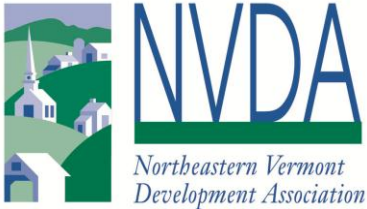


# Northeast Kingdom Food System Plan

One-Year Update ~ June 2012



## Acknowledgements

### *Members of the NEK Food System Network:*

Northeastern Vermont Development Association  
Center for an Agricultural Economy/Vermont Food Venture Center  
Small Business Development Center  
Area Agency on Aging for Northeastern Vermont  
Vermont Farms!  
Northeast Kingdom Travel & Tourism Association  
St. Johnsbury Area Local Food Alliance (ALFA)  
Green Mountain Farm to School  
Vermont Department of Health  
Newport Renaissance Corporation  
Fresh Start Community Farm  
Area Agency on Aging  
Rural Community Transport  
Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital  
Sky Island Farm  
Essex County Natural Resource Conservation District

UVM Extension  
Northern Communities Investment Corporation  
Sterling College  
Vermont Land Trust  
North Country Career Center  
Lyndon State College  
Northern Vermont Dairy Goat Network  
Tamarlane Farms and the Freighthouse Restaurant  
Harvest Hill Farm  
Jasper Hill  
Highfields Center for Composting  
NEK Learning Services  
Vermont Department of Health  
Eden Ice Cider Tannery Farms  
Vermont Chevron

This report was written by Erica Campbell with data contributions from Heather Davis of the Center for an Agriculture Economy and Alison Low of Northeastern Vermont Development Association.

The coordination of the NEK Food System Network and the development of this report were supported by the Center for an Agricultural Economy and the John Merck Fund.

Cover photos courtesy of Newport Renaissance Corporation and Green Mountain Farm to School.

## Moving from Plan to Action

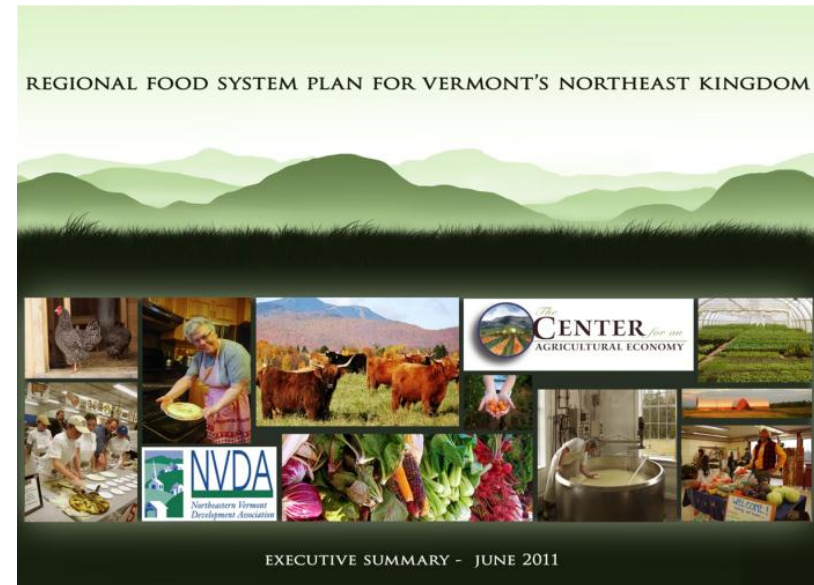
The *Regional Food System Plan for Vermont's Northeast Kingdom* was published in June, 2011 by the Center for an Agricultural Economy and the Northeastern Vermont Development Association. The plan, developed with widespread participation, presented ten broad goals to strengthen the NEK food system and 36 strategies to help reach those goals. These goals are aligned with Vermont's Farm to Plate Strategic Plan, and the NEK plan is meant to be a complementary blueprint for building local and regional food systems and for being a successful example of sub-state regional implementation.

This report is a one-year update of the full plan. It shares some of the exciting success stories and activities that are improving the vibrancy of the NEK food system, and provides a snapshot of how well we are doing at implementing the plan and achieving goals.

To help coordinate implementation of the plan, several organizations and businesses came together when the plan was published to discuss how to move the plan's strategies forward. The group, called the *NEK Food System Network*, meets quarterly and is always open to new participants.

The purpose of the network is to bring together a broad group of organizations and businesses to:

1. Share updates on NEK-based activities across the food system
2. Identify gaps in activity, and opportunities to collaborate on initiatives that help reach the NEK goals and the Farm to Plate statewide goals
3. Track the progress of how well the NEK is progressing at achieving the goals set out in the NEK plan



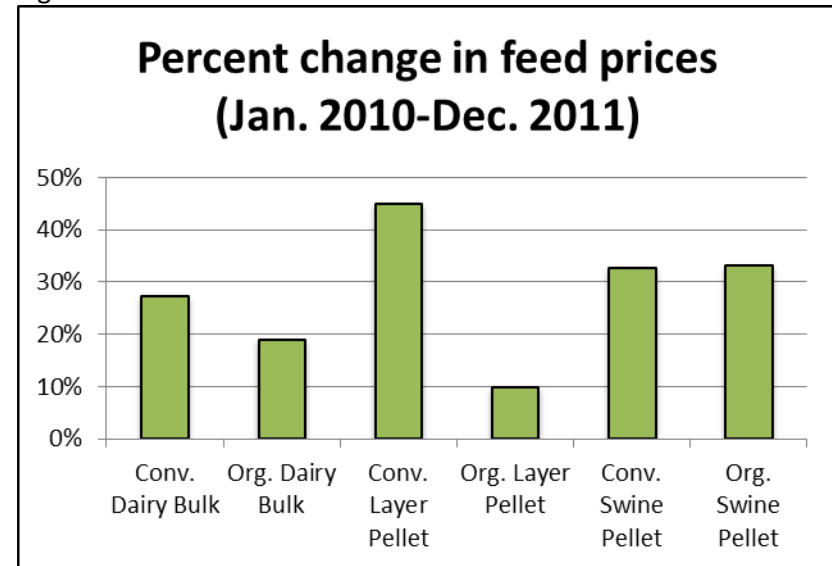
## Reaching our Goals for a Vibrant NEK Food System

The ten goals in the *Regional Food System Plan for Vermont's Northeast Kingdom* and subsequent strategies provide a roadmap for strengthening the food system in the Northeast Kingdom (NEK). Each goal includes annual indicator metrics where available, and also showcases examples of implementation projects throughout the NEK.

**GOAL 1. The Northeast Kingdom will have increasingly localized, affordable, and sustainable farming and production inputs, including energy, fertilizer, seeds, forage, and feed.**

A number of inputs are required before production can occur. Most farms today in the NEK rely on out-of-state sources for equipment, seeds, feed, fuel, and fertilizer. The cost of inputs such as energy and feed are very high, cutting into farmers' already tight margins. One measure of input costs is feed prices. Figure 1 shows how much feed prices rose at one custom feed store in the NEK over a two year period. Most feed costs rose 20 to 30% in that time period – a rate vastly more than inflation. Producing more feed and forage is one way to reduce input costs and reduce reliance on out-of-state commodity crops.

Figure 1. Increase in Various Feed Prices



Source: Morrison's Custom Feeds

Many livestock farmers are considering grazing and pasture management as a way to reduce feed costs. The Vermont Grass Farmers Association includes 8 member farms from the NEK in 2010, but there are likely many more farms that use grass farming and grazing techniques. In 2011 there were only 7 farms listed as members of VGFA. It will be important to continue to expand grazing practices and to grow more of our farming inputs as we move forward. This will likely also require additional technical assistance by service providers or through farmer-to-farmer mentoring.

There is one farm in the NEK that is a state-wide and northeast leader at developing grain crop. Butterworks Farm in Westfield grows over 150 acres of corn, oats, barley, peas, soybeans, spelt, rye, sunflowers, dry beans, and wheat for animal and human consumption. Last September, Butterworks offered an on-farm workshop that focused on grain topics related to grain storage, cleaning, drying, and processing value added products. These farmer-to-farmer workshops are an important teaching mechanism and a way to increase knowledge about producing more animal feed and other inputs.

Seed production and sales are another important production input. The sales of the region’s only commercial seed company is a proxy measure that indicates whether or not there is an increase in the purchasing of locally produced inputs in the NEK. High Mowing Seeds is a locally owned company based out of Wolcott, VT that

grows and distributes organic seeds that are not genetically engineered, as well as many heirloom seed varieties that have withstood the test of time. These varieties of seeds also provide a stronger, more diversified genetic pool. NEK sales data from High Mowing Seeds have been collected in 2010 and 2011, and percent change, rather than actual sales, is measured (see Table 1.)

Table 1. Sales of High Mowing Seeds in NEK

Type of Sales	Percent change in sales (\$)
HMS overall catalog sales	+28.24%
VT catalog sales	+15.64%
NEK catalog sales	-8.89%
Walk-in orders	+580.36%

Source: High Mowing Seeds

Although overall catalog sales and catalog sales from within the state of Vermont increased, catalog orders from the towns within the NEK have dropped. However, with the drastic increase in walk-in orders, many of these individuals who went to the facility to purchase their seeds are likely from the region. Also note, these amounts do not reflect the sales from retail stores that carry High Mowing Seeds, such as food coops and garden supply stores.

High Mowing Seeds also purchase seed from farmers throughout the NEK and Vermont. Besides providing additional farm income, this increases the overall amount of seeds being produced in the region.

**GOAL 2 - More food will be produced in the Northeast Kingdom for local and regional markets; production will continue to diversify; and farmers and food producers will be able to be profitable.**

Production data is primarily available every five years from the U.S. Census of Agriculture, as well as net farm income and other indicators of farm profitability. Despite the lack of quantitative data, there are many examples of increased and diversified production within the region.

The Northern Vermont Dairy Goat Network is helping farmers throughout the NEK explore scaling up milk production and developing value-added goat milk products. They offer workshops and other forms of technical assistance including management and production skills. With added goat milk production comes more offspring, including males. Vermont Chevron is working to develop a specialty goat meat market in response to these additional “unwanted” males. Vermont Chevron meats are currently being sold to restaurants, and with additional marketing efforts, sales could expand. There will be much work to be done, and adequate processing and distribution, as well as technical assistance, will be necessary to create a successful chevon value-chain.

Making dairy products is one way that dairy farms are diversifying and adding value to their milk. Jasper Hill Farm continues to expand their production of award winning cheeses aged at the Cellars at Jasper Hill, where other farmers can also age their cheese in a unique co-branding arrangement. Three farms in the NEK were also awarded USDA Value-Added Producer Grants in 2012:

- Kingdom Creamery in East Hardwick has invested in a processing infrastructure for yogurt and ice cream.
- Sweet Rowen Farmstead in West Glover has built a new on-farm processing facility and is bottling and selling milk locally and throughout Vermont.
- Shadagee Farm in Craftsbury Common is making Gouda cheese in a new on-farm cheese-cave.

Helping dairy farmers diversify often requires technical assistance in setting up equipment, developing production processes, and building a funding package to support a new farm enterprise, such as the Kingdom Creamery of Vermont. This new business recently built a state-of-the-art dairy processing facility to make ice cream and yogurt. According to Jeremy Michaud, one of Kingdom Creamery’s third-generation managers, “Our family dairy, Clair-A-Den farm, had a horrendous year in 2009. We faced a “now or never” situation, and needed to make a change for a brighter future. We are raising the fourth generation of children here – and when you look at them every day, this is why you do what you do.” Kingdom Creamery now has four wholesaler partners for product distribution, and also has over 60 accounts they deal with directly. The USDA Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) will help offset operating expenses. The family’s dairy farm and land provide all of the milk and maple syrup used. “We are now on a steep learning curve to produce and market a quality, value-added dairy product.”



Michaud continues, “There is a lot to learn about making yogurt and ice cream. We are learning very quickly how to best market and sell our products. It is still a work in progress—but, we have good help and have lots of good ideas and brain power from consultants and family about how we want to grow and develop.”

### **NVRH and Harvest Hill Farm Share 2011 - Vermont Sustainable Agriculture Award**

Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital and Harvest Hill Farm in Walden, VT were awarded the 2011 Vermont Sustainable Agriculture Council Award for their partnership. The award was presented “in recognition of their outstanding shared effort to build sustainable, collaborative and socially just communities.” The Sustainable Agriculture Council was impressed by the work that both partners have done to support agriculture in the Northeast Kingdom. Bill Half of Harvest Hill farm has been an active member of his community for the past 10 years, working with schools in Walden as well as St. Johnsbury. He has had a relationship with NVRH since 2005, when he started selling the hospital potatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, summer squash, broccoli, carrots, radishes, kale, and many other types of fresh and storage vegetables. In 2008, NVRH signed onto the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge. As part

of the pledge, NVRH works to source as much local food as they can (including vegetables from Harvest Hill Farm), coordinate an employee CSA (which has just completed its 3rd year, and is also supplied by Harvest Hill), and educate patients and staff about the importance of healthful eating.



Harvest Hill’s Bill Half. Photo: Harvest Hill Farm

**GOAL 3 - The NEK food processing and manufacturing sector will grow, increasing value-added food production and providing farmers and producers with additional local and regional markets.**

The number of food manufacturers is on the rise in the NEK. The Vermont Department of Labor reports that the NEK increased from 18 food manufacturing establishments in 2010 to 21 in 2011, and from 255 employees to 264 employees in that time period. That only includes those businesses with employees and thus does not include any of the newly emerging food specialty businesses or food manufacturers.

The Vermont Food Venture Center, a program of the Center for an Agriculture Economy, opened in January 2011 and provides the opportunity to grow value added businesses through kitchen rental, storage, distribution, and technical and business support. The VFVC offers technical assistance and business planning for clients of the facility, including start-up and existing businesses from the NEK and throughout Vermont. The Cellars at Jasper Hill is a major tenant at the VFVC. They process cheese at the facility, and also train cheesemakers how to produce certain varieties so that they can eventually make the cheese on their own. There are currently four NEK-based businesses that are using the VFVC to manufacture their product.



VFVC's Annie Rowell processes zucchini. Photo: George Keener



**GOAL 4 - There will be a sufficient supply of storage, aggregation, distribution, telecommunications, and other forms of on-farm and commercial infrastructure to meet increasing year-round consumer demand.**

The Vermont Food Venture Center also provides much needed storage and aggregation space. The facility includes cold and freezer storage as well as ample dry storage for their clients. They are working with a variety of distributors to move more local food product around the state and to out of state markets.

Farm to Institution and farm to school procurement are also driving more food distribution options. Green Mountain Farm Direct, a program of Green Mountain Farm to School, expands the amount of food it moves each year. They are now working with D & S Distributors to further expand the reach and impact of their farm to institution procurement programs. GMFTS is also working with other groups in the Newport area to increase the amount of storage space for farm fresh food.

The *St. J ALFA* online farmers market continues to broaden the ways consumers can access local food and for producers to market their products. The online market was launched in late summer, 2011. Consumers can choose from a wide variety of local produces online and pick up their order at the St. Johnsbury Farmers' Market.



Blueberries ready for distribution to NEK schools Photo: Green Mountain Farm to School

**GOAL 5 - The demand for local food will increase, local food consumption will rise, and appropriate marketing channels will help drive the demand for local food up, including agritourism, regional marketing, buy local campaigns, matchmaking and brokerage services, and education and awareness.**

The demand for local food appears to be on the rise. The Farm to Plate Strategic Plan generally estimates that Vermonters consume approximately 5% of our total food purchases on local food. Direct sales from farms are only measured every five years by the U.S. Census of Agriculture. Direct sales from that source rose significantly from 2002 to 2007 and will likely show another major increase in the 2012 Census.

Farmers markets are a significant direct sales opportunity for farmers. The total reported sales of the farmers' markets in the NEK increased 43.7% in the period of four years between 2008 and 2011 (see Table 2).

Table 2. NEK Farmers' Market Data

	Total Number of Markets	Total Number of Markets Reporting	Percent of markets reporting	Total Reported Sales
<b>2008</b>	N/A	6		\$452,967
<b>2009</b>	11	8	72.7%	\$533,268
<b>2010</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2011</b>	12	10	83.3%	\$650,518*
<b>Percent change (2008-2011)</b>				+43.7%

Source: NOFA-VT and the Hardwick Farmers' Market

\*Total includes Hardwick Farmers' Market which was not included in the NOFA-VT survey

Three farmers' markets (Derby, Craftsbury, and Hardwick) did not report data in the survey, so there is likely a much greater increase than shown. It is essential that these farmer's markets report earnings each year to be able to accurately measure progress.

There are several ways that local foods are marketed in the region. One of ways to increase the demand for local food is through culinary and agritourism. There are several examples of successful agritourism in the NEK:

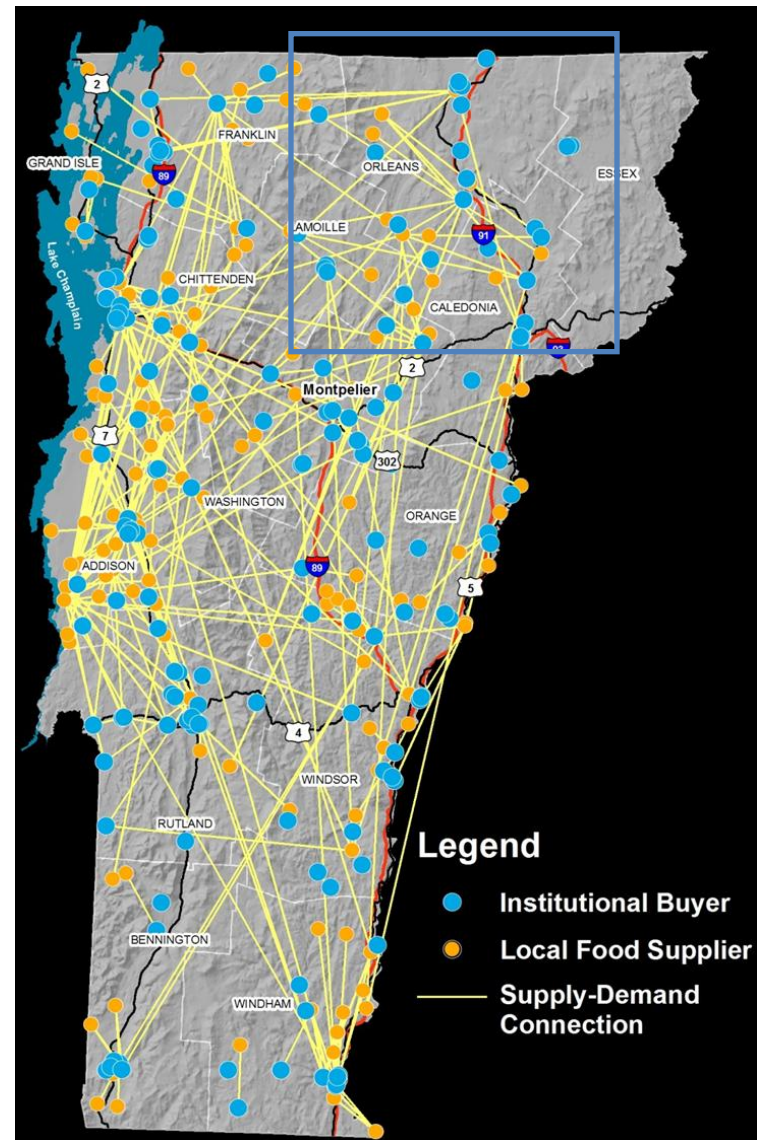
- The NEK Tasting Center has been under development and will soon open in downtown Newport. This facility will be place tourists and locals alike can go to experience local food and beverage processing and be able to taste some of the best products the NEK has to offer.
- Northeast Kingdom Travel and tourism Association continues to support and expand agritourism in the region.
- The Center for an Agriculture Economy offers monthly tours of Hardwick area farm and food businesses, and hosts Kingdom Farm and Food Days, a weekend of farm tours and a local food festival.
- Newport Renaissance Corporation is leading an agriculture and culinary tourism project in collaboration with area businesses and organizations called *Fresh by Nature*. This

initiative includes farm and food trail maps of Newport and surrounding area.

The Fresh by Nature campaign is currently the only buy local marketing campaign in the NEK. The State of Vermont is developing a new Made in Vermont brand to be launched in September, 2012. While not exclusive to food, it will hopefully bring a heightened awareness to the benefits of buying local.



Earlier in 2012, NOFA-VT conducted a statewide survey on institutional local food demand. Figure \_\_ shows the current connections between institutions and producers that responded to the survey. The survey findings also showed that there are many institutions (senior meals sites, schools, correctional centers, hospitals, etc.) that have a desire to purchase high volumes of local food, such as cabbage and spinach. By September, 2012 the full results of the survey will be disseminated.



Map: Dan Erickson. Data Source; NOFA-VT 2012



**GOAL 6. Farm and food wastes will be recycled to produce compost and energy that will be used as production inputs.**

The local food cycle is circular only if food waste is returned to a state of inputs for production. Composting is essential to “close the loop,” enabling the food system to be holistic and sustainable. This spring, Vermont passed a bill on the universal recycling of solid waste. The bill will establish single stream recycling over the next eight years, including organics recycling. The bill calls for a prioritized best use for food scraps:

1. Reduce the waste stream
2. Food recovery for human consumption
3. Livestock feed
4. Composting, land application, digestion
5. Energy recovery

A lot of work needs to be done to successfully implement the goals in this bill over the next seven years. To help reach the organics recycling targets in the bill, a new Close the Loop Coalition is being formed, led by Composting Association of Vermont and Highfields Center for Composting, located in Hardwick. Founding coalition members include the Vermont Solid Waste District Managers Association, Vermont Food Bank, and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. The Close the Loop Coalition will work together to support infrastructure for phasing-in the ban on landfilling organic materials through coordinated education, messaging, financing, and technical assistance. The coalition will engage a cross-section of Vermont in a

monumental effort to build out the strongest local food system in the country, starting with our soil.

The NEK Waste Management District tracks how much organic waste is diverted from landfills in specific locations. In 2010, 229 tons were diverted and in 2011 there were 277.4 tons diverted – an increase of over 48 tons in the last year. In 2010, the NEK had eight categorical compost facilities and in 2011 that number dropped to four. It is critical that organizations work to expand the amount of compost facilities to reach the goal of 100% recycling of food scraps and organic solid waste.



Testing compost piles. Photo: Highfields Center for Composting.

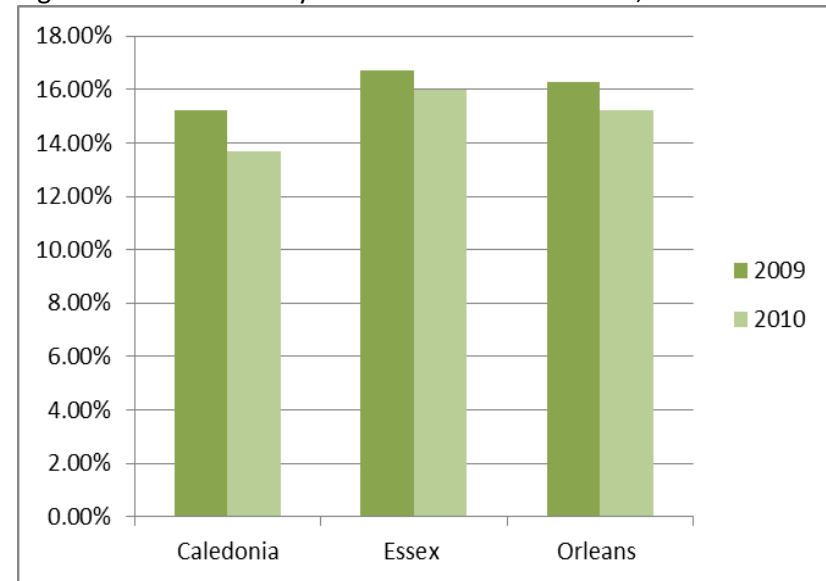
**GOAL 7. NEK residents will increasingly become more food secure; will have economic access to fresh, healthy, and local foods; and food-related health outcomes will be improved.**

A major goal of the NEK plan is to have all residents be food secure and be able to access and afford fresh, healthy food. *Hunger* (i.e., a painful sensation caused by a lack of food) and *food insecurity* (i.e., an inability to access enough food to meet basic needs due to financial constraints) are issues of growing concern. There are many ways that local farms and food based organizations are working to improve food security and food access.

- Green Mt. Farm to School – GMFTS’s mobile produce market the *Lunchbox* is starting this summer to deliver fresh food from over a dozen local farms in its pop-up farmers market to senior meal sites, low-income housing sites, and community centers throughout Essex and Orleans. They have also established the Green Mountain Food Access Fund - a matching gift program that offsets the premium of local food.
- VT Department of Health has been supporting efforts such as the *Healthy Retailers* project to get more fresh, healthy and local food into retail stores, such as convenient stores.
- The Area Agency on Aging continues to work to expand the amount of local food through their senior meal programs, such as Meals on Wheels.
- University of Vermont Extension is working to assess and improve food access in Island Pond, an area deemed a food desert by USDA.

Food insecurity data is not yet available for 2011. While the food insecurity rate is on the rise in Vermont and in the U.S., it is fortunately declining in the Northeast Kingdom (see Figure 2). Could this be in part due to the growth of the local farm and food economy?

Figure 2. Food Insecurity rate in Three NEK Counties, 2009 & 2010



Source: Feeding America, 2011





A student makes salad from local greens. Photo: GMFTS

At least fifty percent (50%) of NEK farmers' markets currently accept EBT, but that needs to increase to 100%. NOFA-VT's Farm Share program is another initiative to help increase the access to and affordability of fresh, local food, which subsidized CSA shares for families in need. Table 3 shows the number of farms and the number of shares they offer. In 2011, 126 individuals received fresh farm food through the Farm Share program.

Table 3. NEK participation in NOFA's Farm Share program

2011 NEK data from NOFA-VT's Farm Share program	Number of farms	Number of shares	Number of individuals affected
Spring	1	1	1
Summer	3	15	97
Fall	1	10	28
Totals	5	26	126

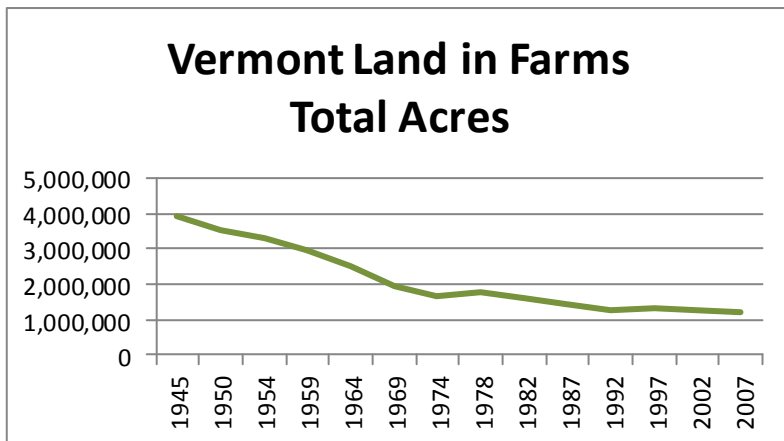
Source: NOFA-VT

Community gardens and farms also help increase access to fresh, local food and improve community food security. Fresh Start Community Farm is a decentralized urban farm in Newport whose mission is to cultivate a baseline of food access in the city through gardens that create social, cultural, and economic hubs within the communities they serve. Fresh Start Community Farm is a collection of three gardens that started as a mud parking lot in the center of a block in downtown Newport and has now transformed to a hugely successful garden and community space that has changed the neighborhood. The Farm was asked in 2012 by the Master Gardeners to coordinate the community garden space at Gardner Park and also expanded to include the lawn at Numia Medical, formerly the VT Teddy Bear Factory. The three gardens are all distinctly different, with different soil types, sun, shade, and, most importantly, communities to tend them. Volunteers are "paid" for their time in vegetables as they come into season.

**GOAL 8 - Agricultural land will remain open and available to future generations of farmers and the food system will have increasingly positive impacts on environmental quality.**

If farmland is not affordable and available to farmers, there will be no way to increase the amount of food that is produced and consumed locally. Unfortunately, the total land in agriculture continues to decline in Vermont (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Total land in agricultural production in Vermont



Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture

Fortunately, there are groups working to conserve land and make it more accessible to farmers. By the end of 2011, the Vermont Land Trust had protected a total of 18,859 acres in prime/statewide important agricultural soils for Essex, Caledonia, and Orleans, and a total of 27,518 acres in total farm projects. Vermont Land Trusts’

Farmland Access Program provides farmers with opportunities to purchase or lease affordable farmland so that they can start up or expand agricultural businesses.

When Canaan dairy farmers Bill and Ursula Johnson decided to retire after 30 years of building a successful dairy business, they knew they wanted their farm to continue to be used as productive agricultural land. They worked with Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and The Nature Conservancy to develop a solution for making the farm affordable to a new dairy farmer, while protecting the incredible natural resources of their property.

The property is known for its six-mile stretch of Connecticut River. As a first step, the Johnsons sold the development rights on 583 acres of farmland for less than market value in December 2011. They then sold the conserved land plus an additional 266 acres (849 acres total) to VLT, which agreed to serve as an interim owner while a new farmer was found and plans could be made to protect the wetlands and natural areas.

As part of the VLT’s Farmland Access Program, which helps new farmers find affordable farms, VLT requested farm-business proposals from people interested in purchasing the farmland. Dairy farmers Cy and Andrea Nelson of Derby were selected for their farm experience and excellent business plan, and are currently leasing the farm from VLT until the final sale can go through. The final phase of this project will be for VLT to transfer the remaining 266 acres of wetland and natural areas to the State of Vermont for the

creation of a new Wildlife Management Area and public recreational access. Funded by the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund, VHCB (with matching funds from NRCS), and the Pew Charitable Trusts Northeast Land Trust Consortium. The Nature Conservancy assisted with project planning.



Conserved farmland in the NEK. Photo: Vermont Land Trust

Besides improving farmland access, Goal 8 includes enhancing environmental outcomes from food production activities. While not a perfect proxy measure, the number of organic farms can be used to indicate environmental stewardship of the land and farming's impact on environmental quality. Vermont and the NEK are far ahead of the US in organic farming: while only 0.63% of US cropland is in organic production, 13.02% of Vermont cropland and 13.46% of cropland in the NEK is devoted to organic production.

Other environmental measures that will be important to track over time include soil health and water quality.

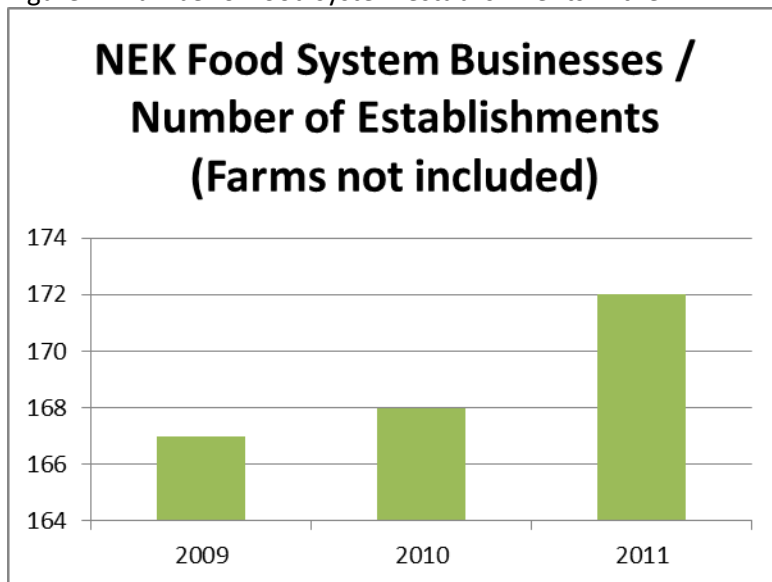


Sterling College students tour Pete's Greens' new barn. Photo: Sterling College

**Goal 9. Food systems and agriculture education, training, and workforce development will continue to be developed and offered in primary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary schools and training programs, and the labor force for food systems will meet the needs of the food system sector.**

Ensuring our food system businesses and organizations have a properly trained workforce is an important ingredient for a vibrant food system. The total number of food system businesses is increasing in the NEK (see Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Number of food system establishments in the NEK



Source: Vermont Department of Labor

A variety of schools in the NEK offer some form of food system education. At the elementary and middle school level, there are farm to school educational opportunities. At the secondary level, Career and Technical Education schools offer natural resource and agriculture educational programs. Post-secondary opportunities include colleges and training programs.

Farm to school programs take place at several schools throughout the region. Each year, employees at Green Mountain Farm to School work directly with schools to help plan and run school gardens and educational programs.

Sterling College offers several education and training opportunities. A summer 2011 course at Sterling College is allowing Sterling students to design the Burke Farm – a new farm at Burke Mountain Resort intended to connect visitors with local agriculture. Besides various agriculture degree courses during fall and spring semesters, Sterling also offers Vermont's Table, an intensive academic program in sustainable food systems that includes practical culinary experience, frequent field trips, lessons in sustainable agriculture, and seminars in food writing and food entrepreneurship. The program is open to current Sterling College students, students from other colleges and universities, and adult learners.



**GOAL 10.** Support and leadership for food systems (e.g., economic development, workforce development, financing, research, marketing, business planning, technical support, etc.) in the Northeast Kingdom will be adequately coordinated to provide maximum support and these support organizations will work to meet the needs of producers and to provide healthy, fresh, local food for all residents.

Farm and food system businesses receive a variety of support from other organizations. This support includes business planning services, safety workshops, emergency assistance, legal advice, production techniques, conservation methods, financing, and market research. While there is a variety of support available, it is not always coordinated or easy to access and navigate for a farm or food system business. During the NEK food system planning process, several people noted the importance of not only expanding the support of the food system but also coordinating it so that it is more effective and not duplicative.

One of Vermont's most robust technical assistance programs is the Vermont Farm Viability Program. The Vermont Farm Viability Program serves as an umbrella program for farmers across the state delivering assistance through several program partners (Intervale Center, UVM Extension, NOFA-VT, and Land For Good) as well as directly via private consultants. This program provides in-depth business planning and technical assistance to all kinds of farmers, as well as certain kinds of food system businesses. Service providers within the VFVP have served a total of 54 farms in the NEK. In 2011, eleven new farms were enrolled in the program. VFVP also offers emergency support to farmers, such as after the spring flooding of 2011 and after Tropical Storm Irene that devastated farms throughout the state.

Access to capital is critical for new and existing farmers and food system business alike. Also, support system businesses and organizations need financing to serve their food system business clients. Table 4 lists several of the funding sources (i.e., grants and loans) that were received by farm and food based businesses and organizations in the NEK in 2011.



On-farm technical assistance mentoring at Butterworks Farm. Photo: Vermont Farm Viability Program



**Table 4. The Amount of Funding (Loans and Grants) Provided for NEK Farm and Food System Business and Organizations, 2011**

Source	Type	Recipient	Purpose	Amount
NE Center for Rural Development	Grant	UVM Extension	Enhance food security in the NE with regional food systems	\$ 75,000.00
Vermont Community Development Program	Loan	Pete's Greens (original grant to Town of Craftsbury)	Re-equip barn	\$ 292,358.00
Vermont Farm Viability Program	Grant	7 farms in NEK	Business Plan implementation	\$ 53,350.00
NCIC/ RBEG	Grant	Small business related to local food	Marketing, feasibility studies, engineering, construction management	\$ 89,611.00
USDA (RBEG)	Grant	Green Mountain Farm to School, Inc.	Expand food distribution center	\$ 60,092.00
Vermont Economic Development Authority	Loan	Farms in NEK	Construction, capital investment, etc.	\$ 1,900,000.00
USDA (RBEG)	Grant	NEKTTA	Promote regional agritourism targeting 15 farm businesses, increase the number of farms participating in the Vermont Fresh Network from 11 to 20	\$ 92,500.00
USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)	Grant	9 farms in the Northeast Kingdom	Financial assistance for seasonal high tunnels. Funding provided under NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	\$ 66,205.89
VSJF / Farm to Plate	Grant	Center for an Agricultural Economy	To purchase a walk-in cooler and freezer at the VFVC to store fruits / vegetables for area farmers who want to sell lightly-processed food to schools, institutions, coops, etc.	\$ 5,000.00
VSJF / Farm to Plate	Grant	Highfields Center for Composting	To purchase a Mobile Compost Screener that will be made available to composters around the state at a reasonable price.	\$ 12,500.00

Source	Type	Recipient	Purpose	Amount
Farm to School / VAAFM	Grant	St. Johnsbury School	Implement a Farm to School Program that encompasses cafeteria, classroom and community	\$ 14,726.00
Farm to Institution / VAAFM	Grant	Green Mountain Farm to School	Expand Green Mountain Farm Direct to increase famers' access to institutional markets	\$ 5,000.00
GAP	Grant	Pete's Greens	Purchase and install a greens wash/disinfect/dry line. Equipment to be purchased includes two wash tanks, a conveyor, sprayers, and three dryers.	\$ 10,000.00
VAIC / VAAFM	Grant	Highfields Center for Composting	On-farm composting workshops for farmers and pre-farmers	\$ 7,620.00
VAIC / VAAFM	Grant	Vermont Ice Cider Association	Awareness & promotion of VT Ice Ciders in regional markets	\$ 6,000.00
VAIC / VAAFM	Grant	Green Mountain Farm to School	Green Mountain Farm Direct distribution program to schools and institutions	\$ 13,333.00
VAIC / VAAFM	Grant	Center for an Agricultural Economy / Vermont Food Venture Center	Capacity building for VT grown food processing	\$ 33,333.00
VCDP	Grant	City of Newport	Planning for tasting center	\$ 30,000.00
USDA RD	Grant	Northeast Kingdom Tasting Center	Matching funds for tasting center	\$ 5,000.00
VAAFM – various grants	Grant	Multiple Farms	Various: food safety, serving institutional markets, etc.	\$31,500.00
Vermont Farm Fund / CAE	Loan	Multiple Farms	Emergency funds from flooding; agriculture development	XXXXXX
<b>2011 Total</b>				<b>\$2,803,128.89</b>

Following the release of the NEK food system planning document almost a year ago, the Northeast Kingdom Food System Network was formed to implement actions and strategies prescribed in the plan with the aim of achieving its overarching goals. Currently, the NEK Network meets quarterly to share information on projects and initiatives being undertaken by members and partners, and to speak more broadly about the overall function and direction of the network.

## Moving Forward

The NEK is moving forward and making great progress on many of the strategies laid out in the NEK plan to reach its goals. Moving forward, the NEK Food System Network is faced with the dual tasks of building capacity to achieve plan goals while maintaining cohesion and communication across a vast and varied region that encompasses three counties and more than sixty thousand people. Optimizing the NEK food system requires buy-in and coordination from groups and individuals at a variety of scales and key leverage points. Good communications will be necessary for continued coordination and collaboration.

One of the major projects this year of the Network was to assist NEKTTA and the Center for an Agriculture Economy plan the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Northeast Kingdom Food System Summit. The summit was held at Jay Peak Resort this year, drawing almost 200 participants to the event. The Summit offered 16 workshops including raising backyard chickens, financing the community supported farm, and soil monitoring. This year, the Summit included a tasting with 12 vendors from the NEK sampling products such as ice cider, sausage, cheese, smoked fish, and specialty food products.

The NEK Regional Food System Plan has already helped network organizations and partners in their food system related work. Organizations have used the plan for fundraising, research, program development, project development, and strategic planning, among others. Furthermore, the effects of the plan have created a committed and passionate network of food system advocates, who are now able to meet regularly and unite around common goals to implement meaningful strategies. However, for this plan to continue to be helpful in improving the food system in the NEK in the long run, the network needs to remain strong and committed to effecting change in the region.

**For more information contact:**

Alison Low, Senior Planner  
Northeastern Vermont Development Association  
36 Eastern Avenue  
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819  
(802) 748-5181  
[alison@nvda.net](mailto:alison@nvda.net)  
[www.nvda.net](http://www.nvda.net)

Monty Fischer, Executive Director  
Center for an Agricultural Economy  
Hardwick, VT  
[monty@hardwickagriculture.org](mailto:monty@hardwickagriculture.org)  
[www.hardwickagriculture.org](http://www.hardwickagriculture.org)

<https://sites.google.com/site/nekfoodsystems>

