

Moving Vermont Agriculture Forward

Strategic Initiatives Report

On December 5, 2007, the **John Merck Fund** and the **Vermont Agency of Agriculture** co-sponsored a meeting of agricultural and development leaders to analyze opportunities for the expansion of agricultural business opportunities in Vermont. The discussions centered on how Vermont could move forward as a business environment for economically sustainable agricultural enterprises that represent added value, whether through processing, unique production methods, local marketing, or other models that contribute to working landscapes.

Participants considered an array of ideas and called for a more focused dialogue to evaluate options and flesh out some key opportunities. The John Merck Fund contracted with the **Vermont Council on Rural Development** to facilitate that focused dialogue with assistance from Vermont Agency of Agriculture staff. The discussion took two tracks: branding and marketing, and business development. Volunteer participants on each committee were:

Branding and Marketing:

Bill Stenger, President, General Manager and CEO of Jay Peak
Dr. John Bramley, CEO of Windham Foundation
David Marvin, President, Butternut Mountain Farm
Bill Schubart, President, Resolutions Inc
Megan Camp, Vice President, Shelburne Farms
Anson Tebbetts, Deputy Secretary, VT Agency of Agriculture

Business Development

Diane Imrie, Director, Nutrition Services, Fletcher Allen Hospital
Robert Foster, President, Vermont Natural Ag Products
Allison Hooper, President, Vt. Butter and Cheese
Rep. Will Stevens, Owner, Golden Russet Farm
Rosalie Wilson, President, Business Development Services
Andrew Meyer, President, Vermont Soy Company
Dan Smith, Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation
David Lane, Deputy Secretary, VT Agency of Agriculture

The Vermont Council on Rural Development began a 6-month process in May, 2008, to facilitate the committees' work to identify a short list of priority projects to recommend for pursuit in their respective focus areas. This report presents the findings of each working group.

Vermont Agriculture Development Corporation

The Business Development Working Group proposes a development corporation designed to help bring the most promising ideas in Vermont agriculture to a funded implementation stage. This corporation will increase efficiency for businesspeople moving through the steps of developing ideas, navigating regulations, and pulling together funding packages – particularly packages that combine traditional capital, philanthropic capital, and government funding. The corporation, through its close knowledge of the business and agricultural environment of Vermont, will help investors vet proposals to find those with the highest potential for success. The Agriculture Development Corporation will provide a strong voice for Vermont agriculture as part of economic development strategies in the state. It is anticipated that this project will increase the appearance of new business ventures (whether a new business or new phase of an existing business), increase the long-term prospects for success of these businesses, and provide a strategic assessment of what agriculture-related businesses clusters, including businesses that provide services and / or infrastructure, set the stage for a strong agricultural economy in the future.

Vermont Agritourism Promotion

The Branding & Marketing Working Group finds that Vermont is well positioned to become a national leader in agritourism initiatives. Vermont is well known for its strong commitment to local agriculture. At the same time, we devote considerable resources to our tourist economy, which centers on outdoor recreation and cultural heritage. The Branding & Marketing Group proposes a series of initiatives to multiply the leverage between these economies. The proposed projects include a coordinated marketing campaign that puts agricultural enterprises and tourism events on the same map, an events calendar that takes visitors through the seasons in Vermont's working landscape, an online center for both visitor information and product sales, and trainings to help event and activity organizers present a high quality experience. The Branding & Marketing Group also recommends that those involved in agriculture and tourism in Vermont consider a future signature event that showcases for the world what Vermont has to offer in food and farming.

PART I

Agriculture Development Corporation

The Vermont Agriculture Development Corporation (VADC) will provide leadership to facilitate the growth of new, innovative agricultural businesses and the strengthening and expansion of existing businesses by providing services currently unavailable on a statewide basis. It will serve as a first stop for assistance, navigating the range of steps between a business idea and successful implementation. It will help manage regulatory and pre-development issues. It will help entrepreneurs connect with the capital they need. It will be a vehicle for connecting investors with agricultural enterprises that match their goals and values. It will be a voice to advocate for agriculture in the business world. Under the guidance of a creative and engaged board of directors, it will leverage funds to support private enterprises that promise to advance Vermont agriculture as a whole. This initiative firmly situates agriculture as a key part of Vermont's economic development.

Goals of VADC

The Vermont Agriculture Development Corporation will expand the number of jobs in enterprises that are based on production from agricultural and forest lands, including ventures that use this natural resource base in innovative ways, such as developing new systems for generating energy. It will do so through addressing, in one organization, needs that are either not being met at all in Vermont agriculture or are only being met in small pockets of the state. These needs include:

- Helping entrepreneurs navigate the various services and resources available to them in Vermont.
- Providing a vehicle through which investors can direct money, support, and enterprise expertise to vetted business models that match their goals and values.
- Assisting enterprises in navigating the regulatory and permitting aspects of starting a new ag-based business in Vermont.
- Providing predevelopment assistance, business planning and strategic start up assistance.

- Partnering with Regional Development Corporations.
- Actively aggregating pools of capital to invest in promising projects.
- Assisting in accessing workforce development resources.
- Owning property or infrastructure for use as incubator space for new entrepreneurs.
- Providing agriculture-specific expertise for traditional business and economic development groups.
- Matching business people with an agriculture-related idea to those knowledgeable in agriculture who can help realize it.
- Connecting higher education programs with business implementation.
- Helping new or expanding businesses handle community relations so that they maintain good terms within their communities.
- Sending the message that Vermont is friendly to agricultural businesses and bridging services to recruited businesses.
- Offering a comprehensive support program for the most promising business concepts that can bring them from the idea stage to resources and implementation.

Programs Housed at VADC

The Vermont Agriculture Development Corporation will meet the needs listed above through work in three program areas.

- 1.) Guidance for Existing Services: Vermont is fortunate to have many non-profit groups, individuals, agencies, lenders, and other programs that can help our agricultural business sector expand. However, those starting businesses or entering a new stage of their business' growth may find that it is time consuming to discover what is appropriate for their individual needs. In particular, many entrepreneurs have reported a need for help navigating regulations and permit requirements. VADC can provide guidance for existing services, serving as a single stop for information and referrals. This service will have the additional

benefit of networking *providers* as well, as the VADC director can help those offering services understand more about each other.

- 2.) Idea Development Program: Each year the Idea Development Program, directed by a strong board of advisors, will identify a limited number of entrepreneurs to receive support in developing their business ideas. It will be selective in choosing businesses that are not quite ready for the Funding Packages program area (listed below), but that can fill key gaps in the agricultural business world and that show characteristics which suggest a high probability of success. Entrepreneurs who enter the Idea Development Program will receive grants that underwrite professional technical assistance and connections with seasoned businesspeople. The original vetting process and a later evaluation will allow the Agriculture Development Corporation to then present these businesses, prescreened, to potential investors.
- 3.) Crafting Funding Packages: The Agriculture Development Corporation will be able to pull together funding packages in several ways. It will serve as a connector to investors interested in entrepreneurs who have been vetted and gone through the assistance program described above. It will act as an advisor for investors and funders who want to support Vermont agriculture and participate in local economic development in general but may not be in a position to identify / evaluate specific projects – this function may evolve into building a pool of capital similar to the funds managed by the Vermont Community Fund or Housing Vermont’s Investment Fund. A third is to be a deal maker for fully formed business plans, actively pulling together packages that match clients’ particular needs and providing assistance in accessing federal, state or grant funds where appropriate. Overall, this program will be a hands-on approach to building financing that works for highly promising new businesses or existing businesses that want to strengthen their position.

Projected Market for VADC Services:

The market for the services provided by VADC depends primarily on the selection of willing and knowledgeable entrepreneurs with sound concepts focusing on Vermont’s agricultural and natural resources. Today’s interest in this type of business venture suggests a strong pool of candidates for the future. Recent Vermont business start ups provide examples of entrepreneurs who might have benefited from early stage agricultural development corporation services. These entrepreneurs can contribute to VADC’s own development by reflecting on what services would have made their first years run more smoothly, and later refer the next generation of entrepreneurs to these

services once VADC makes them available. These Vermont businesses will also serve as future clients as they enter a stage of expansion or consider spin-off companies. Examples of the types of businesses who would be (or would have been) strong candidates for VADC services include:

- Vermont Livestock Slaughter and Processing Inc.
- Island Ice Cream
- Honora Winery
- Nutty Steph's Granola
- Vermont Mornings
- Laughing Moon Chocolates
- Vermont Quality Meats
- Vermont Smoke and Cure
- Vermont Soy
- Champlain Orchards
- Jasper Hill Farm

In many ways, existing service providers are also clients of the Agricultural Development Corporation. These organizations benefit from the service of connecting appropriate clients with their programs, a central hub that can network them with *each other*, and an organization available to fill gaps where their services stop – for example building financing packages. Examples of providers who could benefit from VADC include:

- Community Development Block Grant Administrators
- Farm Bureau
- Farm Viability Program
- Intervale Center
- NOFA-VT
- Regional Development Corporations
- Rutland Area Food & Farm Link
- Small Business Development Center
- State Government Agencies
- Trade Associations
- USDA – VT & NH
- UVM Services – including Extension, Ag Innovation Center
- VEDA – VT Agricultural Credit Corporation
- Vermont Community Foundation
- Vermont Food Venture Center
- Vermont Land Trust
- Vermont Technical College
- VT Businesses for Social Responsibility
- VT Community Loan Fund
- VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
- Yankee Farm Credit

Following the start of the Agricultural Development Corporation, initial client companies will be solicited from the network of partners that provide technical assistance, funding, marketing or other assistance to developing companies. General interest agricultural business events such as Vermont's popular organic farming conference, renewable energy conference, the newly introduced Vermont foods matchmaker event, and regular food and agriculture symposia hosted at Vermont's

colleges, all offer business networking opportunities. These events have previously provided basic business information without the in-depth follow up possible through VADC. In addition, VADC will be in a position to attend events across the nation as a representative recruiting agricultural or natural resource based business to Vermont.

Prospective businesses contemplating start-up in Vermont currently range from dairy processing to specialty meats to farm based energy production. Ultimately, VADC clients will cover multiple fields, but all will demonstrate sound business concepts and most importantly have strong management teams willing to listen and ready to develop and implement plans for growth in their companies.

Implementation & Sustainable Funding:

The Vermont Agriculture Development Corporation will begin with a Board of advisors, who can work closely in building business connections and recruiting / vetting initial clients, and an Executive Director with experience in the business development field. An initial pool of start-up funds will provide time for this Executive Director to begin the Development Stage with:

- Refining alternatives and providing recommendations to the founding Board for organizational structure.
- Building connections to existing organizations and the referral service capacity (including written documents such as a “to-contact” checklist for new businesses).
- Outlining a specific work plan and benchmarks for first 5 years.
- Developing start up funds for 5-year pilot period.

The full pilot period will begin with selected entrepreneurs assisted through the idea development program and technical assistance funds. At the same time, the Executive Director will also build funding packages for one or two more mature pilot projects and provide ongoing referral / connection services.

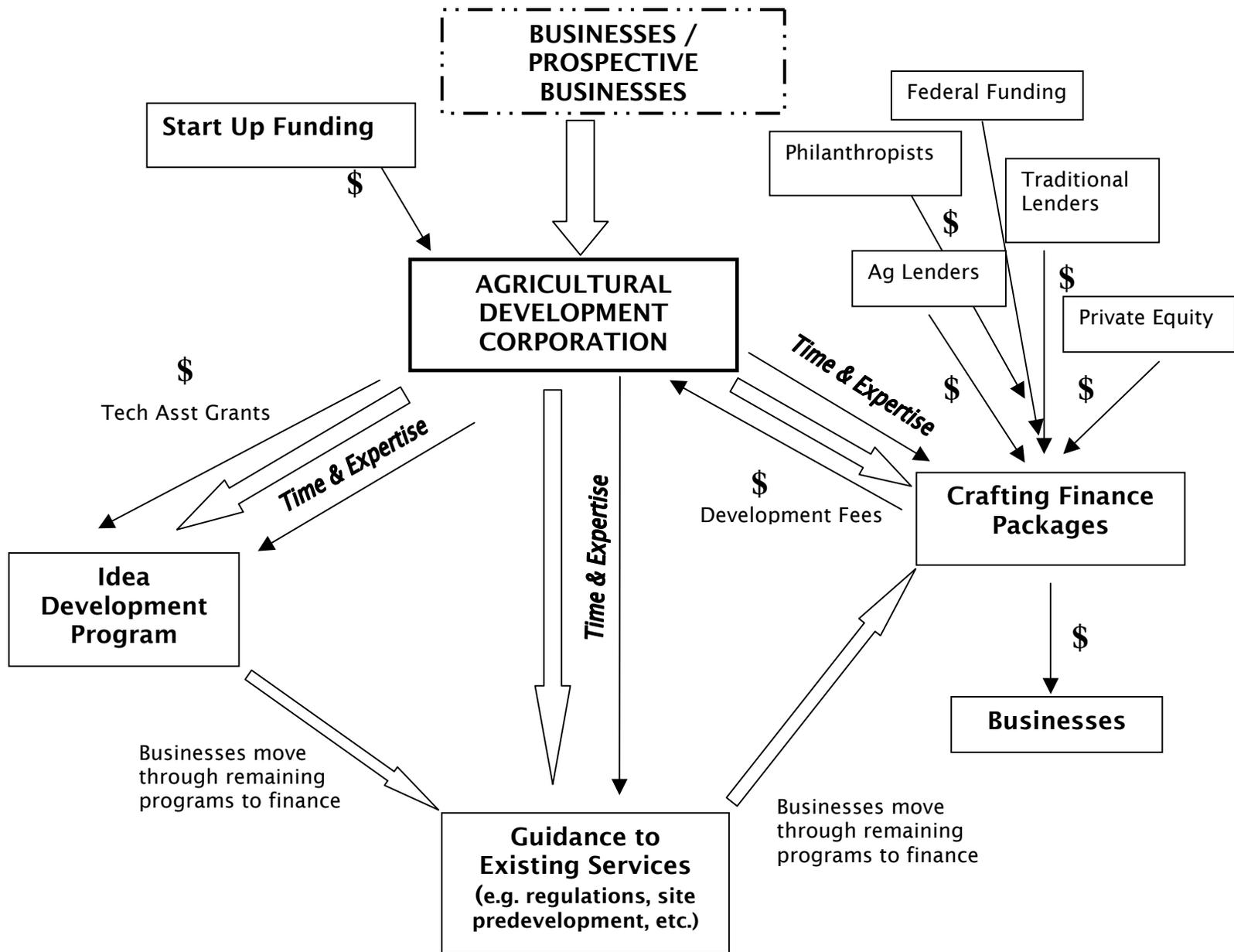
The structure of VADC, with its multiple programs working together, will lead to sustainable funding streams after its initial years. Program resources will flow through several avenues:

- Philanthropic Funds will go into supporting the idea development program and sustaining core staff who provide assistance to clients. This program is an ideal recipient for funding from foundations interested in strong regional agricultural economies.

- Private Equity and State & Federal Grants / Loans will build the investment pool of funds available for entrepreneurs who go through Agriculture Development Corporation programs.
- Service Fees & Royalties, paid by business projects developed through the Agriculture Development Corporation, will go back into underwriting the organization's basic functions.

As VADC helps more successful businesses, its services become more valued and the pool of past clients paying fees based on their own success increases. This system both prevents VADC from relying solely on philanthropic funding and builds in an internal review mechanism, as future funding is clearly tied to performance in supporting successful business development.

The following diagram illustrates the basic proposed resource movement through VADC.



RESOURCE FLOWS FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Outcomes and Evaluation:

The Agricultural Development Corporation will directly advance Vermont's most promising agricultural businesses by facilitating development from idea to implementation. This facilitation will result in a shorter wait for these businesses and their customers. It is a service that applies equally to new business concepts and expansion of existing businesses. The VADC will particularly target businesses that can serve as models or as centers for the cluster development of additional agricultural and value-added enterprises. The Agricultural Development Corporation will also build the foundation for ongoing business strength by ensuring entrepreneurs can access the type of funding packages that best match their needs.

Possible Measurements:

- Amount of capital mobilized to invest in Vermont-based agriculture businesses.
- Entrepreneurs' completion of the idea development program – success will be measured by successful startups against a review of the reasons why those who do not achieve a startup failed to do so.

The Agricultural Development Corporation will assist funders – private, philanthropic, federal and state – by introducing them to promising projects. Where necessary, it can provide background work to layer together different types of funding into one package. The Agricultural Development Corporation will also help out-of-state investors and funders connect with projects on the ground in Vermont, all of which will have been vetted by a knowledgeable board before being accepted for the Development Corporation services.

Possible Measurements:

- Amount of capital mobilized to invest in Vermont-based agriculture businesses.
- Development of a system to review and evaluate potential business investments for outside investors and number of investors turning to Agriculture Development Corporation for advice.

The Agricultural Development Corporation will also help shape the larger business context that supports agriculture. Even the most traditional farm-based businesses rely on healthy supporting businesses, such as distributors, warehouses, processing facilities, to allow their business to grow and succeed. These needs expand as new types of businesses, such as farm-based energy, emerge. Because the Agricultural Development Corporation can provide a bridge between ag-businesses and the larger business community, it will be

ideally suited to communicate these needs and rally other entrepreneurial businesspeople to take advantage of the opportunity.

Possible Measurements:

- Number of business and economic development organizations that have expanded their understanding of ways to help agriculture-based businesses.

This corporation will firmly situate Vermont agricultural businesses as innovative leaders in Vermont's economic development. It will maximize each year's crop of promising new businesses. It will also be a central force for improved communication between business service providers in every field. At the end of five years an assessment based on the types of criteria described above will be a chance to confirm that success, or to recommend a new approach.

PART II

Agricultural Events & Tourism

Vermont is becoming established nationally and internationally as an exciting center for farm and food activity. At the same time, we have an established reputation as a tourist destination for other interests, such as outdoor recreation, cultural heritage, and foliage viewing. It is time to develop a unified, effective campaign that draws visitors to Vermont to experience our agricultural landscape at all times of the year and that continues to connect these visitors back to Vermont farm products after they have left. This effort requires better marketing of existing events that have capacity to handle more visitors, opportunities for those working in agriculture-based tourism to improve their skills, avenues for events to grow in size and scope (where appropriate) and simple ways for visitors to connect back to the products that they experienced while exploring Vermont towns.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture and Department of Tourism and Marketing should work cooperatively within state government to expand agricultural tourism, build the market for events, increase sales revenues to Vermont farm and value-added food operations, and thereby expand enterprise development and job creation in agricultural enterprises in the state. Specific projects that this venture should support appear in the following sections. More generally, it is time for the state to invest in maximizing agriculture's potential as a steady source of tourist traffic. Options for future work range from aggressive promotion at trade shows around the country to building cross promotional packages with other tourism efforts to partnering with our fine restaurants to craft new culinary experiences.

At the same time that we look to the state to play a more active role at the intersection of agriculture and tourism, it is also important for non-profit organizations, individual businesses, and trade groups to come together to improve this sector. The following recommendations offer specific projects that can start this process for all stakeholders.

1. Coordinated Marketing Campaign

Working collaboratively, the Department of Tourism and Marketing, the Agency of Agriculture, non-profit organizations, and businesses should promote a year-round calendar of events that highlight Vermont agriculture in different regions of the state in every month. The message would be that there is *always* something available for the Vermont visitor. The promotional elements would be drawn from existing groups and can include:

- Established annual events
- Recently launched events that would like to draw in new attendees
- Established events that are expanding to include an agricultural component
- The new Farm and Foods Festival

Not every event will be included, only those that are well suited to outside visitors. Those who opt into the coordinated calendar would be expected to invest significant time in the overall campaign's success.

Organizing agricultural events across the calendar year and providing assistance to ensure high quality events will set the stage for a strong marketing push. An overall state marketing campaign will bring the calendar to potential visitors outside the state, visitors currently in the state for a previously planned vacation, and Vermonters looking for weekend entertainment. Coordinated signage, promotional materials, advertisements, presence at events, communications with the hospitality industry, and partnerships with traditional tourism promoters will ensure high visibility for opportunities to experience Vermont agriculture.

2. Training & Assistance for Hosts

Vermont organizations and farmers will not always have experience in tourism, education, or presenting their stories. They may also need help translating the initial visitor contact into sales. Activities currently in place that don't qualify for the coordinated calendar described above, for example because they are not set up to handle visitors from out of state, should have assistance available to help them develop to the point where they can fully participate in this program if they so choose.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture should start the process of developing these programs through an initial census of needs that currently exist for those involved in the agritourism sector and resources currently available to help. It is

anticipated that hosts will require training workshops, potentially along with small grants for upgrading tourism capacity (for example, new signs, website work, parking lot improvements) and, in the longer term, a certification system that designates certain parameters for a quality visitor experience.

Finally, it is important to remember that not all food and farm-related events will grow to a scale where the out-of-state promotions described in the first section are appropriate. Many events flourish based on their small scale and local character. Developing programs to assist organizers of all types of events, activities, and visitor experiences, allows each to reach its maximum potential, as defined by those who have created it.

3. Online Agricultural Product and Events Center

The coordinated marketing campaign described previously will require an online presence to assist visitors in planning their trip. The Internet offers an excellent tool to connect with visitors from outside of Vermont and Vermonters within the state who want to explore other regions. However, a website associated with the calendar of food & farm festivals should not only provide event information, but also be a brand center that features a robust array of Vermont food products. One possible model for this type of showcasing website, with links back to individual business sites for making sales, is the Cabot Essential Buyers' Guide developed in partnership with the VT Wood Manufacturers' Association (www.buyvermontwoodproducts.com).

A new web site should be established as the portal for agricultural tourism in Vermont that accomplishes a short list of objectives:

- Serve as a center point for ag-based events and celebrations and hold a coordinated calendar of these events.
- Connect visitors to VT products after they've gone home.
- Provide direct links to producers; any transactions occur directly at that level as in the Cabot Essential Buyers Guide (see www.buyvermontwoodproducts.com)

The website might also offer additional components beyond these core functions and, through these components, develop as a portal to local product information in general. For example, the site can:

- Host an interactive bulletin board for buyers and sellers.

- Support from the site manager for ag. enterprises that lack web sites as they develop them and link to the central site.
- Coordinate existing online directories of local farms and foods, through links to individual sites and/or through coordinating data to allow for comprehensive searchability across directories.
- Transaction capabilities on site (a longer-term goal)

Different models currently exist for how to structure this type of brand center for Vermont food and farm-based products. Successful sites will all share similar characteristics that include:

- A critical mass of featured businesses from the beginning so that visitors see a diverse, well-populated site.
- Attentive maintenance that keeps all information current and responds to inquiries from site visitors and listed businesses.
- Easy navigation that allows visitors to quickly find what they want, including if they enter the site from an outside search engine.
- Ability to screen for quality and remove businesses that show poor customer relations or poor product quality.
- Technical assistance for producers to help them connect with the website, keep their information current, and maximize its impact on their business.
- A framework that combines easy navigation in search of particular products / events with a chance to learn the stories of Vermont agriculture.

4. The Vermont Food and Farms Festival

As work continues to improve agritourism in Vermont, the state will need a way to draw widespread attention to the many farm and food related activities in Vermont, and re-introduce the state visitors who have traveled here in the past. Producing a signature event that celebrates Vermont food and farms can put Vermont on the map for its agriculture. A Vermont-wide focus to the event will allow it to tie in the mission of all agricultural organizations in the state, highlighting their unique contributions within the final overarching theme and bringing them together for a major celebration of the state's agricultural

community. Area businesses can also utilize the development surrounding the event to build a more permanent economic infrastructure and network of cooperating organizations with year-round benefits to Vermont farms and agricultural enterprises.

The following outline describes a Vermont Food and Farms Festival that can serve as an unveiling of a new age in Vermont agritourism and may potentially continue on as a repeated event (yearly, every five years, etc.). Because this event will be a capstone for agritourism work and bring that work to a higher level through the Olympic style development of infrastructure in anticipation of a major event, the concept will require review at a later date based on experiences in the coordinated marketing, calendar of events, host trainings, and online product center.

Vermont Food and Farms Festival Theme:

The event will be designed to tell the story of agriculture in Vermont, how it is rooted in farm families and the working landscape of the state, and celebrate the stories of Vermonters and the flavors of VT fresh and value-added products.

The festival will share the aesthetic pleasure of Vermont and regional food in ways that center on families and friends, and the communal delight of sharing in fresh foods in close proximity to their source.

The festival will serve as a center-point for the regional Slow Food movement, RAFT, and other campaigns to preserve traditions of raising, preparing, and enjoying food with family and friends. It will center on Vermont and the VT Brand, but it will also serve as a platform to engage producers from the larger region whose products all share a unique flavor & history in our part of the Northeast.

The festival will find ways to celebrate the relationship of many Vermont brand attributes—the human scale, the small and diversified nature of Vermont farm operations, the story of community, the history and heritage of agriculture. It will also key into larger themes in Vermont’s economic development prospect today, especially the symbolic role of food in the green economy movement and the power of the “buy local” movement as expressions of Vermont values and priorities.

Features of the Festival:

The core of the festival will be similar in physical format to regional showcases, such as the Eastern States Exposition: both a celebratory event and commercial

opportunity for producers, with multiple pavilions representing the range of Vermont food & farms.

EATING OPPORTUNITIES: The festival will celebrate restaurants and prepared foods in a number of informal and formal settings to meet the needs of the variety of participant audiences.

SALES: The event will include significant direct sales opportunities. In one sense, the multiple sales venues will be the equivalent of statewide farmers market for fresh Vermont produce, vegetables, meats, wines, cheeses, and a wide variety of processed specialty and value-added foods. Other marketing opportunities will be the development of orders for later fulfillment and new linkages for future marketing and sales.

UNITING ORGANIZATIONAL AND STATE PARTNERS: The festival will succeed as a center-point for telling the full story of Vermont agriculture; it will do so by building partnerships with the full agriculture industry and with all the non-profit and associated organizations that support, market, or participate in agricultural or value-added activity. It should also become a keystone for the partnership of state agencies in advancing agricultural tourism in VT (especially the Dept. of Tourism and Agency of Agriculture collaboration described above).

TOURS AND WORKSHOPS: The Vermont Food and Farms Festival will present workshops and tours ranging from school food programs to agricultural energy projects. Organizations allied to produce the festival will lead workshops and tours in their area of interest and expertise ranging from the VT Cheese Council to the Vermont Compost Association. This common activity will produce a scale of agricultural celebration and education beyond anything done in Vermont previously. Many sessions may center on “relationship-based” food production, marketing, and education, and could include Farmers’ Markets, CSAs, Farm to School, Vermont Farms!, Vital Communities, Shelburne Farms, Localvore groups, NOFA, VFB, Slow Food VT, Intervale Center, Rural VT, VFN, RAFFL, VVBGA, and so many others.

VERMONT AND REGIONAL: The event will center on Vermont but build scale by inviting producers and consumers beyond our borders. Vermont can celebrate its place at the center of a NE and Quebec bio-region, enriching the variety and cultural presence of the event and, at the same time, reaching out to new markets and new partners. Reaching beyond its immediate region, Vermont can invite delegations of business or state leaders from China,

Quebec, Europe or elsewhere to this event, and can work with the Governor's office and VT's Congressional delegation to host these visitors.

Vermont Food and Farms Festival Outcomes:

The festival will produce new commercial outlets and markets for Vermont products by bringing chefs, retail food buyers, highly engaged individual consumers, and other markets directly to VT farms and value-added enterprises. Follow up evaluations will be able to document new market linkages like, "This year we connected 37 producers with chefs..."

The festival will draw a significant audience, popularizing both fresh and processed Vermont foods with new in-state audiences and visitors. In its first years it should reach 5,000 to 10,000 participants.

The event's success will also be measurable by gate receipts (from the number of attendees) and the amount of sales (in terms of gross receipts) and contracted deliveries by participating vendors.

The festival will produce measurable publicity for Vermont agriculture at a regional and national scale. The number of articles, especially in the regional and national press, will be a mark of success.

The event should be a focal point for infrastructure development connected to marketing and delivery and potentially including physical infrastructure, web development (see next concept), and marketing structures to unite and expand current VT Brand efforts.

This festival effort will succeed as a center-point for telling the full story of Vermont agriculture; it will do so by building partnerships with the full agriculture industry and with the non-profit and associated organizations that support, market, or participate in agricultural or value-added activity. The effort will lay a foundation, from the partnerships it builds to physical infrastructure development, for a stronger Vermont role in national and international food & farm interests. It should become a keystone for ongoing partnerships and investment in building Vermont's agricultural tourism capacity.