

Windham County Listening Session Notes

Date: 11/30/2023

Location: Brattleboro, VT

Partner(s): Food Connects

Attendees: 10 attendees (including VAAFM staff)

Common Acronyms

ANR: Agency of Natural Resources

NOFA: Northeast Organic Farming Association

NRCD: Natural Resource Conservation District

NRCS: Natural Resource Conservation Service

VAAFM: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

Notes as Followed

Equipment Needs

- Windham County NRCD could make rental equipment available for farmers but needs a place to store the equipment, coordinate the schedule for use, and to maintain it
- Farms interested in models to rent, share, and experiment with unique equipment
 - New technologies and strategies are of interest
 - Ex.: soil steamer

Flooding & Recovery Efforts

- Farmers are still so busy and still in recovery mode, which makes it difficult to apply for grants
- Farmers want to know how to engage and learn about funding opportunities.
- Heather Blunk at Windham County NRCD sends out a monthly newsletter of funding that is currently available
- Losses:
 - Story from an attendee: Bought a new farm in Vermont, and it was totally flooded out. They lost 15 acres, travel vehicles, tractor, and tunnels.

- Filled out all the forms and now don't know what to do now
- Still trying to recover
- Need some sort of farmers union to help farmers connect
- Unclear who to connect with in VT for farmers
- Full time job just to manage the hay finder sourcing of feed
- Making deals at the 50 to 75 bales scale but need 2000, so small arrangements are not efficient

Listening Session

- There was not enough notice or information put out about this series for farmers to know about
- Farmers want the opportunities to have their voices heard, especially by VAAFM and especially in this part of the state, and we were not given enough time to plan for this meeting.

Marketing Needs

- Know how to grow, but need to know how to sell it
- Guilford Food Hub model works well but need a larger audience
- Thinking about a pre-order model in the community
- Think about the best one-service system – Square was recommended since it integrates with website to help with payment processing; Farmigo can be used for small farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)
- Be a Local Hero campaign is a good idea

State and Federal Aid & Support

- Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) payment from Farm Service Agency (FSA)
 - No more money available
 - Howard Prussack from High Meadows Farm says he's not sure when he will get his award
 - Was due back in July, now November and still no word
- Crop insurance payments are still not calculated for diverse produce operations
- NOFA-VT reopened their flood relief funding
 - Very quick, accessible funding
 - Easy to get funds out the door
- NRCS applications have been submitted and now wait to hear in spring
- "BEGAP is the only thing holding us up right now" — *didn't want to take away from the direct quote, but BEGAP is the Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program*
- State to support non-organic milk bottling plant needed
- Definition of a 'farm' and a 'farmer' to be consistent across programs, jurisdictions, and allow people to work off the farm while trying to preserve the farm buildings and land
- Farmer has several acres on which he wants to graze and raise vegetables and native plants

- Naming that lamb and goats are nuanced for multiple reasons, including their novelty and complications with slaughter
- His preference would be on-farm slaughter if possible
- He doesn't believe that NRCS does any kind of contract grazing?
- He has been trying to find support for establishing the described operation, but feels like if he lived in Chittenden County he would have a better chance of receiving funding