



Vermont Council on Rural Development

Published on [vtrural.org](https://www.vtrural.org) (<https://www.vtrural.org>)

[Home](#) > Online Learning, Global Programs, Farm Enhancements, and Nationwide Leadership: Innovation Thrives in Food Systems Education at Vermont's Higher Ed Schools

---

## Online Learning, Global Programs, Farm Enhancements, and Nationwide Leadership: Innovation Thrives in Food Systems Education at Vermont's Higher Ed Schools

2016-07-12

This summer Vermont's colleges and universities are buzzing with inventive and hands-on learning that drives global food system solutions. The seven members of the Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium are continuing to expand their presence in the nationwide food systems movement, creating pacesetters to lead the charge in the way the nation sources, grows, processes, purchases, regulates, and contemplates food. Together, Vermont's food systems educators, students, and entrepreneurs are making Vermont a national epicenter of food systems education.

The Consortium is tapping Vermont's agricultural traditions, unrivaled educational opportunities, and cutting-edge food businesses to introduce students to new ways of thinking and earning school credit in agriculture, science, community development, law, and policy, noted Paul Costello of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the project facilitator. Vermont sets the standard for healthy food, innovation, beautiful and productive working lands, and food systems education. Each school's recent achievements include the following:

**Green Mountain College:** Green Mountain College Summer Farm to Table Semester students are earning up to twelve credits learning about building healthy, just, and sustainable food systems, in addition to immersing themselves in a practicum in Sustainable Agriculture on the college's Cerridwen Farm. Renovations of barn and outbuildings are moving forward reflecting the school's commitment to contemporary uses for historically-important farm infrastructure, while also enhancing labor efficiency, food safety, and animal husbandry. Meanwhile, 27 new leaders graduated from the nation's first on-line Masters in Sustainable Food Systems, and Robin Currey, Assistant Professor of Sustainable Food Systems and Director of the Master in Sustainable Food System Program, will be in the Kyrgyz Republic wrapping-up a ten-year longitudinal study about agrobiodiversity conservation in the Kyrgyz Republic while she prepares a study tour to Kyrgyzstan in Summer 2017. (<http://www.greenmtn.edu/student-life/farm-food/programs/> <sup>[1]</sup>)

**Middlebury College:** Known for international education, *Middlebury College* is headed abroad once again with its FoodWorks leadership program combining academic and experiential

learning in food systems. Building upon its proven summer programs in Middlebury, Washington D.C., and Kentucky, the College is going international with new academic-year food systems programming in Italy, Spain and Chile. As part of the new program, students will be exposed to systems thinking, experiential learning, and cohort living, built around academic content and context in an international context. <http://www.middlebury.edu/foodworks/foodworks-abroad> [2]

**New England Culinary Institute:** Heading into the height of the Vermont harvest season, warm days draw a clear line to how food is part of our life system, and present an opportunity for a new crop of students to embrace the sustainability of our food system and the importance of a connection to local farmers and food makers of all kinds. Students begin a new term in July, where they will ?learn it by living it,? transforming the fresh, raw products grown from the Vermont landscape into products renowned worldwide for quality. (<http://www.neci.edu/> [3])

**Sterling College:** Environmental stewardship is embodied in the \$225,000 grant the college recently received from the Endeavor Foundation to develop its Global Field Studies curriculum, which currently consists of seven international two- or four-week intensive cross-cultural field courses. The Global Field immersions are led by Sterling College faculty and explore the complex, ever-changing relationships among people and place. This expansion comes on the heels of the launch of Sterling?s School of the New American Farmstead, through which a variety of workshops, classes, and certifications inspire and equip students with marketable skills, and provide leaders with new perspectives on integrated, community-centered farming and food production. (<http://www.sterlingcollege.edu/academics/global-field-studies/> [4])

**The University of Vermont (UVM):** UVM recently completed a strategic plan that advances the food systems program as a global innovator, grounded in Vermont. Through trans-disciplinary research, intra-university connectivity, collaboration, participation, external partnerships, students and community, UVM is becoming a global leader in food systems education and research. The focus of food systems at UVM in the next five years is to significantly increase the capacity to address the most pressing problems facing the global food system. With new curricula, UVM faculty are framing complex concepts that prepare students for careers in a new era of environmental and policy solutions. (<http://www.uvm.edu/foodsystems/documents/FoodSystemsStrategicDirectionsReport.2016.pdf> [5])

**Vermont Law School:** Vermont Law School?s Center for Agriculture and Food Systems is building momentum as the most comprehensive law and policy program in sustainable food and agriculture in the nation by embarking upon a multi-year expansion under a generous grant from the GRACE Community Foundation. The Center trains students to become sustainable food and agriculture advocates and entrepreneurs through its law and policy curriculum, available residually and on line to both masters and law students. This year the Center is expanding its Food and Agriculture Clinic, one of the few in the nation dedicated to sustainable food and agriculture, enabling it to grow its teaching and national and global partnerships to address our most pressing food challenges related to social justice, environmental harm, public health, animal welfare and global food security. Vermont Law School has published a summary of its first three years. ([http://www-assets.vermontlaw.edu/Assets/cafs/CAFS\\_First3Years\\_rev.pdf](http://www-assets.vermontlaw.edu/Assets/cafs/CAFS_First3Years_rev.pdf) [6])

**Vermont Technical College:** Vermont Tech?s anaerobic digester ?Big Bertha? has completed its first year of routine operations converting cast-off waste to electricity, heat, animal bedding,

and crop fertilizer. At full power, the digester transforms 16,000 gallons of waste to 8,800 kilowatt hours of electricity daily ? equivalent to about 200 gallons of heating oil, or the amount of energy consumed by about 70 houses on a cold day. As part of the digester project, the school has created curricula and an apprenticeship program, led tours, adjusted protocols, developed manuals and management plans, and designed data collection systems and databases. The school has also invested in a dragline as an alternative to traditional manure spreading. In another piece of the school?s expansion, it is completing its first full year operating a recently donated, 350-acre dairy farm located in Norwich, Vermont. (<http://digester.vtc.edu/> [7])

The Vermont Higher Education Consortium?s Food and Farm Education website, [vermontfoodeducation.org](http://vermontfoodeducation.org), provides details on each school?s related academic programs and the broader Consortium initiative. The Consortium?s Facebook page, [facebook.com/vhefsc](https://www.facebook.com/vhefsc), is active with dynamic campus events, institutional achievements, and news from Vermont?s corner of the food systems education world.

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.vtrural.org/programs/facilitation/food-systems/press/20160712>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.greenmtn.edu/student-life/farm-food/programs/>

[2] <http://www.middlebury.edu/foodworks/foodworks-abroad>

[3] <http://www.neci.edu/>

[4] <http://www.sterlingcollege.edu/academics/global-field-studies/>

[5] <http://www.uvm.edu/foodsystems/documents/FoodSystemsStrategicDirectionsReport.2016.pdf>

[6] [http://www-assets.vermontlaw.edu/Assets/cafs/CAFS\\_First3Years\\_rev.pdf](http://www-assets.vermontlaw.edu/Assets/cafs/CAFS_First3Years_rev.pdf)

[7] <http://digester.vtc.edu/>