

Chittenden and Washington Counties Listening Session Notes

Date: 12/04/23

Location: Williston, VT

Partner(s): None

Attendees: 5 attendees (including VAAFAM staff and legislators)

Common Acronyms

ANR: Agency of Natural Resources

NRCD: Natural Resource Conservation District

NRCS: Natural Resource Conservation Service

RFSI: Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

VAAFAM: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

Notes as Followed

Business Growth

- Value added business that is a separate business from the farm; they as a value-added producer are not eligible for many grants
- Business sources majority local ingredients for products
- Storage of fresh ingredients (i.e. cabbage) later in the season can be a challenge for sourcing farms
- USDA awards were also not accessible
- It can be hard to find adequate sources of items from Vermont farmers for some things (i.e. red onions)

Communication Needs

- Need one clearinghouse for information sharing

- Farm to Plate newsletter & Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association (VVBGA) listserv are both very valuable resources
- Hard to pull away from regular work responsibilities to attend these types of meetings
- New Farms for New Americans are growing culturally important foods, and it's important to figure out how to market and share this information

Distribution

- Hard to scale to reach available distributions
- Food hubs (such as Farm Connex and Farm Direct) are solutions but coordinating all the pieces feels a bit disorganized at times
- How to get food to food apartheid in Vermont?
- How to address more Women, Infants, Children (WIC) and SNAP benefit recipients for local producers

Flood/Emergency Preparedness

- Is there a challenge if Vermonters can't source locally during flood recovery times
- Feels like we will see more of this (2023 growing season; hard to access VT produced food) year over year with climate change
- Do we have longer term storage capacity for emergency planning?

New England Feeding New England Initiative

- How can small and mid-scale businesses reach these larger markets?
- How to reach retail markets and be eligible to sell safely; Example: no Good Manufacturing Practice regulations (GMPs) for fermentation
- How do we as producer and VT business communities make access to local food a 'no brainer' easy purchase – include value added
- How do we make food and food products from Vermont prepared and available at institutions?

RFSI Needs

- Need more shared processing space, cross docking, and storage capacity – need more investment in the middle of the supply chain
- Support networking and a listing of businesses that may be looking for expanded processing/storage capacity
- Also need an opportunity to share equipment needs and experience processing before purchase of said equipment
- Need inventory of equipment needs and availability across the state for value-added businesses

Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative

- Agriculture land was not added into the draft protection language
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) will not be adding recommendations until 2025
- This is connected to the New England Feeding New England 30x30 based on the fact that we need another 500,000 acres of food production to reach the 30% regionally consumed/produced goal by 2030
- We need to conserve agricultural lands to ensure we have sufficient food production

Workforce and Succession Planning

- How could small businesses be supported to offer employees higher thriving wages
- How to make working for a small business more economically feasible and able to offer more support to workers that is more/different than just wages
- Vermont State Treasurer may be very interested in this model
- Need for financial literacy for younger workforce population
- Land for Good and Land Link options are helpful