

# Agricultural Enterprise Meeting

## Education and Technical Assistance Subcommittee

November 4, 2014

Justin Morrill Conference Room, ACCD, Montpelier, Vermont

Participants: Chris Company, WRC; Ela Chapin, VHCB (by phone); Ben Waterman, UVM Ext; Lorelee Marrow, TRORC; Reg Godin and Louise Waterman, AAFM

Host: Stephanie Smith, AAFM

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The Agency provided background to the group as many were new to the conversation started by the Department of Housing and Community Development started in 2013 about Agricultural Enterprises. The discussion stems from the question of how farm based agricultural enterprises fit into the definition of “farming,” and if not how to provide consistency and certainty for those engaged in associated on farm enterprises, and clarity for municipal officials. The Education and Technical Assistance aspects of the issues seem vast as there are numerous players providing different types of support to existing and potential producers, municipal officials, and other interests. There are also multiple regulatory requirements that influence the decisions of individual in the business planning stages. The purpose of the meeting was to identify who is providing assistance around agricultural enterprises, generally; who are the audiences; what are the topics; and the different types of outreach methods.

The group recognized there are many different entities providing technical assistance<sup>1</sup>:

- UVM Extension has multiple programs that offer assistance and generally if they can't find the right answer they refer to the appropriate resource or entity (Accepted Agricultural Practices, Use Value Appraisal program, Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Labor, etc
- Regional Development Centers (RDC)
- Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)
- Vermont Land Trust

The primary audience for these programs and services are farmers and landowners. The larger audience beyond farmers and landowners for technical assistance include municipal officials, the public, and trainers or service providers.

- Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) work with municipal officials on planning and zoning, and economic development. The work of these regional entities is not always the same. Different

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<sup>1</sup> Ela Chapin, VHCB shared a link to F2P Strategic Plan, Food System Business Planning and Technical Assistance which lists many TA resources, [http://www.vtfoodatlas.com/assets/plan\\_sections/files/4.4\\_Business%20Planning%20and%20Technical%20Assistance\\_MAY%202013.pdf](http://www.vtfoodatlas.com/assets/plan_sections/files/4.4_Business%20Planning%20and%20Technical%20Assistance_MAY%202013.pdf).

pressures and interests of the regional change the focus of the entities work. Windham Regional Commission is interested in doing a strategic Ag Development plan because its wants to complement/fill a void of the work of the SBDC and other regional economic development entities in its area. This document would help inform planning decisions.

- Regional entities across the state have no consistency in the services they provide. For instance in Addison County Economic Development Corporation does provide business development assistance to agriculture and forestry sector in this region and partners with other non-profits to offer workshops on accessing capital.
- There is the Vermont Farm Viability Program at VHCB, which provides many services including technical assistance and grants to farmers, food producers, and other agricultural businesses . The network of providers includes nonprofit providers are the [Intervale Center](#), [Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont](#), [UVM Extension](#), and [Land for Good](#).
- The Vermont Agricultural Mediation Program, which mediates disputes and use a network of attorneys and mediators to solve issues including those between farmers and neighbors.

The group explored the issues of whether there is a business planning/regulatory checklist for new and expanding businesses. The Rutland Regional Planning Commission is working on a document that will specifically focus on agritourism, and will include business planning resources, licensing and permitting resources, in the form of a broad overview. The AAFM works with farmers working on human resource, labor issues, expansion of markets and opportunities to enter various markets, and with food producers and processors, but has no checklist.

Methods of engagement include

- conferences,
- one on one work with farmers (business plan development),
- farmers training farmers,
- Train the Trainer
- Using trade associations and their meetings as venues

Platforms of engagement

- Case studies addressing common issues to help guide decisions by producers. They can be illustrative of real issues.
- FAQs are a concise way to share important points and spur additional in depth questions.
- It is important for a trainer or service provider being able to confidently refer people with questions to the correct entity for an answer without risk of backlash if violations exist.
- Interactive or “fun” tool can be helpful.
- Winter conferences are a great way to reach farmers.

Gaps identified included the need to educate producers on labor regulations for value added production and migrant labor issues. In Vermont, there is a new employee with VT DOL will work on farm related issues.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Waterman at the AAFM has contact information.

RPCs were wondering what role they could have in education, are there models that exist? What are the range of needs and how can they respond? Specific land use related issues could be a niche for RPCs. They are also not limited in who they can provide assistance to.

The group discussed various funding<sup>3</sup> opportunities and other types of assistance to create educational materials and ways to do outreach to larger audiences. Everyone agreed that a variety of methods and people to deliver the messages may influence different types of audiences.

The Agency informed the group that it would likely cancel the next meeting of this subcommittee. It wanted to establish a narrower focus that specifically addresses concerns that come out of the Regulatory/Legislative Subcommittee, and thank everyone for their time.

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<sup>3</sup> Extension Risk Management Education Competitive Grants Program, High Meadows, USDA