

Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative **Advancing Food Systems through** **Learning, Planning and Action**

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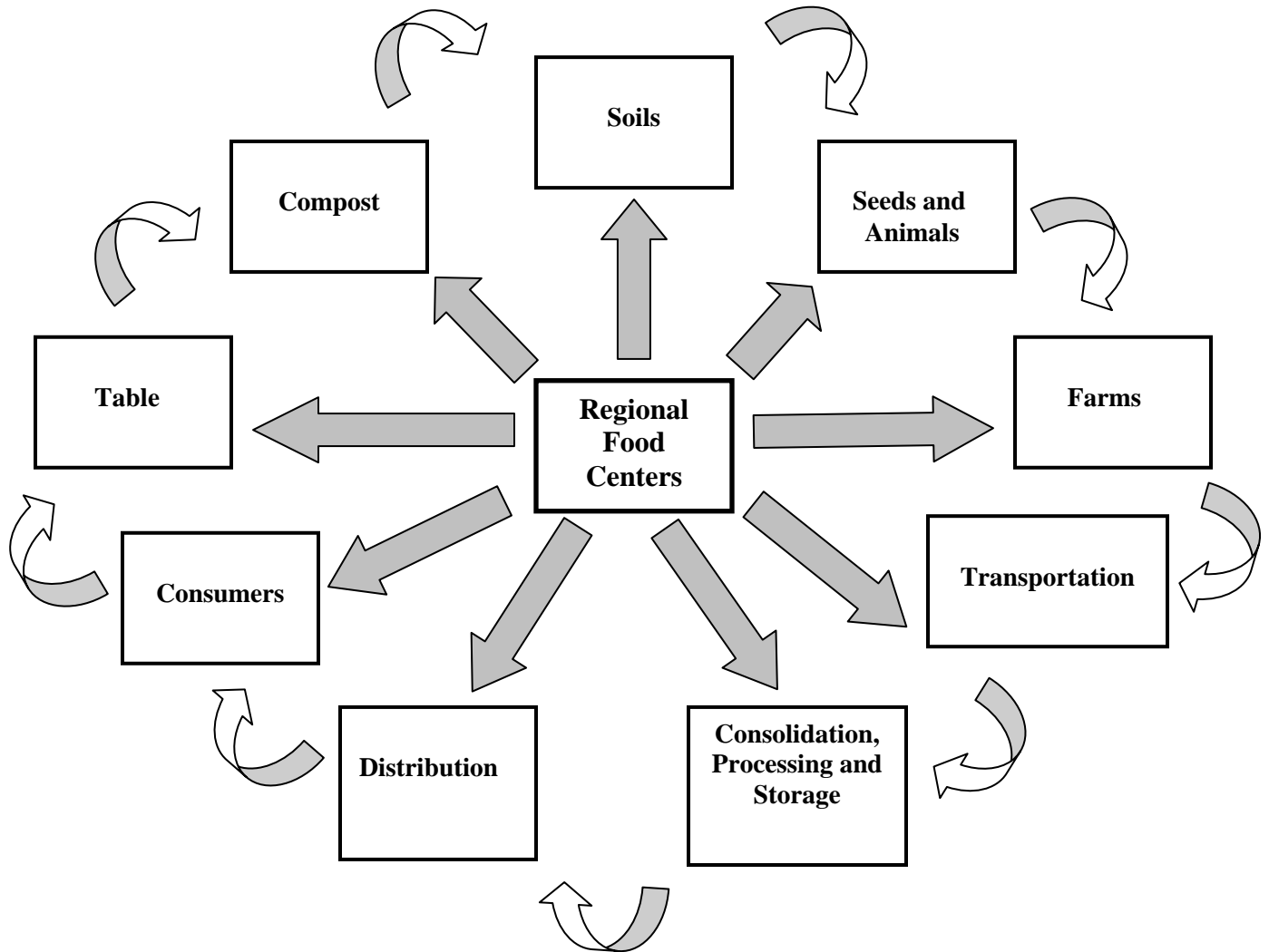
1. Definition of a Vermont Regional Food Center

“Coordinative Centers Supporting Regional Food Systems Development”

Vermont Regional Food Centers are organizations that work within regions of the state with communities and seek to increase physical and organizational infrastructure to support Vermont farms, local agriculture economies, and the health and vitality of Vermont communities. They work to expand local food access, shorten supply chains, promote fair prices to farmers, increase efficiency, and support the success of farmers and food related business. They act as supportive centers of their regional food systems by providing services to farmers, communities, individuals and families, as well as to the regional agricultural economy. They each connect to and coordinate with other Regional Food Centers to provide a full overlay of services for expanding food access among, as well as within, regions.

Community support and participation is crucial to meeting the goals of Regional Food Centers. By honoring community values, Regional Food Centers are able to better assess and serve the needs of the regional food system while expanding markets, processing, distribution and services. By serving as a point of connection between members of the food system in their communities, the Centers connect the dots between those members, provide leadership in networking farmers in various sectors, and advance farm prosperity and food security. They are uniquely posed to provide the necessary support to expand infrastructure for farm operations, processors, transportation systems, and other elements. They also are able to build or expand market opportunities to support agricultural enterprises and entrepreneurs.

Because Vermont Regional Food Centers reflect the values and serve the needs of their distinct local and regional communities, each is different and fills a variety of roles based on local needs and opportunities. Despite these differences, they all hold similar goals and seek to promote economic opportunity, to expand access to under-served Vermonters, and to educate about food, nutrition and the food system.



2. Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative Member Goals

- Support more Vermont farmers and produce more food for the local and regional market.
- Increase and improve infrastructure that supports diverse farm operations and value added processing.
- Expand economic opportunities in farming, access to land, and food system services.
- Improve farm viability, thereby expanding existing farm operations and opening opportunities for new farm incubation.
- Expand local food access for all Vermonters.
- Engage communities in learning about and contributing to a viable local food system.
- Increase food security and self-reliance of communities and regions.
- Engage communities in retention of important agricultural lands for current and future productive usage.

3. Vision and the role of Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative

The Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative envisions a vibrant, economically just and environmentally sustainable food system where locally-produced food is available and affordable for all Vermonters, and where the vitality of agriculture in Vermont is key to the conservation of our land and the progress of our sustainable economy.

The Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative acts as an established network whose mission and goals address gaps in the local food system and serve the needs of farmers, food processors, and consumers. Members of the network are organizations working in and serving different designated regions of throughout the state. Members of these groups work together to develop and share resources including information, infrastructure, and funding when appropriate. They also mentor other Vermont community groups who share similar values and goals.

A successful collaborative of Regional Food Centers will work with key organizational allies to support the development of necessary food and agriculture related infrastructure and promote the increase in consumer consumption of locally produced food and food products. To do so, the Collaborative will serve as a statewide coordinating body. Regional Food Centers will co-organize for new markets, enhanced processing and distribution, and support the success of each regional area. Ultimately the Collaborative will include Centers to advance regional food systems throughout the state, including in currently underserved areas.

This thriving network of Regional Food Centers will have many positive impacts on the development and ongoing functioning of the Vermont food system and the state as a whole. The state will benefit economically in several ways. The percent of food dollars spent locally in Vermont will dramatically increase, driven in part by an increase in institutional purchasing and access to local food for all, including low income Vermonters. Increasing consumption of locally grown and processed food will capture previously exported funds and have a tremendously positive impact on the state agricultural and food economy. This in-sourcing will create more jobs in the agriculture and food sectors while lowering market barriers for new and established farmers. The further establishment of the Vermont brand will increase the value of Vermont products for export. A fair and just return for the labor of farmers will mean that more people will be attracted to farming, thereby increasing farmland retention.

The success of the Collaborative will also mean significant advances in food justice, so that all Vermonters will have access to locally grown food. Due to this expanded access, public health will dramatically increase. Through increasing access to healthy, local foods, the Centers will help eliminate hunger in Vermont. Inadequate nutrition and obesity will be ameliorated, health will be promoted, and consumer education will result in greater statewide food system literacy.

This will be achieved through increasing food system related education in schools and in other public settings. Every school in the state will have a garden that will provide educational opportunities for students and community members. This will not only enhance food system literacy, but will increase likelihood that children will see farming or other food related careers as attractive job choices in the future.

The work of the Regional Food Centers Collaborative will contribute to a return of consumer food confidence and a new assurance around the health and safety of foods. Their work will build upon the strong value that Vermonters place on the state's agricultural heritage. Farmers will take pride in their occupation and their roles in the community and Vermont economy. Regional Food Centers will address both production and consumption challenges, advancing the capacity of Vermont agriculture to feed its population while encouraging consumers to change in what they buy and eat. In doing so, the Centers will contribute to an increase in local food purchasing in Vermont.

In order to make this vision a reality, Vermont will have to change in ways beyond the reach of Regional Food Centers alone. It will be necessary for transportation systems to link farms and food system components to each other and to consumers while lowering carbon emissions. Infrastructure for storage and processing will be built or strengthened. Universal broadband access and its wide use will enhance new food systems communications, marketing and operational efficiencies. Marketing will have systematically advanced to build new opportunities and respond to growing agricultural capacity. Processing and storage systems will work for diverse farm operations and especially help small farmers and entrepreneurial micro-businesses succeed. Scale-appropriate regulation will also support the diversity of small farm operations. New, local, and mission-driven financing mechanisms, revised tax structure, improved agricultural and food systems education, and positive public policy will ensure that a life in farming is accessible to young people. In addition, Vermont public policy and conservation efforts will ensure that agricultural lands remain affordable for new and established farmers. Agri-tourism benefits will be maximized and negatives minimized for enterprises that rely on it.

Vermont's scale, history, and culture combined with the dynamic leadership of today's farmers, advocates, and thoughtful consumers, provide assets that, when coordinated, will make the state a best practices standard for the nation. With leadership from the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative, Vermont will demonstrate and advance a model of a healthy food system for America.

4. The Food System Challenge

In a world ecologically and economically threatened by global climate change and peak oil, as well as a centralized food system that is undermining the wellness of our citizens, Vermont Regional Food Centers face significant challenges as they work collaboratively to meet their goals and to realize their vision for the future of Vermont's food system. Overcoming these challenges hinges on the availability of resources. Support is needed in order to expand markets for local food, develop food system infrastructure, develop agricultural literacy in Vermont, and effectively measure change in the food system that results from these efforts.

First, there are currently insufficient diversified markets for local food in Vermont. These markets are undeveloped due to competition with conventional food pricing, subsidized commodity agriculture, and the cultural perception that food should be inexpensive. Considering these challenges, there are few producers willing to increase the scale of production of local foods. To make medium-scale farming more attractive:

- production and processing infrastructure must be made available at reasonable cost to established and potential farmers,
- hiring barriers and the challenge of finding qualified labor must be creatively addressed,
- cap-and-trade and carbon trading opportunities will need to be used to farmers' advantage,
- and creative, locally focused investment opportunities (such as slow money) should be thoroughly explored.

Second, as they work towards increasing year round accessibility of local foods and expanding production and storage of Vermont food for local supply, there are significant infrastructure gaps that must be addressed in the state. These gaps include:

- accessibility of farmland and capital,
- sufficient maintenance of roads and effective local transportation networks,
- the availability of processing infrastructure for meat and vegetables,
- regional capacity for food storage,
- access to season extension facilities and technology,
- and sufficient food tracking systems.

Third, many people are disconnected from the source of their food. While reconnecting to the local food system would benefit them in many ways, there are several challenges directly related to the further development of food and agricultural literacy for Vermonters. These challenges include:

- a lack of general public awareness about local and fresh foods,
- a lack of household cooking and preparation skills when using whole or local foods,

- accessibility and affordability of food for all Vermonters,
- the lack of a unified narrative about local food and food systems that addresses public health concerns and that shows agriculture to be a significant economic engine. Such a narrative could encourage local purchasing and celebrate the skill, hard work, and commitment of agricultural labor.
- the need to strengthen existing programs as well as to support efforts to establish new systems in schools that advance food systems education and local purchasing.

Lastly, it is important to compile baseline indicators about the Vermont food system. By collecting this information, it will be possible to show how the efforts of the Vermont Regional Food Centers are helping to change the food system. This information will also be used by individual Food Centers and the Regional Food Centers Collaborative to develop new goals and action steps to advance their own work in the future, in addition to continuing to advance the overall local food system.

The members of the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative are committed to continued investment of time and resources in collaborative processes in order to overcome these challenges. While each Regional Food Center is developing solutions appropriate to the culture and landscape of their region, together the members of the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative are building a national model for advancing regional food systems.

The Collaborative is currently working to build a strong common platform and strong collective communications to unite food systems efforts needed to elicit the support of national level resources. In the current economic climate, funding is an increasingly difficult challenge for the members of the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative, especially as they begin new projects that address the challenges in this document. The lack of seed funding for new projects can hamper or weaken the progress of local and statewide food systems. If supported to develop new projects and address these challenges, the Vermont Regional Food Centers can work effectively to expand local food production, processing, distribution and the development and growth of local agricultural enterprises while increasing consumer support for this new food system model.

5. Regional Food Centers Collaborative Work Plan

5A. Organizational Action Steps

1. Report out the Regional Food System Centers Collaborative platform

Meet with other stakeholder groups, potential funders and representatives from state and federal offices.

2. Build a convening system for the Regional Food Centers Collaborative

Create an internet based networking tool for the group such as a Ning, listserv, or Basecamp. Formalize and share regional work plans and look for ways to support one another. Agree to what each group will each do in its own regions. Develop affinity groups within the greater group to work on common projects (which can then be shared back to the larger group.) Use the communications system to co-promote the work of the Regional Food Centers Collaborative. To be more coordinated this network should consider seeking minimum staff support and financial resources. This will provide a central point for coordinating Collaborative efforts, as well as a resource for outside inquiries.

3. Build Common Grants to Advance Regional Food Centers

Work together to articulate grant proposals that advance key regional infrastructure processes. Establish measurable results based on agreed upon indicators. Make a strong plan for grants management. Define the grants so that they supports advanced system centers, emerging centers, the development of centers where they are lacking, and the capacity for collaborative coordination. The grants should:

- Provide capacity for key infrastructure development through advanced food centers
- Provide organizational and development capacity to advance initiatives in emerging food systems centers
- Provide capacity to established centers to support and nurture the development of new food systems centers with the goal of strong food centers covering all the food systems regions and the complete geography of the state.
- Provide capacity to the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative to advance the system of food centers to advance our common vision of the future of food systems in Vermont.

4. Strengthen the statewide network of established and emerging Regional Food Centers

Look at blank spaces on the map of Vermont and help develop new food system centers in underserved areas. Develop and invest in areas that we can make into models. Share an employee or employees to work on common projects. Do an assessment of staffing and needs for the short term. Create a resource-exchange list for the group to better support each other and cross train about each others' services. Document these models with intent that they could be replicated.

5B. Priority Action Agenda

Collaborative Priorities for Project Leadership and Common Action

1. Advance and Build Infrastructure to Meet Regional Needs

Map out existing infrastructure (processing facilities, cold storage, shared feedstock storage facilities, distribution, warehousing, trucking, root cellars) at a regional and state level. Put existing infrastructure to better use by increasing efficiency and sharing information more effectively. Build a statewide map of infrastructure needs and analyze these findings. Seek financing to leverage timely development of these resources. Considering the strategic placement of facilities that will serve multiple regions around the state. Examples of infrastructure needs that currently exist include shared, multi-use regional milk processing facilities, slaughterhouses and meat processing facilities, profitable and energy efficient season extension greenhouses, eco-agricultural industrial parks, light processing to meet the institutional market. Create multi-use kitchens (for teaching and incubator purposes) on a regional level. Institute better distribution strategies and invest in technology for online product ordering. Increase cold wet, cool wet, dry root storage (etc.) in every region. Assess needs and network appropriate storage to meet demand. (This will help avoid duplication and fill private sector gaps.)

2. Grow New Farms

Grow new farms and help new farmers succeed. Help them to access affordable, productive land, including land that has been conserved. Reinstigate the Land Link program and explore other creative land access techniques, including land-share opportunities and other unconventional means. Create more mentoring and mentorship opportunities, and provide these new farmers with clearly outlined steps for starting successful farms. Provide ongoing educational opportunities for farmers and other stakeholders, especially in isolated geographical areas. Institute or expand mentorship programs that help small farms transition to medium-scale production. Remove barriers and add incentives for them to do so. Develop or provide information about financing, specifically for the purchasing of land and equipment. Partner with existing financing operations so that they better understand diversified (non dairy) farming. Provide targeted legal and technical advice to farmers.

3. Consumer Food Education Campaigns

Develop and implement a local food awareness campaign to celebrate local food, raise public understanding and support wise consumer choices. Educate regional economic development organizations and others about the role of local foods, value added and export as essential economic activities. Provide ongoing consumer education about production practices and challenges that includes group discussions and farmers' presentations. Gather, maintain and disperse information about where consumers can find local products. Have statewide data on-hand. Ensure that information is available to consumers about the conventional food system and the alternative of fresh and processed local foods. Rebuild the local culinary culture, reclaim and market a "taste of place." Institute an "ask your server" campaign that highlights local producers and processors.

5C. Additional Action Elements in the Strategic Agenda

Regional Food System Centers Collaborative Common Targets

1. Build Farmer Networks and Collaborative Marketing Opportunities

Increase collaboration among farmers to expand agricultural development, processing, marketing and profitability of agricultural enterprises. Set up collaborative marketing opportunities and business structures to aggregate products and increase the selling power of Vermont farmers. Through these innovative networks, open new markets using creative arrangements that ensure fair, stable pricing systems.

2. Expand Composting

Develop county-wide and/or town-wide composting programs that have educational components and capture nutrients in the waste stream to support soil fertility and additional economic, social, and environmental impacts. Advocate for greater clarity around state regulations for on-farm, municipal, and private composting systems.

3. Steward Agricultural Soils

Work with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other partners to determine statewide usability of different soil classes. Research crop varieties to determine regionally appropriate production. Provide a “best use” consultation service to producers and other land-owners. Participate in regional and state level decision-making regarding soil stewardship practices and nutrient management. Work with the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and other parties to plan and implement these efforts.

4. Ensure Seed Security

Institute a breeding program for regionally appropriate seeds, specifically open pollinated varieties.

5. Expand Energy Efficiency and Renewable Generation

Help farmers and food systems avail new technologies to improve efficiencies, reduce energy costs and carbon impacts, and increase the generation of biomass power and all its benefits for farm viability, food security, and long term sustainability.

6. Advocate to Improve Regulation

Support scale-specific food and agricultural regulations. Foster a new, 21st century goals-based regulatory structure that arises from a vision for Vermont agriculture. Provide support to farmers for navigating new regulations, including Generally Accepted Agricultural Practices (GAAPs) and others.

7. Research

Advocate for a coordinated and collaborative state research agenda. Get more information about the current market for locally and regionally produced food, as well as about producer capacity and preferences for supplying this market. Use this information to support farmers in taking risks, trying new crops, and processing for new markets. Conduct (or take advantage of) economic analysis that goes with implementation and trials of new technology

(such as oil processing or freezing units). Disseminate information about new technology and the economic impact associated with it. Evaluate and test creative ownership models for infrastructure that serves farmers. Pool research needs and data.

8. Expand Tourism Opportunities

Support interest in and development of Agrotourism, Agritainment, and Gastrotourism. Work with partners to develop infrastructure related to these businesses.

9. Improve School Foods

Expand the use of local foods in schools, and promote school-based community food systems. Build a curriculum that includes gardens, mentoring, and information sharing between Farm-to-School participants. Conduct multi-year education programs in kid-centered places that emphasize how food systems work.

10. Organize to Advance Community Food Systems

Advocate for town by town and regional “food plans” that include mapping and farmer inventories. Bring gardening and community gardens to underserved communities. Educate around public efforts to grow extra food for donation for the hungry. Organize community action around local food systems.

6. Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaborative Members

Today, the Vermont Regional Food Centers listed below are working in their own regions and as partners throughout Vermont on a range of activities toward realizing our common vision.

Food Works at Two Rivers Center

Food Works at Two Rivers is now in their sixth year of operating a Farm-to-Table program, purchasing fresh produce from a network of 20 small farms and distributing at reduced cost to sites serving mostly at-risk Vermonters: Senior Meals, early childhood education programs, hospitals, mental health facilities, food shelves, schools. Over the past year we have expanded into the for-profit market by selling to buying clubs and larger institutions like Goddard College. Our Two Rivers Center consists of a 4 acre-farm and an 1836 farmhouse and barn which we are turning into a regional food, farm and nutrition education center. A 12,500 cubic foot root cellar below the barn will be completed in June.

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The Center for an Agricultural Economy

The Center for an Agricultural Economy operating in Hardwick and surrounding communities is a Vermont regional food center whose purpose is to ensure that consumers have access to healthy, secure, and affordable locally-grown food, and farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs have reliable and efficient access to local and regional markets.

The Center strives to make community connections so that institutions such as food pantries, schools, restaurants, and social service agencies are also able to count on a year-round supply of local food. The measurable outcomes of such a system include a stronger local economy, improved public health, retention of agricultural lands, and decreased fuel consumption.

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ACORN Local Food Collaborative

The ACORN Local Food Collaborative is a new initiative of the Addison County Localvores, a three-year old project of the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN). The Collaborative's vision is to develop an integrated, thriving local food system that enhances the long-term health of our land, the prosperity of our local economy and the well-being of our whole community. The purpose of the Collaborative is to network the key stakeholders in the local food system (from field to table, from businesses to schools and hospitals to foodbanks), to coordinate needs and to identify gaps and opportunities.

The Collaborative was set into motion in response to a local food system summit held in Middlebury on March 12, 2009 (co-sponsored by the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, the Addison County Localvores and the Addison County Organic Farmers) which was well attended by many key participants in the local food economy. The Localvores and Organic Farmers subsequently met with the Addison County Economic Development Corporation to seek help in applying for a planning grant to further the work of the Collaborative. The farmers are considering the development of a farmers' cooperative. The Localvores are also planning to publish Addison County's first Local Food Directory in the spring of 2010. We continue to meet with local institutions who have expressed interest in increasing their purchasing of local foods, including Porter Hospital, Middlebury College, Cafe Services (Middlebury schools), Abbey Foods (county schools) and the new Farmer's Diner.

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The Intervale Center

The Intervale Center is a 501c3 nonprofit organization in Burlington, Vermont. Our mission is to develop farm- and land-based enterprises that generate social and economic opportunity while protecting natural resources. Since 1988, we have pursued this mission by preserving and managing 350 acres of land, supporting viable farms, increasing access to local and organic food, improving soil fertility, protecting water quality through stream bank restoration and educating young people about agriculture and healthy food. Through these efforts, we have established an exceptional agricultural and environmental resource within the city limits of Burlington and earned a national reputation as a leader in the sustainable agriculture movement.

The Intervale Center is known as a leader in farm business incubation and business-planning support. In the last five years, we have worked with more than 100 farmers throughout Vermont through our agricultural development programs. Since 2002, Success on Farms, a statewide farm business planning program funded through the Vermont Housing and

Conservation Board, has worked with more than 60 farms, providing customized planning and technical assistance to help farms increase revenues and quality of life. The Farms Program, a nationally-recognized farm business incubator, has supported the growth of dozens of farms since its inception in 1994. Just in the past three years, three Intervale farms have successfully graduated from the program onto their own farms on conserved land. In 2008, the 12 independent farm businesses in the Intervale grossed over \$1 million and sold product to a range of markets in the Burlington area, including farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture programs. Additionally, the Center is a consultant for the Association of Africans Living in Vermont's New Farms for New Americans project, an Office of Refugee Resettlement-funded project in its second year, which works with 60 refugee families who grow produce to market at area farmers' markets and limited wholesale accounts. The Center provides agricultural, marketing and business planning curriculum and project development support for this growing program with the goal of supporting viable refugee and immigrant farming in Vermont.

Drawing from this experience and the established relationship with farmers, the Intervale Center has expanded its work to include food hub development. A food hub provides farmers with marketing support, storage infrastructure and distribution services. At the Intervale Center, we have successfully integrated these elements on a small scale with the launch of the Food Basket enterprise. Through the Food Basket, 20 local farmers work together to successfully generate \$150,000 in sales through a multi-farm workplace delivery program. The program offers a variety of local food shares from fruit, vegetable and cheese to meat, eggs and maple syrup delivered directly to Burlington-area businesses. In the coming year we plan to build on this success by expanding the Food Basket and working with farmers to develop additional market opportunities and appropriate storage and distribution infrastructure. The goal of the food hub is to work with multiple stakeholders to develop new collaborations that will increase the amount of local food produced and consumed in Vermont. This will be accomplished through a more direct distribution system that values farm efficiency and farm profitability and offers an opportunity for direct investment by farmers.

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LACE (Local Agricultural Community Exchange)

LACE (Local Agricultural Community Exchange) is a non-profit 501c3 dedicated to bringing the community back in touch with local foods and the land by supporting family farms. By strengthening the relationship between people and their local foods, LACE aims to boost local economy, conserve local farm land, increase the community's health and create unity within the community. LACE fulfills its mission by inviting farmers and community members alike to a central location in downtown Barre. Here they can: share, trade and sell

locally prepared foods; learn from one another in workshops, discussion groups, lectures and the like; participate in hands-on cooking and preparation of local foods in LACE's community kitchen; become Vendors in the LACE Gallery of all Vermont-made crafts and goods; and, best of all, get to know one another.

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Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL)

Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL) has been working since 2004 to create a viable, sustainable local food and agriculture system in our region. RAFFL is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization with a diverse board of directors comprised of farmers, consumers, and organizational partners who share our goals and generously contribute their time and energy to carrying out the priorities.

Specifically, RAFFL is working to ensure local food is accessible, affordable and plentiful for the full spectrum of people living here. We accomplish this via a multi-faceted approach with both short-term and long-term projects:

- ✓ finding new markets for farmers
- ✓ publishing a Locally Grown Guide to the region's local food system
- ✓ redistributing local produce to people reliant upon charitable food programs
- ✓ planning a land-based business incubator for new farmers
- ✓ establishing a young farmers network to support their initiative

One key planning project in the works is the Green Mountain Food Hub. The Green Mountain Food Hub will be a centralized food processing center that allows for new agriculture enterprise and specialty food product business growth in the Rutland Area. The Hub seeks to provide farmers with fair-trade value on their product while increasing the affordability and convenient access to consumers. The Hub will incorporate facilities for production and storage in order to meet the needs of institutions seeking to increase their local food usage, regulatory needs of retail establishments, and demand from consumers for locally grown and produced products on a year-round basis.

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Post Oil Solutions: Greater Falls Regional Food Center – Bellows Falls

Post Oil Solutions (www.postoilsolutions.org) is a community organizing initiative whose mission is to empower the people of our bioregion to develop sustainable, collaborative, and socially just communities leading to a self-sufficient post petroleum society. We have developed projects around energy, transportation, education, and the local economy. However, our primary thrust has been in working toward our goal of becoming a region which can basically feed itself, otherwise known as our Regional Food Sustainability Campaign.

We have taken a variety of approaches: from organizing a buy local campaign and starting the Windham Localvores; to organizing community and neighborhood gardens, starting CSAs and a seed saving group, offering skills workshops, sponsoring farmers' markets, and developing a Community Food Security Project geared to ensure that all members of our communities have access to fresh, nutritious locally produced food.

The Greater Falls Regional Food Center Project, one spoke of Post Oil's Regional Food Sustainability Campaign, is intended to help build the social, economic, and educational infrastructure necessary to support the availability of locally produced foods that are affordable to everyone in the community while providing a fair return to the farmers. This infrastructure would include a licensed, commercial-sized, food processing kitchen and storage facilities, dry, cold and preserved, that would allow local food to be available 12 months of the year. In turn, this is envisioned as becoming a distribution outlet for fresh and processed local food for a region that includes Windham and Windsor Counties in Vermont, as well as Sullivan and Cheshire Counties in New Hampshire.

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Vital Communities – Valley Food and Farm

Valley Food & Farm fosters relationships that make local agriculture a vital part of daily community life in the greater upper valley region of Vermont & New Hampshire. Valley Food & Farm (VF&F) works to connect people across the complex food web which includes individuals, farms, retailers, food service, institutions, processors, and the non-farming business community. Over the past 10 years our projects have included helping Dartmouth College increase its local farm purchases, collectively promoting area farmers' markets, offering a searchable website for farm products and services, writing and publishing an annual Valley Food & Farm Guide to seasonal eating and area farm-related businesses, hosting an annual meet-the-farmer expo, introducing an income-based housing community to gardening, cooking and more healthful eating, and producing a bi-weekly electronic bulletin

about food-and-farm-related events, news, and seasonal availability. We also just began the Valley Food Council, a networking group comprised of individuals from town and community groups in our region that are focused on local agriculture. VF&F currently provides a wellness benefit to larger local progressive businesses: we will connect your staff to farms, farmers, and fresh farm foods. This project broadens the concept of workplace CSA, so that everyone, regardless of their suitability for CSA, can learn about vegetables, learn to cook, and enjoy fresh wholesome foods at a level that meets their needs. You can find out more at: <http://www.vitalcommunities.org/Agriculture/agriculture.htm>

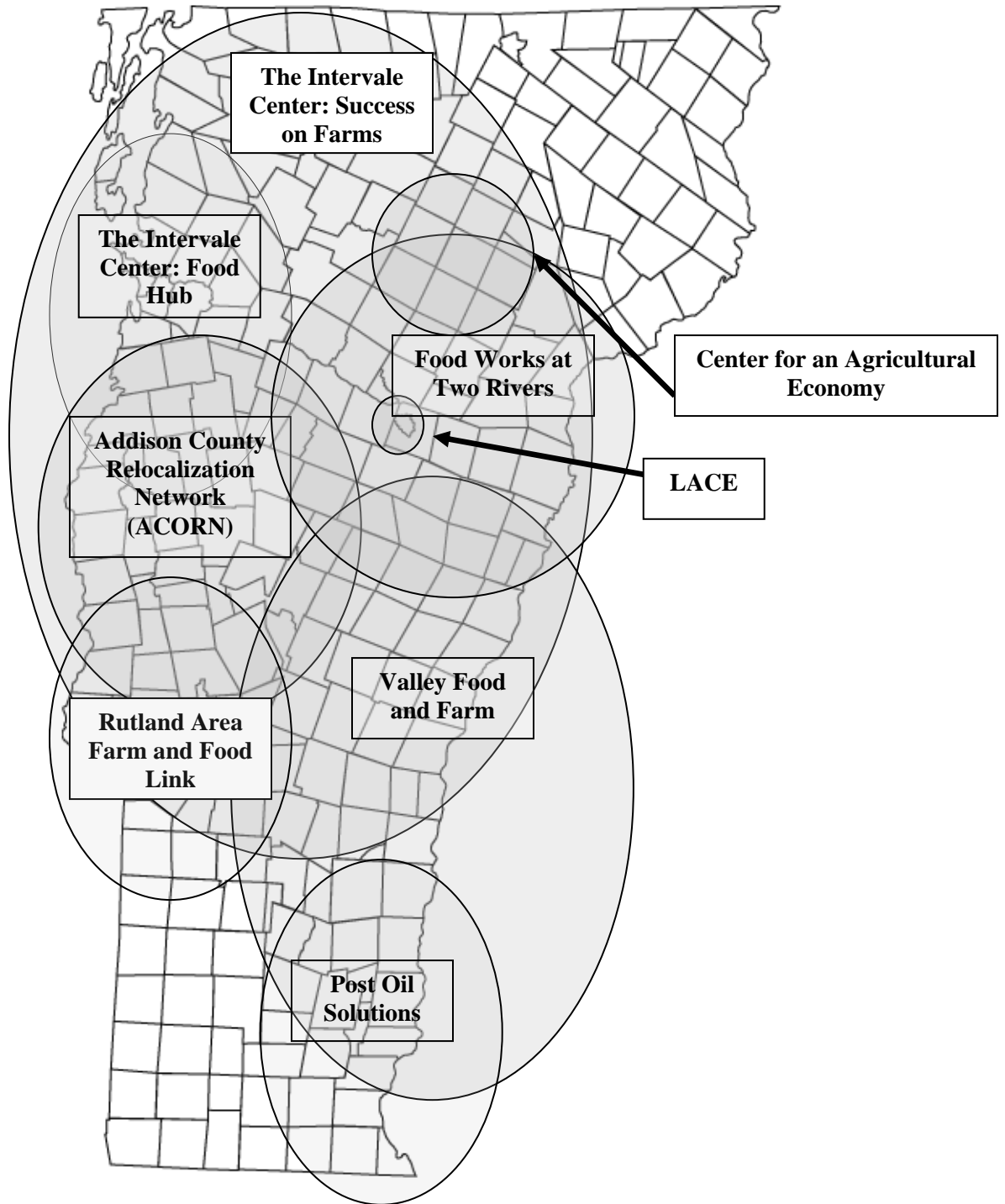
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7. Regional Food Centers Collaborative Primary Service Areas Mapping Exercise 2009



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