sold off, often to people of means who do not need the income from forest management. Many Vermonters fear that the forest will become a park for the rich and fear the incremental removal of forested areas from the productive management that provides jobs in the local economy.

"We work so hard to keep our working landscape; in other states they'd have built it up and bring in whatever they want to support the taxes they need."

While Vermont has been a leader in conserving land, and the Vermont Land Trust have done impressive and effective work in supporting farm transitions and long-term preservation, Vermonters want more than a conserved landscape. To paraphrase one forum participant, conserving land does not necessarily conserve a way of life, and Vermont should avoid the "gentrification of the landscape." A Brattleboro woman described how her father had sold development rights to the family farm; now "my husband and I could never afford to buy the preserved land," and the preservation easement made it difficult for it to be broken up for several small farm operations. The affordability issue, in this example and for many young people with an interest in farming, can be insurmountable.

Opportunities

The energy economy provides a great opportunity to Vermont's forest products industry. Towns from Richford to Brattleboro are exploring opportunities ranging from downtown combined heat and power projects to locating pelletization plants to meet home heating needs. There has been significant progress in heating schools with wood, and Vermonters have been exploring new utility-scale wood energy generation to add to the capacity of the McNeill plant in Burlington and the Ryegate generating facility. Most Vermonters seem eager to see progress in the use of Vermont forest products for energy production, as long as it can be done in a manner consistent with maintaining the long-term health of the forest.

One forum participant called on us to see the forest as "natural capital," and reminded the Council that "if we use it, we need to renew it," not use it to depletion. For most of the state, the forest is currently in renewal – growth exceeding harvest and mortality – but many worry about the coming demands of the energy economy and warn that Vermont must prepare itself to prevent the export of chipped forests to meet the energy needs of Europe or Asia. Adding value at home and for use in local communities can replace imports of oil, other fuels, and even electricity and serve as a dynamic engine to Vermont's rural economy.

The working forest provides multiple assets to the state. The forest is the center for outdoor recreation, hiking, fishing, hunting, bird watching, skiing, snowmobiling, ATV travel, and more. Importantly, the forest captures and stores carbon and provides other ecological services, clean air and water, as well as natural habitat for the state's biodiversity. Positive stewardship of the forest is a meaningful state contribution to minimizing global climate change.

Given the economic importance of the forest to the state's economy, and especially to smaller rural communities, there are many residents who believe that the forest economy and those who manage it are undervalued. Forum attendees pointed out that the forest products industry does not enjoy the positive public image that it deserves and that agriculture has, even though these stewards are the 'family farmers' of the forest. They claimed that Vermonters and the state should be providing the same support and encouragement to this sector as it does to agriculture.

Common Points

Despite a variety of points of view, Vermonters are united in support of agriculture, forestry, and the working landscape. Much of the testimony in public forums supported better long term planning to preserve the character of working land in Vermont, and affirmed that the sense of continuity and community that is embodied in Vermont's heritage of open, non-posted land is of vital importance to current-day residents. Many Vermonter spoke to the need to capture as much "added value" as possible for each of the state's natural resources and that the state of Vermont needs to invest in infrastructure and tools to support that effort and to optimize opportunities for natural resource enterprises through the marketing of Vermont branded products.

Vermont needs to find balance points and reconciliation between the recreational and aesthetic interests of the public and the diverse needs and ambitions of natural resource businesses. There is a need to compromise and get over the "either/or" character of much of the dialogue within the natural resource economy where sector interests are often seen as competitive or mutually exclusive. Those who grow or celebrate fresh foods for direct market sales can see their interests in dynamic opposition to larger commodity producers and exporters. Vermonters and farmers talk about the distinct gap between the large-scale farms producing commodities for regional and national markets versus small-scale farms producing value-added products for local and niche markets. As one participant expressed it: "Both should realize that they succeed because they balance each other and need each other. This should be part of a common vision."

One forum attendee spoke for many when he said that Vermont has had these divisions: organic/non-organic, dairy/diversified, large dairy/small dairy. He posited that instead of being at odds, Vermonters should act together to support strong agriculture and strong farms into the future. For him and many others who provided testimony at forums, Vermont agriculture exemplifies Vermont's ecological, community and land values; as such, it is the key to the state's future and what can be shared with people outside Vermont.

Vermont also needs to reconcile divisions arising from differing concepts of the goal of sustainability. For some, achieving sustainability requires actions and changes that others believe would seriously compromise the viability of existing agriculture and forestry.

It would be a terrible unplanned consequence if sustainable agriculture in Vermont were to undermine family farm operations, particularly the dairy farms that keep land open, leaving fewer Vermonters in the next generation actually making a household income from the land and less land used in the natural resource economy.

Clearly, counter forces to the working landscape are sprawl, parcelization, fragmentation, dispersed housing, and commercial development. If the return on investment in agricultural and forestry operations is undermined, then alternative land development will take the place of the working landscape.

Everywhere the Council conducted stakeholder sessions, people discussed agriculture and the working landscape together as a core value, a challenge, an opportunity, and a priority for the future of Vermont. They insisted that Vermont needs to bring balance to the challenge of competing uses of the land; that planning needs to follow from long-term value decisions to preserve rural character. They want to see an effort to define the balance point between the working landscape and development, and then guide investment to achieve those results. "We work so hard to keep our working landscape; in other states they'd have built it up and bring in whatever they want to support the taxes they need."

Time and again at Council on the Future of Vermont forums, participants asserted that agriculture and the forest industry are essential to Vermont's character and the working landscape; that they are major drivers of the tourism industry and foundation for many other external values and benefits; and that farmers, entrepreneurs, and workers in this arena deserve respect as stewards of the land and contributors to the Vermont identity that all Vermonters value. Farmers, farm workers, loggers, and forest industry workers often do not feel valued. There is a huge contradiction in Vermonters' professed expression of respect for hard work and for those who work with their hands, and the sense of stigma that workers in Vermont's landscape say they feel. This feeling exists despite polls showing a high degree of support for both agriculture and the working landscape and points to the need to take serious steps, starting with communication of appreciation for the farmers and the people who lead its forest-based enterprises.

Older participants in forums observed that Vermont will see a new generation that needs education to understand the tradition and work of farming and forestry. The story of these industries will need to be taught and pathways provided for those who want to be farmers or forest workers to learn the skills and internalize the sense of stewardship to build viable and responsible enterprises.