

Specialty Crop Block Grant Agreement No. 12-25-B-0875

Final Report to USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service

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Date:

Submitted by



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PROJECT 1: General Specialty Crops Marketing

PROJECT SUMMARY

Vermont Harvest Publications

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, non-profit organizations across the state, and individual producers have been building the framework for helping consumers interested in local foods to connect with local farmers. An important strategy is to reach new customers who may not have considered their Vermont food options. The *Vermont Harvest* publication has been an effective way to reach these consumers, through broad distribution of an educational piece that informs Vermonters and visitors to Vermont of their options for accessing local foods as well as recipes and tips for using these ingredients.

Agriculture and Culinary Tourism Council

This project is built on the successful collaborations developed in the *Culinary Tourism: Expanding the Economic Benefits of Agritourism* (FISMIP01 & SCBGP08) project. This grant funded the first phase of a collaboration that intends to address the fact that there is no one place on the Internet in which you, as a Vermonter or out-of-state visitor, can locate Vermont farms, farmers markets, restaurants and retail outlets serving Vermont products, and local food events.

The Internet offers a way to reach potential Vermont visitors, provide simple itinerary building tools, and connect non-local visitors back to Vermont products after they have left. An agricultural and culinary tourism website will provide:

1. Aggregation of information for all culinary tourism experiences that connect tourists and VT residents to Vermont grown foods, farms, food producers and food service establishments.
2. Statewide listing of all food and agriculture events in the state
3. Individualized building of a culinary itinerary: composed from all farms, food producers (using VT products), cheesemakers, vineyards, breweries, and restaurants/accommodations that serve Vermont grown food.

The outcome of phase one was to research and plan the development of the platform that would support the above mentioned components. The project will be completed in 4 phases: phase 1 – planning, phase 2-branding, phase 3-build, phase 4 – marketing. The outcome of the entire project is a dynamic, interactive, and cohesive information and mapping tool for Vermont’s food producers, farms, restaurants and special events; a tool that provides visitors and Vermonters alike the ability to craft their own itinerary of experiences relating to VT agricultural.

Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder

The purpose of this project was to promote Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder, our unique food product that showcases locally grown ingredients sourced from Vermont farmers and ‘tastefully’ highlight the importance of agriculture in Vermont to skiers, snowboarders and winter sports enthusiasts who visit our state seasonally for recreation and leisure.

Ski Vermont/Vermont Ski Areas Association initiated a partnership project with the Agency of Agriculture, Kettle Cuisine, a Boston based manufacturer, Black River Produce of Springfield, VT and NECI to bring an updated recipe/chowder, under the moniker of Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder, to our member alpine and Nordic resorts for purchase by skiers, snowboarders and winter guests via resort restaurants and on mountain cafeterias.

Note: Based upon limited request for this product by Ski Vermont's alpine resorts' food and beverage teams throughout the 09/10 ski season, the product was cancelled by Black River Produce in 2010.

Ski Vermont continues to distribute Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder recipe cards to skiers, snowboarders, and winter enthusiasts and media via consumer events, trade shows, media FAMs, etc. as well as via inquiry fulfillment packages in an attempt to promote local agriculture.

PROJECT APPROACH

Vermont Harvest Publications

Using the template developed through previous rounds of SCBGP funding, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture designed and published a four color, 16 page brochure featuring seasonal Vermont products for the 2009 foliage season. An updated publication was developed for the 2010 season. These issues featured:

- Cranberries
- Christmas trees
- Maple Syrup
- Apples
- Wine and Spirits
- Beer
- Pumpkins
- Honey

Vermont Agency of Agriculture communications specialist Kelly Loftus took the lead in developing these materials, with graphic design assistance from Tim Newcomb Studios.

The primary distribution mechanism was as an insert in 7 print newspapers: Brattleboro Reformer, the Bennington Banner Daily, Valley News, the Caledonian Record, Burlington Free Press, Seven Days and Rutland Herald newspapers (reaching approximately 160,000 households). Over 9,000 copies were distributed at the 2009 Eastern States Exposition, in West Springfield, Massachusetts, which attracts over 1 million visitors each year. Nearly 10,000 copies were distributed at the 2010 Eastern States Exposition. Distribution continues in the Vermont State Welcome Centers.

Agriculture and Culinary Tourism Council

This Specialty Crop Grant partially funded the first phase of the project – the planning phase. In the first phase of the Agriculture and Culinary Tourism Website Project, the council hired the Bluehouse Group to research and advise the council on the following points:

- brief evaluation of sites with similar functionality
- work with Council to define specific functions of website
- assess the host options for the website and the costs associated with the different options
- moderate Council's discussions of nonprofit representation/acknowledgement on site
- work with Council to establish data integrity protocol for inclusion in site
- outline sustainability options for site longevity
- establish timeline for development of website
- refine project budget for future phases
- assist in identifying web development and branding firm to work on phase 2 and 3 of project

The Bluehouse Group completed their report for phase one. Some of the key findings were:

Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Agreement 12-25-B-0875 – Final Report

- together there will be 700-800 establishment listings on the proposed site
- the council's website will be strategically connected to the Department of Tourism and Marketing's current website (www.vermontvacations.com) but not housed with their site
- an annual sustainability budget for the site is projected at \$42,000, which will be raised through fees from each Council membership organization and corporate sponsorships.
- each council organization will define the integrity protocol that they will certify for their membership listing
- functionality will include itinerary building and posting along with suggested itinerary routes
- timeline for phase two was established
- budget for phase two was established
- funding for phase two was identified
- timeline for phase 3 was established
- budget for phase 3 was established
- funding for phase 3 was identified

Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder

The agency granted funds to Ski Vermont to promote Farmhouse Chowder, a unique food product that showcases locally grown potatoes sourced from Vermont farmers and 'tastefully' highlight the importance of specialty crop production in Vermont to skiers, snowboarders and winter sports enthusiasts who visit our state seasonally for recreation and leisure. The project has brought together Kettle Cuisine, a Boston based manufacturer, Black River Produce of Springfield, VT and the New England Culinary Institute (NECI) to bring an updated chowder recipe, under the moniker of Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder (SVFC), to alpine and Nordic resorts.

Media Outreach/Events:

NYC Deskside Appointments with Food Editors – June 09 – Ski Vermont marketing and public relations personnel visits NYC based media and distributed 0910 Ski Vermont media kit, together with Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder recipe cards. The 0910 Ski Vermont media kit included a release on the SVFC project.

Ski Vermont Media Receptions – NYC, Montreal, Toronto, and Boston markets – Ski Vermont media kits (500) highlighted the second year of the Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder program and recipe cards are included in media goodie bags together with *The Flavors of Vermont* 'tastings and pairings' magazine – In NYC and Boston, Ski Vermont sampled SVFC and Vermont Chef of the Year and recipe creator Gerry Nooney of Sugarbush spoke to the partnership - October/November 09

Consumer Events:

Boston Ski Show – With Kettle Cuisine, Ski Vermont served SVFC to hundreds of ski show attendees for four days from November 19-22, 2009 and highlighted where skiers and riders can enjoy SVFC as they visit Vermont resorts and retail outlets. SVFC recipe cards and *The Flavors of Vermont* magazine were also distributed.

Boston OOH Events – In conjunction with Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, Ski Vermont provided staff support for out of home, grassroots events in Boston at North Station and South Station and at the Burlington, MA Mall from December 09 through February 10. As brand ambassadors, we promoted skiing and snowboarding in Vermont, as well as our partners and programs, and distributed SVFC recipe cards.

NYC OOH Events – In conjunction with Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, Ski Vermont provided staff support for out of home, grassroots events in metro NYC at the Westchester Mall in January and February 10. As brand ambassadors, we promoted skiing and snowboarding in Vermont, as well as our partners and programs, and distributed SVFC recipe cards.

Vermont Specialty Food Days – Ski Vermont hosted approximately 10 Vermont Specialty Food Days events at our member alpine and Nordic resorts in January, February and March. We sampled Vermont food products to highlight Vermont farm fresh ingredients, award winning chefs, and resort dining options to hundreds of skiers and snowboarders at each host resort. SVFC recipe cards and *The Flavors of Vermont* magazine will be available for distribution.

Consumer Marketing Tool Kit:

Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder Recipe Cards – Ski Vermont designed and produced 10,000 updated recipe cards featuring the new, second year of the program’s NECI inspired recipe by Cody Tester. We distributed the cards at media and consumer events as noted above. These cards were also fulfilled to inquiry requests via skivermont.com website and our website Food Zone.

Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder Point of Sale Signs – Ski Vermont designed and produced counter signs for Black River Produce distribution to resort restaurants and retail outlets serving SVFC with ‘take one’ pocket for SVFC recipe card distribution.

Skivermont.com Website:

In 0910, skivermont.com debuted the Food Zone, which was designed to create a focus upon Vermont’s local grown foods, brews and chews at our resorts as well as highlight the importance of our working landscape as an attribute of the Vermont winter brand. We featured our resort dining options, unveiling chef profiles, and highlighting those resorts that served SVFC and/or have unique partnerships with local farmers. SVFC was a key ingredient of this site with recipe sign up, links to the ingredients’ source of supply, and NECI program.

Other Activities

The original state plan included marketing and technical support for Vermont’s Quadricentennial Celebration. A change of scope was submitted reducing these activities to focus only on the wines at the event, as reported on under Grape and Wine Industry Support.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Vermont Harvest

A survey was distributed to all of the state’s specialty crop producers to determine their perceived efficacy of the *Vermont Harvest* publication. Three questions were asked:

- 1) Did one or more issues of *Vermont Harvest* help increase your business?
- 2) Should the Vermont Agency of Agriculture continue publishing *Vermont Harvest* as funds become available?
- 3) Please share any comments on the publication.

We were pleased to receive 92 responses to the survey. Overall, 46 percent of farmers said that Vermont Harvest helped to increase their business, 9 percent said that it did not help increase their business, and 44 percent didn’t know if the publication was having any effect.

The majority of respondents, 79 percent, said that they thought the Agency of Agriculture should continue to publish Vermont Harvest, while only 9 percent said that the Agency should discontinue. Fourteen percent said that they did not know if the publication should continue or not.

Many of the comments were positive and encouraged the continuation of the publication. Some offered suggestions to improve efficacy, including distributing to the Boston and New York City metropolitan areas, increasing the use of web-based promotion, and distributing at farmers' markets. A few producers thought that the funds should instead go directly to producer groups.

VtACT Council Website

As a result of these funds, the Council completed the planning phase and defined the objective of the website. The vision is to establish Vermont as a center for excellence, and attract people from far and near to the Vermont food experience. As a result of the planning process, the Council plans to:

- Connect with people's rising interest in quality food and food tourism.
- Create an online presence dedicated to authentic Vermont food experiences.
- Establish and maintain qualification criteria, so that places featured in the online initiative will uphold quality standards.
- Raise people's awareness of select opportunities for authentic food experiences in Vermont.
- Help people imagine possible experiences.
- Provide compelling and actionable information.
- Motivate and facilitate people's decisions to visit and to buy

Data collected under this grant demonstrated that the target audience is made of diverse segments. Findings suggest that the Council's message may resonate with people who are interested in:

- Creative culinary experiences;
- Cooking;
- The local food movement instead of industrial food;
- Humanely raised meat;
- Sustainable farming practices;
- The environment;
- Health and wellness.

It became clear that the audience includes people from out of state, as well as Vermont residents. Tourism data shows that Vermont is already a popular destination with people who live within driving distance, but the Web is an ideal medium for increasing awareness nationally and internationally.

The Council wants more people to seek out Vermont food and food producers. The intended outcome of the website is that the target audience will engage any number of the following activities:

- Visiting a farm
- Buying products on the farm
- Visiting and purchasing products at farmers' markets
- Visiting a winery
- Visiting a brewery
- Visiting a cheese producer
- Visiting a producer of other types of food products
- Attending an event featuring authentic food

- Dining at restaurants that feature local Vermont food

The first phase of this project has given the Council a better understanding of what we have to offer the consumer. By experiencing Vermont food and agriculture in a variety of ways, the consumer has a deeper level of engagement, and has stories to share with friends. By promoting quality, the Council seeks to build brand loyalty for Vermont products, producers, and Vermont food overall.

We also now have a better idea of what we offer producers. Since many agricultural ventures and food producers have limited marketing resources and expertise, the Council's initiative will also help level the playing field. It will give exposure to people and ventures that sometimes have a difficult time getting it.

In the next phases of the project, the Council membership organizations will collect annual visits and sales data from all participants on the website as a way of quantifying the impact of the project. They will also track web traffic.

Ski Vermont

Awareness Creation/Education – Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder evidenced the importance of agriculture in Vermont and our working landscape to skiers, snowboarders and winter sports enthusiasts and demonstrated local crops/ingredients in use in product/s that were seasonally appealing to this audience

Brand Management/Affinity – Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder created an opportunity to Vermont alpine resorts to champion local ingredients and showcase Vermont's working farmers as a key attribute to the Vermont winter brand and resort experience, differentiating Vermont further from other Northeast destinations for our target audience of skiers and riders.

Sales – Through Ski Vermont's efforts to promote this product via sampling at events in state at our resorts and out of home in our core markets, Ski Vermont Farmhouse Chowder supported Black River Produce's purchase of local Vermont farm fresh ingredients and direct sales to Vermont's alpine resorts.

BENEFICIARIES

Vermont Harvest

The *Vermont Harvest* publication benefits the more than 5,100 specialty crop producers in the state.

VtACT Council Website

The planning phase demonstrated that the member organizations of the VT ACT Council will benefit from this website by being able to advance their mission through building awareness and sharing information to a wider audience. Council members include Vermont Fresh Network, Vermont Cheese Council, Vermont Wine and Grape Council, Vermont Maple Producers, Vermont Farms Association, Vermont Brewers Association, Northeast Organic Farming Association, Vermont chapter, Vermont Hospitality Council, Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Vermont Tourism Data Center at UVM.

When the website is complete, benefits to each council organization will include:

- increased traffic to Council member websites as visitors to the new website will be directed to Council member sites when requesting more information on a related topic

- increased membership and strengthening of the Council member organizations as farms, restaurants, food producers join a Council member organizations to obtain the benefit of being listing on the collaborative site
- increased awareness of Vermont local foods and events will translate into increased tourist interactions with Vermont grown food, which in turn will increase the sales of these products

Ski Vermont

Vermont's potato producers and our in-state local wholesaler of farm fresh ingredients benefitted from an increase in sales. Vermont's community of local and out of state skiers, snowboarders and winter vacationers benefitted from increased access to tasty, fresh, local food. The Vermont brand benefitted from leveraging two popular attractions – local food and skiing – into one successful project.

LESSONS LEARNED

Vermont Harvest

Comments from the survey have led us to examine our web-based promotional materials and examine ways that we might promote Vermont's specialty crop producers at a lower cost online. The Agency of Agriculture has decided to no longer be the lead organization in the publication of *Vermont Harvest*. In 2011, the publication will be produced by the Vermont Tree Fruit Growers Association.

VtACT Council Website

The project is a continuing on to phase two. The first phase was an essential to determining the scope, timelines and budgets of the design/build phase and the marketing phase of the project.

Ski Vermont

The greatest challenge this initiative faces is the absence of SVFC product placement at Ski Vermont alpine and Nordic resorts. Despite the integrated efforts and repeated sales calls by Black River Produce, we had very limited success selling in this new recipe. Our fact finding has resulted in a wide range of reasons, from existing contracts to pricing to the actual recipe and absence of broad based appeal/marketability. Oddly, even NECI failed to place an order with BRP for this product in their restaurants.

On the consumer side, where we have sampled SVFC, response was only favorable – and the recipe cards continue to be a sought after item at our events.

All OOH events, marketing materials and outreach activities occurred on time, and on budget, and we continued to champion the project and core message of Vermont's locally grown foods in all our media, collateral and website.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Vermont Harvest

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VtACT Council Website

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Ski Vermont

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ski Vermont

Yummy!

**SKI VERMONT
FARMHOUSE
CHOWDER**

**TRY SOME ALL-NATURAL
VERMONT-RAISED GOODNESS TODAY.**

Featuring farm-fresh potatoes, sausage and cider from the Green Mountains.

Vermont's winter resorts are committed to providing you with an exceptional experience – from the tops of our mountains to the bottom of your belly. We support local farmers and encourage you to buy homegrown foods from Vermont. We're confident you'll savor the difference.

SKI VERMONT
Winter in its Original State.
SKIVERMONT.COM

FIND OUT WHERE YOU CAN GET MORE SKI VERMONT-SUPPORTED PRODUCTS AT SKIVERMONT.COM.

FOR THE LATEST SNOW CONDITIONS FROM ALL OF VERMONT'S WINTER RESORTS, JUST CALL 800-VERMONT.

PROJECT 2: Apple Industry Support

PROJECT SUMMARY

Apple Drying Demonstration Project

The purpose of this project is to market low value utility apples as a higher value dried apple product to benefit Champlain Orchards, its neighboring orchards, and the Vermont population as a whole. With an increasing demand for IPM and organically grown fruit, Champlain Orchards is trying to minimize its pesticide spraying, resulting in a higher percentage of utility grade apples which cannot be sold on the fresh market.

Unpredictable weather, disease, and insects often diminish the quality of New England apples. In the 2009 and 2010 growing seasons, the Shoreham area experienced significant hail and pest damage, creating a need for alternative marketing possibilities. Criteria for fresh apples sold on the market are very strict, and even a slight blemish can send an otherwise delicious apple to the utility bin. Dried apple production gives orchardists the security that even a damaged crop can produce income. Limited and costly refrigerated and controlled atmosphere storage space has produced a need for additional preservation methods such as dehydration, which eliminates the need for cold storage. Dried apples have a one year shelf life.

Champlain Orchards purchased surrounding orchards' utility grade apples, help provide a market for the fruit, and distribute the finished dried apples to schools, hospitals, granola companies, bakeries, grocery stores, large food service distribution companies, and food coops throughout Vermont.

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

Funds were granted to the Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association to support the state's apple industry. Vermont's apple growers produce and ship nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million bushels of apples annually through wholesale (supermarket) channels and 1.4 million through direct to consumer marketing. Vermont does not have the resources necessary to sponsor health studies, conduct meetings with consumer and media representatives, address public relations and be ready to counter special interest groups lack of understanding of agricultural production issues (use of pesticides, H-2A, etc.).

In addition, the scope of work was changed, removing the four educational and training activities from the initial state plan, and replacing them with a demonstration project for drying utility apples and a Foodbank "Pick for your Neighbor" project, as described below.

Pick for Your Neighbor

The Pick for Your Neighbor program is a partnership between the Vermont Foodbank and the Agency of Agriculture. During apple harvest season (September through October) community members are encouraged to visit their local participating orchard to pick and purchase extra apples for donation to the Foodbank. This program benefits the Foodbank by increasing the amount of fresh, healthy produce available for distribution to hunger relief charities throughout Vermont; and also provides advertising and helps increase business for local orchards, which are an important part of our communities.

This program addresses the economic hardships simultaneously faced by orchards and families in Vermont. The economic downturn has spared no one in Vermont, which—according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture—is ranked as the 6th hungriest state. This ranking is reflected in the 35–40 percent increase in demand that Foodbank agencies have experienced over the past three years. In order to ensure that struggling Vermonters do not have to sacrifice good nutrition, the Vermont Foodbank is creating programs to increase the amount of fresh, local, and nutritious food it is able to distribute to its 280 network partners statewide. It is only natural, then, that the Foodbank has begun establishing relationships with the multitude of farms in the state. However, the recession has not been kind to farms, either, and as they struggle to keep their businesses afloat it becomes more difficult for them to spare product. Being mindful of this fact the Foodbank has developed a program that will not only address the needs of the hungry, but orchards as well.

Throughout the year the Foodbank gleans hundreds of thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables from farms statewide. Pick for Your Neighbor is seen as a program that complements the gleaning and fresh food rescue in a way that benefits the orchard economically. In addition, apples are a perfect fresh food for charitable distribution as they are a very familiar fruit, which makes it more likely that clients will take them home from a food shelf. This program provides orchards with the opportunity to meet gain new customers; and to encourage existing customers to purchase additional pounds of apples.

Other Activities

Because the apple industry has been a major supporter of the *Vermont Harvest* publication, funds for apple industry support also went towards the distribution of that seasonal brochure, described above.

PROJECT APPROACH

Apple Drying Demonstration Project

Champlain Orchards has already made dried apples on a small scale in a household dehydrator for sale in its Farm Market previous to this project. However, to obtain the project purpose mentioned above, further research into bulk dehydration had to be undertaken. As a result of this research the business purchased a large double rack Hobart Oven that could be set at low enough temperature to work as a dehydrator.

This used oven was purchased in New York and installed onsite in the baking area. To speed the manufacturing of dried apples, the business also purchased an onion slicer that works for apples as well. The apples are first hand cored and then sliced into rings with the onion slicer.

To allow airflow for dehydration, perforated trays were originally purchased. However, the trays proved inadequate and cooling racks were purchased and substituted. The cooling racks have been working very well in the ovens. Through experimentation it has been determined that the best setting for the oven is 160 degrees Fahrenheit with the apple rings laid out flat on the trays. It takes around 6 hours for one batch. Through stacking the cooling racks we have been able to increase yield of one batch from 3 pounds originally to 20 pounds currently, as well as lower our propane costs.

In order to educate and bring awareness of dried apples as a healthy alternative snack to chips, the dried apple slices have been marketed in small 3 oz single serving bags as chips. Production is not yet optimized enough to market the dried apples in bulk.

Elissa Mathis and Bill Suhr were in charge of the marketing, while the bakery and veggie crews were responsible for batch experimentation. This crew includes Wendy Ogden-McDowell, Melissa Pomainville, Claire Freierman, and Katy Bauer. Experimentation was conducted for flavor with different varieties of apples. Both McIntosh and Empire varieties have been a success. The crew is now to the point that regular production is being undertaken to fulfill orders.

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

These funds allowed for the continued representation of Vermont apple growers on the New England Apple Association, Vermont Apple Board, Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association, US Apple Association's State Advisory Committee and the US Apple Export Council by subsidizing dues.

Pick for Your Neighbor

Throughout the spring and summer, orchards with "pick your own" programs were educated about and recruited to participate in the Pick for Your Neighbor program. Program promotion was aggressive in the

months surrounding the apple harvest season and highlighted the orchards and the program through a wide variety of media outlets. Program posters were printed and distributed statewide and to participating orchards. In 2010, road signs were also provided to all participating orchards for additional program promotion.

Press releases were submitted by the Foodbank to state and regional newspapers. This was done strategically so that the program was covered in locations during their peak picking season. The program runs through the entire apple harvest season, which coincides with National Hunger Action Month and helps with promotion.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, the Vermont Fruit Tree Growers Association, natural food co-ops statewide and regionally based food organizations were all asked to promote the program in their newsletters and on their websites.

In September the Vermont Foodbank began utilizing its social media tools to reach out to the already established group of followers on Facebook and Twitter about the program. Also, a webpage was created on the Foodbank's website that enabled interested community members to find the orchard nearest to them and get directions.

Operational logistics of collecting the Pick for Your Neighbor apples were facilitated through communication with the Vermont Foodbank's Director of Agricultural Resources and the participating orchards. When an orchard reached its maximum capacity for storing apples they requested a pick-up. Donations from the orchards were received into one of three Vermont Foodbank regional distribution centers, and pounds were tracked for each orchard to determine where program participation was most successful.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Apple Drying Demonstration Project

So far around 2,000 pounds of apples have been used in the dried apple project. This is a little over 3% of the total utility apples purchased from surrounding orchards including Douglas Orchard, Mountainview Orchard, and Sunrise Orchard. The dried apples fetch a value of about \$60/bushel, which is a higher value than when selling them fresh.

So far we have sold over 300 of our 3oz dried apple snack bags to schools, coops, and grocery stores. People are pleased with the product and have been re-ordering. However, we are noticing that the bags we have selected are not sealing out air as well as we wished, so the dried apples are not remaining crisp for over a month. We will be putting more effort into researching better packaging.

We have been able to use our own as well as surrounding orchards' seconds for the project, creating another market for fruit that does not meet the fresh fruit criteria. We have also been able to partner with stores such as the Shelburne Supermarket and Richmond Market and Beverage to promote our new product through tastings and store demos. Currently no workshops have been held yet at the orchard due to the timing of the project. Once dried apple production was steady, our PYO and Farm Market season was already past its peak, but we hope to educate more people about the values of dehydration in the future.

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

Vermont growers were able to influence the planning of major public relations initiatives and other key industry priorities and activities.

Pick for Your Neighbor

The primary goal of this program is to increase the number of apples received into the Vermont Foodbank's inventory by mobilizing the Vermont public to actively participate in addressing the issue of hunger while also supporting our state's agricultural economy.

In 2009 the program secured 2,232 pounds in Pick for Your Neighbor donations and an additional 20,000 pounds from fall gleanings and donations throughout the winter that resulted from new relationships that developed out of the program. Fifteen orchards signed up to participate, and 12 had donations.

The pounds of donated apples from 2009 acted as a benchmark for the 2010 year.

In 2010 the program secured 8,000 pounds in Pick for Your Neighbor donations—an increase of nearly 6,000 pounds over 2009. Foodbank gleanings as a result of orchard relationships were down considerably from 2009 due to a late spring frost that affected the apple crop at most orchards in Vermont. There was an increase in the number of participating orchards, with 18 enrolled in the program, and 13 having donations.

BENEFICIARIES

Apple Drying Demonstration Project

Beneficiaries include the surrounding orchards, including Douglas Orchard, Mountainview Orchard, and Sunrise Orchard, from which we have bought approximately 2,000 pounds of apples for the dried apple project. They receive a better price on utility apples from us for the dried apple project compared with regular cider and cull fruit. Growers can also learn from our project and create their own line of dried apples.

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

The state's 264 apple growers, who produce on over 3,200 acres, benefitted from this project.

Pick for Your Neighbor

Pick for Your Neighbor is a program that addresses the needs both of Vermont orchard owners and individuals that access Foodbank food shelves and meal sites. The Vermont Foodbank serves as many as 86,000 individuals annually, so it is safe to estimate that this program alone benefitted several thousand people. As for orchards, to date 18 orchards committed to participate in the program during its second year—an increase of six orchards from 2009.

Participating orchards benefitted from a revenue increase from additional purchases from already established customers, and from revenue from first-time customers who were drawn to their orchards via the Foodbank's promotion of the Pick for Your Neighbor program.

LESSONS LEARNED

Apple Drying Demonstration

Aluminum trays are not suited for drying fruit. Acid in the fruit can corrode the metal and leave metal marks on the fruit. You should always use stainless steel.

One batch of dried apples is currently using about 2 gallons of propane. Champlain Orchards hopes to find ways to reduce this or implement renewable energy in some way. Further research will have to be conducted.

Sampling new products is a great way to get a sale, especially if people have a different view of your product than what it actually is. People usually do not expect our dried apples to be a crisp, crunchy, treat, but once they have tried one they will usually make the purchase.

Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

Dues to industry associations may not be the most effective use of SCBGP funds. Projects funded by current rounds of the SCBGP program are targeted to have a more direct effect on the state's apple growers.

Pick for your Neighbor

The volume of citizen participation varies dependent on orchard location and orchard scale. Donation quality is dependent on how often donated apples are collected for integration into the Vermont Foodbank's distribution. Pick-up of product is often challenging due to the rural nature of the state and at times limited by the scheduled trucking routes of the Vermont Foodbank trucks.

Crop failures and unforeseen impacts on production also play a part in the success of this program. Also, some interested orchards could not participate due to crop loss in the pick your own sections of their orchards. Others chose to take what harvestable crop volume they had and market it through an avenue that would yield a better financial return, thus limiting an orchard's ability to participate in the Pick for Your Neighbor program.

Utilizing natural but not formal partners for promoting the program proved very beneficial. The Vermont Fruit Tree Growers Association helped educate orchards about the program and build participation. Vermont's Local Banquet, a quarterly publication growing in its readership, covered the program with an article that included a full page listing of all pick your own orchards, highlighting those orchards that were participating in the Pick for Your Neighbor orchards by marking them with a little red apple.

In future program promotion efforts, the Foodbank will actively pursue businesses, church groups, scouts and 4-H clubs. In 2009, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters sponsored its employees to participate and in one morning picked 104 bushels of apples for their neighbors, thereby increasing the program's second year totals by 50 percent.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Apple Drying Demonstration

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Vermont Tree Fruit Growers' Association

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Pick for Your Neighbor

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Apple Drying Demonstration



Pick for Your Neighbor

<http://www.vtfoodbank.org/OurPrograms/AgPrograms/PickForYourNeighbor.aspx>

PROJECT 3: Grape and Wine Industry Support

PROJECT SUMMARY

Wine Industry Promotion at the Quadricentennial Celebration and Cheese Festival

In the summer of 2009 Vermont celebrated the Quadricentennial of Samuel Champlain’s discovery of the lake that carries his name. The connection between France (Champlain’s home country) and Vermont provided an excellent opportunity for education about food and flavors. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Dr. Almena Aliste and the Vermont Fresh Network partnered with Burlington City Arts to offer a public food event on July 8th, preceded by a July 7th invitation-only event for a professional exchange between Vermont and France.

PROJECT APPROACH

The public day of events included educational sessions by sensory experts from France and Vermont, a keynote talk by Sister Noella, a world-renowned cheese expert, a panel discussion that was broadcast live on Vermont Public Radio, and a tasting session that drew over 200 members of the public. The private day with producers focused on an extensive tour of the Cellars at Jasper Hill, an innovative cheese cave, and a lunchtime discussion about Protected Designation of Origin protocols and their contribution to the agricultural economy.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

SCBG funds were used to promote Vermont’s wine industry during the Quadricentennial celebration. Funds were used to publicize Vermont’s emerging wine industry to the thousands of participants.

FSMIP money went to create a pairing guide for wine and cheese that was distributed during the events, leveraging these two sources of federal funds for a greater impact.

BENEFICIARIES

This project benefitted Vermont’s 27 wineries, which currently produce \$5 million in revenue annually. It is expected that this exposure will contribute to an expanded wine industry in Vermont, which has substantial excess processing capacity and is forced to import substantial amounts of grapes from other areas. Over 200 Vermont farms currently supply grapes, apples, blueberries and other produce for wine production.

LESSONS LEARNED

Coordination with French and Canadian experts around the Protection Designation of Origin protocols has been developed into a multi-pronged marketing effort called “Taste of Place.” Wine is one of the products for which producers are working collaboratively to develop standards for place-based marketing.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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PROJECT 4: Vegetable and Berry Industry Support

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont developed a statewide outreach campaign to encourage more customers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables with SNAP benefits at 25 Vermont farmers' markets that accepted SNAP-EBT cards during the summer market season of 2010. The Harvest Health Coupons used a "double value coupon" model to incentivize the use of SNAP benefits at farmers' markets. Harvest Health Coupons matched no more than \$10 per customer, per market day. The Harvest Health Coupons were released at markets in July and August to strengthen other "SNAP at Market" outreach tools. This project served as an expansion of a successful pilot project that operated at five farmers' markets in 2009.

PROJECT APPROACH

Planning and implementation of this project was coordinated by Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, in close collaboration with state and national partners. The goal of the project was to raise awareness of the opportunity to use SNAP benefits to purchase farm fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers' markets vendors. In addition to lessons learned from the 2009 pilot project, the Harvest Health Coupon Project benefitted from consultation and support granted by the Wholesome Wave Foundation and their partner projects around the country. The work of this project was performed as outlined below:

Winter 2010:

- Consulted with stakeholders, including Vermont Department for Children and Families, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, and Wholesome Wave Foundation to develop best practices.

Spring 2010:

- Refined coupon design and print coupons.
- Refined materials for market training, execution, and accounting of the Harvest Health Coupon Project.

Summer 2010:

- Printed and distributed promotional materials to SNAP agencies, service providers, and appropriate community centers.
- Released Harvest Health Coupons during July and August in collaboration with other outreach opportunities such as National Farmers' Market Week.

Fall 2010:

- Collected and reviewed summer SNAP redemption data.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Promoting the use of SNAP benefits at farmers' markets served a dual purpose of providing Vermont specialty crop producers with market access to the \$50 billion SNAP dollars, of which more than \$120 million were allocated to Vermonters in 2010. When spent to purchase farm fresh food at the local farmers' market, these dollars provide greater economic benefit to the local economy. Products available at the farmers' market also tend to provide greater health benefits to SNAP customers, as the majority of vendors at farmers' markets sell fresh fruits and vegetables.

This activity benefited over 500 farmer-vendors selling at 25 farmers' markets and thousands of SNAP recipients who have access to these markets. During the 2010 summer market season, participating farmers' markets reported over \$55,000 in SNAP sales. This represents a 44% increase in SNAP sales at farmers' markets in Vermont since 2009.

For the 2010 season, \$9,276.00 in Harvest Health Coupons were awarded to SNAP recipients, and \$8,837.00 were redeemed, for a redemption rate of over 95%. 82% of SNAP customers who participated in a statewide farmers' market survey reported that the Harvest Health Coupon Program was a "very important" or "important" factor in encouraging them to spend SNAP benefits at the farmers' market.

BENEFICIARIES

The primary beneficiaries of this project were the hundreds of farmers' market specialty crop vendors, who now have better access to the millions of dollars in SNAP benefits that are being allocated to Vermont. Farmers' markets represent a growing market sector for many of Vermont's specialty crop producers, and raising awareness of opportunities to use SNAP benefits at farmers' markets allows a diversity of customers to form lasting relationships with these producers.

LESSONS LEARNED

There were many lessons learned through the actions of the project including:

- 1) Both farmers' market vendors and SNAP recipients have growing interest in connecting with one another in the marketplace. The Harvest Health Coupon Project was very useful in marketing the opportunity to use SNAP benefits at farmers' markets. As more and more SNAP recipients know about this opportunity, they are making use of this new marketplace to purchase farm fresh food.
- 2) Record keeping is challenging for farmers' market staff, but has enormous benefits when carefully tracked. As a condition of participating in this project, the 25 markets were asked to carefully track SNAP and Harvest Health Coupon sales. The systems established to achieve this tracking are leading to improved record keeping at many of the markets. Many of the markets now have better understanding of their current cash flow patterns and are able to target their own promotions to improve sales in specific market sectors.
- 3) Building on the success of double Harvest Health Coupons (in driving more SNAP sales at farmers' markets) there are a number of other incentive models that could be implemented to bring additional customers to farmers' markets. We intend to explore additional incentive models including Vegetable Prescription coupons, Workplace Wellness coupons, and youth market participation programs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
 Agreement 12-25-B-0875 – Final Report

Mail: PO Box 697 Richmond, VT 05477

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Market:	Total number of weeks with EBT/Debit service:	EBT Cash: \$	EBT Food: \$	TOTAL EBT	monthly average	Total (EBT and Debit): \$	EBT Cash: # of transactions	EBT Food: # of transactions
Bellows Falls Farmers Market	22	\$30.00	\$2,533.00	\$2,563.00	\$466.00	\$4,023.00		
Brattleboro Area Farmers' Market	27	\$272.00	\$10,588.00	\$10,860.00	\$1,608.89	\$33,273.00	17	577
Burlington Farmers Market	26	\$74.00	\$4,829.00	\$4,903.00	\$754.31	\$9,483.00	7	241
Capital City Farmers' Market	27	\$40.00	\$2,950.00	\$2,990.00	\$442.96	\$6,569.00	4	149
Granite Center F M	19	\$0.00	\$787.00	\$787.00	\$165.68	\$1,440.00	0	49
Manchester Farmers' Market	12	\$0.00	\$140.00	\$140.00	\$46.67	\$350.00	0	3
Middlebury Farmers' Market	16	\$0.00	\$920.00	\$920.00	\$230.00	\$4,064.00		
Newport Farmers' Market	16	\$40.00	\$675.00	\$715.00	\$178.75	\$1,185.00		
Norwich	27	\$0.00	\$890.00	\$890.00	\$131.85	\$12,455.00	0	26
POS Winter Farmers' Market	11		\$295.00	\$295.00	\$107.27	\$2,455.00		
Rutland Farmers' Market	26	\$10.00	\$3,440.00	\$3,450.00	\$530.77	\$6,187.00	1	155
Townshend Farmers' Market	12		\$299.00	\$299.00	\$99.67	\$299.00		
Walloomsac Farmers' Market	24		\$721.00	\$721.00	\$120.17	\$896.00		
Westgate Farmers' Market	12		\$969.00	\$969.00	\$323.00	\$969.00		
Williston Farmers' Market	20	\$31.00	\$113.00	\$144.00	\$28.80	\$2,999.00	4	6
Winooski/Old North End*	16		\$666.00	\$666.00	\$166.50	\$1,558.00		
	332	\$497.00	\$30,815.00	\$31,312.00	\$377.25	\$88,205.00	33	1206
* markets shared a terminal								

Vermont Farmers' Market EBT and Debit Cards Project 2011 Summary										
MARKET SUMMARY SHEET										
Market Date	SNAP/3SquaresVT Sales				Harvest Health Coupon Sales		DEBIT Sales			
	\$\$ SNAP - EBT Tokens Sold to Customers	# SNAP - EBT transactions	# of new EBT customers (1st time visit to market)	\$\$ of SNAP - EBT Tokens Redeemed by Vendors	\$\$ Harvest Health Coupons Awarded to Customers	\$\$ of Harvest Health Coupon Redeemed by Vendors	\$\$ DEBIT Tokens Sold to Customers	# of DEBIT transactions	# of new DEBIT customers (1st time visit to market)	\$\$ of DEBIT tokens redeemed by vendors
Granite Center Farmers' Market (Barre)	\$721.00	39.00	14.00	\$662.00	\$388.00	\$354.00	\$170.00	8.00	4.00	\$ 260.00
Bellows Falls Farmers' Market	\$1,936.00	107.00	0.00	\$1,871.00	\$564.00	\$564.00	\$650.00	29.00	0.00	\$ 655.00
Brattleboro Area Farmers' Market	\$18,010.00	347.00	13.00	not available	\$900.00	\$886.00	\$14,503.00	135.00	15.00	\$ 4,140.00
Bristol Farmers' Market	\$356.00	22.00	11.00	\$317.00	\$46.00	\$46.00	\$480.00	18.00	9.00	\$ 480.00
Capital City Farmers' Market (Montpelier)	\$4,687.00	202.00	14.00	\$3,570.00	\$660.00	\$660.00	\$3,200.00	105.00	2.00	\$ 2,230.00
Downtown Burlington Farmers' Market	\$8,452.00	437.00	not available	not available	\$906.00	\$906.00	\$13,193.00	442.00		
Fair Haven Farmers' Market	\$162.00	16.00	1.00	\$197.00	\$20.00	\$12.00	\$95.00	6.00	3.00	\$ 55.00
Lunenburg Farmers' Market	\$51.00	6.00	2.00	\$51.00	\$78.00	\$72.00	\$75.00	8.00	3.00	\$ 75.00
LVYFAM (Morrisville)	\$1,474.00	16.00	6.00	\$1,474.00	\$210.00	\$178.00	\$0.00	0.00	0.00	\$ -
Manchester Farmers' Market	\$425.00	19.00	13.00	\$425.00	\$158.00	\$156.00	\$170.00	6.00		
Middlebury Farmers' Market	\$1,858.00	84.00	2.00	not available	\$536.00	\$510.00	\$2,510.00	92.00	21.00	
Newport Farmers' Market	\$1,819.00	128.00	55.00	\$1,825.00	\$900.00	\$860.00	\$420.00	22.00	17.00	\$ 420.00
Northwest Farmers' Market (St. Albans)	\$258.00	15.00	3.00	not available	\$188.00	\$60.00	\$45.00	24.00	9.00	\$ -
Norwich Farmers' Market	\$1,390.00	39.00	not available	not available	\$244.00	\$90.00	\$7,869.00	188.00	0.00	\$ -
Old North End Farmers' Market	\$2,097.00	190.00	38.00	not available	\$900.00	\$842.00	\$756.00	52.00		
Poultney Farmers' Market	\$864.00	29.00	5.00	\$857.00	\$84.00	\$88.00	\$295.00	14.00	11.00	\$ 305.00
Richmond Farmers' Market	\$577.00	35.00	not available	not available	\$262.00	\$240.00	\$1,500.00	98.00	0.00	\$ -
Rutland County Farmers' Market	\$5,464.00	289.00	166.00	\$5,107.00	\$1,264.00	\$1,221.00	\$3,092.00	112.00		
POS Farmers' Markets (Townshend and Brattleboro)	\$1,485.00	13.00	4.00	not available	\$90.00	\$78.00	\$117.00			\$ 10
Downtown Rutland Farmers' Market	\$1,490.00	91.00	8.00	\$1,501.00	\$366.00	\$512.00	\$150.00	41.00	5.00	\$ 931.00
Walloomsac Farmers' Market	\$649.00	21.00	not available	not available	\$166.00	\$166.00	\$21.00	1.00	1.00	\$ 105.00
Waterbury Farmers' Market	\$656.00	34.00	not available	\$646.00	\$246.00	\$246.00	\$565.00	29.00		\$ 565.00
Williston Farmers' Market	\$29.00	2.00	1.00	\$29.00	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$2,165.00	84.00	0.00	\$ -
Woodstock Farmers' Market	\$431.00	not available	not available	\$338.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$997.00	0.00	0.00	\$ 849.00
Five Corners Farmers' Market (Essex)	\$163.00	11.00	6.00	not available	\$70.00	\$70.00				
Windsor Farmers' Market	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available	not available
TOTALS	\$55,504.00	2192.00	362.00	\$18,870.00	\$9,276.00	\$8,837.00	\$53,038.00	1514.00	100.00	\$ 11,080.00

PROJECT 5: Honey Industry Support

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Agency partnered with the Vermont Beekeepers' Association to establish a 50/50 cost share program aimed at assisting new beekeepers to purchase hive equipment and honey bees for one or two colonies each, coupled with technical assistance and educational support. With the decline in wild honey bee colonies and continued problems of established beekeepers with parasitic mites and diseases, it is important that honey bee populations be maintained on a local level to meet pollination needs. It is equally as important for new beekeepers to have mentoring support and knowledge in beekeeping.

PROJECT APPROACH

Participants purchasing hives were reimbursed for 50 percent of the cost of establishing one or two hives of bees up to but not exceeding \$200 per hive or \$400 for two hives. Participants were required to provide itemized dated invoices as written proof that they have purchased equipment and bees to establish one or two hives.

A bee hive was defined as follows: a package of bees or nucleus colony, bottom board, inner cover and top (outer) cover, two brood chambers and two medium or shallow supers with frames and foundation for each. Related equipment (not reimbursed) is defined as slatted rack, screened bottom board, queen excluder, varroa monitoring tray, bee suit and/or veil, smoker, hive tool and a beginning beekeeping text.

Grantees were solicited via a press release to all major and most local press outlets. The Vermont Beekeepers Association also released grant information to its members. Extensive press coverage of the grant was received and is reflected by the number of applications received.

At the close of the application period, after screening of the applications for eligibility, the applications that were received first were notified of their eligibility. A packet of information and requirements (attached) was sent via electronic mail or USPS mail (per applicant preference). Based on the date the application was received, several applicants were notified that they were added to a back-up list in the case that the original grantees did not meet the conditions of the grant. The remaining applicants were notified via electronic mail or phone calls from the grant administrator that they would not be eligible for the grant.

The grantees were required to take and document the following steps:

- Enroll in a Vermont Beekeepers Association approved course on beginning beekeeping. These courses covered the basics of hive equipment, diseases, health, and basics of beekeeping.
- Research and purchase basic components of a beehive (e.g. hive bodies, supers, frames).
- Research and purchase either a package or nucleus of bees.
- Keep a log of beekeeping experiences for one year (to be submitted in May of 2011).
- Join the Vermont Beekeepers Association.
- Register hives with the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets as required by Vermont law.

The grantees were also encouraged to locate a mentor to help guide them, and the Vermont Beekeepers Association and affiliated clubs assisted with this. Various individuals volunteered to offer these classes around the state and the curriculum was reviewed by the Vt. Beekeepers Association and determined as adequate to meet the requirements of this grant. Additionally, many new beekeepers joined local chapters of the Vermont Beekeepers Association, furthering the support they have with any challenges in the future.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

A total of 152 applications were received. Originally, 21 grantees were notified that they were eligible for the grant for a total of 37 hives (applicants could choose to be reimbursed for a portion of one or two hives) and 12 people were added to the back up list. The remaining 119 people were encouraged to begin beekeeping without financial assistance and encouraged to join the Vermont Beekeepers Association. After

the initial notification, 16 of the original 33 people on either the initial list or the “back up” list dropped out or were disqualified, citing that they were no longer interested, forgot to order bees, or gave various other reasons. Several simply did not respond to any emails or phone calls.

Since the grant requirements required attending a class and ordering bees and equipment, we were not able to add new grantees on at this time (i.e. by June when documentation was required to be submitted, it was too late for new beekeepers to order bees, take a class and meet other requirements for the year). By June, we had gone through the back up list of applicants and ended up with a shortfall of applicants despite heavy interest in the program.

To summarize, 33 people were told they were eligible and that they should plan to meet the requirements for the grant (either as initial or on the back-up list) and 16 of those dropped out. Of the grantees, all met all of the requirements for the grant and several have reported great success in their first year (i.e. receiving a honey crop in the first year, starting a beekeeping blog or helping others to start beekeeping).

In the end, 17 new beekeepers started up 29 new hives in Vermont as a result of this program. Most had a mentor at that point and all had had a beekeeping class and joined the Vermont Beekeepers Association – an active club that will ensure their ongoing success.

While we expected a high level of interest, we were stunned by the number of applications that were received – and equally disappointed by the number of enthusiastic new beekeepers who dropped out of the program. We received inquiries for several months after the application deadline had passed. Interest in beekeeping in Vermont is strong and growing but our experience reflects that getting started with bees requires a thoughtful and supported approach: it is much more than “getting bees”. Additional opportunities to tap this interest and encourage those interested could be very fruitful.

<u>Goal</u>	<u>Achieved</u>
37 new hives established	29 new hives established
Disperse basic beekeeping instruction	Disperse basic beekeeping instruction
\$8000 to new beekeepers	\$6300 to new beekeepers

BENEFICIARIES

The apiculture field in Vermont benefited by increased press exposure and increased awareness of bees. Vermont’s landscape benefited from pollination from the new hives. Bee breeders and vendors of equipment benefited financially by the purchases of the new beekeepers. Lastly, new beekeepers benefited financially and educationally from this grant and its requirements.

It is estimated that hundreds of Vermonters became more aware of the difficulties faced by honeybees today. For each of the 152 applicants, hundreds more became aware of the grant and the honeybee plight and while did not apply for the grant, may still have been inspired to begin keeping bees. The benefit of this grant extends far beyond the 17 beekeepers who were awarded a funding match for their start-up costs. With each beekeeper reaching out to others who are interested (especially the recipients of the new beekeeper’s honey), we expect the effects and beneficiaries of the funds to grow exponentially over the years.

While the grant reimbursed up to \$200 for one hive or \$400 for two hives (50% of the estimated cost), the equipment receipts show that start up costs for new beekeepers routinely exceeded \$400. The additional costs were generally due to “related” equipment and not “essential” equipment but does reflect the tendency of beginning beekeepers, even with guidance, to over purchase in caution.

LESSONS LEARNED

The grants were awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. In retrospect, we grossly underestimated the interest in this grant and so only those who submitted an application immediately upon notice were granted funds. Allocating instead on a lottery-basis would allow applicants to give serious thought to their interest level and commitment to getting started with bees.

Because there was such a high level of interest, providing a lower amount of match funds to a larger group of people may have had a greater multiplier effect. Perhaps at 25% / 75% or other level of match would have enabled more people to begin keeping bees.

Lastly, the number of people who did not follow through with the basic requirements is surprising. Perhaps some level of commitment to beekeeping should be established before an application can be submitted. This is also indicative of the level of commitment required to start keeping bees – again proving that beekeeping is much more than just setting up a hive of bees in ones backyard.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Kim Greenwood, grant administrator for VBA and AAFM can be reached at 802-244-6657 and kimgreenwood@gmavt.net.

PROJECT 6: Hop Industry Development

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Agency partnered with UVM Extension and Cornell extension to sponsor a Hops 101 and 201 workshop held in Cooperstown, NY. This workshop educated potential hops growers on all aspects of growing hops from field prep and soil fertility to pest management, harvesting, and processing. Hops are a historical crop in the Northeast, and much of the knowledge on how to grow this crop has been lost in the last 100 years, creating a large knowledge gap on how to successfully and economically raise this crop.

PROJECT APPROACH

The guest speakers that were contracted to run the workshop are experts in growing hops on a small scale in Wisconsin, and the workshop was made possible through co-sponsorship by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, UVM Extension, Cornell Extension, the Northeast Hops Alliance, the New York State Brewers Association, Atlantic Hops, Madison AED, Gorst Valley Hops, and Ommegang Brewery.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

60 participants attended Hops 101, and 42 participants attended Hops 201, with some participants attending only one of the two courses. Overall response to the workshop was very favorable, and to quote one recipient, "It's good to know what I'm getting myself into." This was the first step in preparing beginning producers for commercial production.

Funds have been granted to UVM Extension in subsequent rounds of SCBG funding to expand research on hop production in Vermont, including appropriate varieties and small-scale harvesting equipment. Further outreach events are planned, including a Winter Hops Conference in January 2011, and two field days during the 2011 growing season. Small-scale harvesters are also being developed to facilitate acreage expansion without the limiting labor factor.

BENEFICIARIES

Northeastern hops producers benefitted from these courses. It is anticipated that local microbreweries will be able to source a higher quality, more consistent product from the region's hops producers as a result of this training.

LESSONS LEARNED

Many growers are interested in getting into hops production, but are diving in blind. Further outreach events are planned. A Winter Hops Conference is planned for January 2011, and two field days in the 2011 growing season. Small-scale harvesters are also being developed to facilitate acreage expansion without the limiting labor factor.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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PROJECT 7: Christmas Tree Industry Support

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Agency partnered with three Christmas Tree Industry groups to print and distribute promotional materials, educate the public at the Eastern States Exposition, and create an educational display for future outreach.

PROJECT APPROACH

The Agency partnered with the newly-established Vermont Christmas Tree Council to design and print promotional materials including 30,000 rack cards and a reusable banner. The professionally produced Rack Cards have been distributed at several locations as well as being used by individual producers as handouts to the public. Other locations are being sought to further provide these to the public.

SCBG funds were also used for travel to the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, MA. Rich and Stephanie Rockwood represented the Council to the 1 million visitors to the Vermont Building at the Expo, promoting Vermont Christmas trees by selling Christmas tree seedlings, talking about Vermont and Christmas trees, and giving out rack cards and brochures.

The Agency also granted to the New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association to create an educational display to be made generally available to growers doing public outreach and participation in state and regional events. The new display presents a much more professional image of the Christmas tree industry, as opposed to the previous display, which was homemade and dated, consisting largely of old photographs mounted on poster board. A professionally prepared display has been created. This display has been used in at least six regional exhibits and fairs, to date, including the 2009 and 2010 Eastern States Exposition. It has improved the overall presentation of the Vermont building at this major fair, and has been favorably received at all of the venues where it has been displayed.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

No formal baseline data is available, however informal producer surveys show that the demand for “choose and cut” trees continues to grow past capacity and the wholesale business continues near sell out capacity in Vermont, while growers in other regions of the country are struggling.

BENEFICIARIES

The general public at Big E learned about Christmas trees in general and Vermont Christmas trees benefited from increased exposure.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are two industry groups representing Vermont Christmas tree growers, and they have not been able to cooperate well in the past. The Agency facilitated the creation of a Vermont Christmas Tree Council that would have representation from both groups, but one of the groups dropped out after the first meeting. When funding cuts severely reduced Agency staff hours, the Council was ultimately disbanded. Moving forward, the Agency will only fund producer organizations that pledge to work with all growers in the state, not just their own members.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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