

THE VIEW FROM 116 STATE STREET

Vermont farmers lead the nation in direct-to-consumer sales. We have more CSA's, farm stands, and farmers' markets per capita than any other state (see page XXX in this issue for a listing of 2014 farmers' markets by town – you may be surprised to learn we have more than 50 markets). For consumers, this direct connection to agriculture promotes “agricultural literacy,” a phrase I often use to describe an awareness of how farming and our food system work, and why it matters. I'd like to thank all the farmers who take time to connect directly with the public, and

to the Vermont Farmers' Market Association, and our partners at NOFA, who help create these connections. As much of the country recedes farther away from a true connection to agriculture, more Vermonters are connecting directly with farmers, building awareness and appreciation for the role agriculture enriches our communities.

Charles R. Ross

Vermont #1 “Locavore” State

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Wisconsin, Montana and Iowa.

“This ranking reflects the commitment Vermonters have made to community based agriculture,” said Chuck Ross, Vermont's Secretary of Agriculture. “From the farm and food system entrepreneurs who are providing local foods, to the schools and institutions that are stepping up to integrate local foods, to the individual Vermonters who are making healthy, local choices, our state has embraced a systems approach to agriculture.”

Strolling of the Heifers is best known for its annual weekend celebrating farms and local food (June 6-8), the centerpiece of which is the whimsical Strolling of the Heifers Parade (Sat., June 7 at 10

a.m.), in which up to 100 well-groomed-and-dressed heifers are led up Brattleboro's historic Main Street. When the parade is over, the crowd follows, to the all-day, 11-acre Slow Living Summit, which features vendors and exhibitors, music and entertainment, and of course, a chance to meet the heifers up close and personal.

“Stroll Weekend” is preceded by a conference, the Slow Living Summit, which brings together people from many sectors to learn about building connected, sustainable and resilient communities.

More information:

www.strollingoftheheifers.com, and
www.slowlivingsummit.org



Editors Note

It's often said “the best things in life are free.” Hard to argue with that one. Springtime in Vermont makes us all feel rich – emerald green vistas, golden blooms, purple mountains majesty! This is a Vermonter's version of decadence. And yet, springtime can also be an expensive time of year for farmers and gardeners. Eager as I am to get back in the garden, I find myself getting a bit carried away with plant and seed purchases. Seems no one told the cashier at the garden center “the best things in life” are supposed to be “free.”

This year, the staff here at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets held a plant swap. We shared perennials, annuals, and gardening wisdom over lunch. We all took home some new, interesting plants, and spent some quality time with coworkers in the process. It was a hit.

Which, figuratively, brings me to

a new revelation: for those times in life when the best things aren't actually free, get creative, and host a swap. If we are resourceful and optimistic, what we need is all around us.

— Alison Kosakowski

Follow VAAFM on Twitter @VTAgencyofAg
and follow me @VTFarmGirl



Sylvia Jensen, Katie Gehr, Alex DePillis, Alison Kosakowski, and Kristin Haas present their plant swap bounty.

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Farm to Plate Spotlight

By Rachel Carter

How is Vermont's local food movement affecting the state's economy?

A Q+A with Farm to Plate program director, Erica Campbell



Erica Campbell

What is Farm to Plate?

Vermont Farm to Plate is the statewide initiative legislatively directed to grow jobs and develop the economy in Vermont's farm and food sector, and increase access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.

How do local food purchases benefit Vermont farmers?

Vermonters spend over \$2 billion on food each year. In 2010, only 5% of that money was spent on local food and one of the Farm to Plate goals is to bring that number to 10% by 2020. That means another \$100,000 million per year would need to be spent on local food, bringing more money back to Vermont farmers with less spent out-of-state or overseas.

How do we increase local food purchases?

More consumer demand affects supply and circulates

money in the local economy. When consumers start to buy more locally produced food it sends an important signal to the marketplace, which encourages farmers to grow more and food businesses to produce more. When farms and businesses decide to produce more, they usually need to hire more workers so that they can keep up with the demand. If Vermonters switched over to buying a little more Vermont grown or raised food, it would really add up and make a big difference in our local economy.

Many organizations across the state are working

towards increasing consumption of local food. Chefs and consumers are demanding locally sourced meats, locally grown produce, and hyper-local products and Vermont's producers are increasingly delivering the goods. Restaurants, hospitals and educational institutions are demanding more locally sourced food from distributors, and more food processors are building brands around local ingredients.

What are some concrete economic impacts that can be seen now?

While farmland uses may be shifting, the overall land used in agriculture has finally reversed its steady decline – so we are now seeing farmland start to increase again after many years.

Water quality issues continue to be a challenge, but more and more Vermont farmers are increasing their stewardship of the land by using good conservation practices such as cover cropping, no till, and pasture management.

The Vermont food and farm sector employs at least 60,000 Vermonters, and more than 2000 of those jobs were added since Farm

to Plate began in 2009. By continuing to support Vermont's farm and food businesses--through initiatives such as the Working

Lands Investment Program--we'll continue to see those numbers increase.

Visit www.VTFoodAtlas.com to learn more.

Free Fertilizer Analysis For Farmers and Growers

By Bethany Creaser, VAAFM

The fertilizer program provides for the registration, inspection and analysis of commercial fertilizer products sold in Vermont. The purpose of the inspection and analysis is to ensure that fertilizer users are receiving a product that meets the chemical guarantee specified by the labeling.

Through the VAAFM fertilizer program, farmers and growers can have their commercial fertilizer sampled at no cost by one of the Agency's field personnel. VAAFM can sample bulk or bagged fertilizer. We require a minimum of 10 bags of one type of fertilizer to sample, no minimum for bulk.

Penalties are assessed to manufacturers for products that are deficient in nitrogen, available phosphoric acid or phosphorous, and soluble potash or potassium content. The value of the penalty is based on the labeling guarantee percentage, the percent deficient and the total sample weight. If a product is consigned to a consumer then the penalty is paid to that person. If no person is identified, then the penalty is paid to the Agency. No penalties are assessed for trace mineral violations. Annual analysis summary reports are available through the Agency.

If you would like your fertilizer sampled, please contact Matt Wood at 802-828-3482



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