



## Cultivating Community

UVM Extension was created by an act of legislation on February 15, 1913, but it got its start in communities long before that date, with the organization of farmers clubs in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. These clubs, along with the formation of other agricultural organizations such as the Grange and the Farm Bureau, laid the foundation for UVM Extension and made it possible for the University to connect to communities scattered across the state.

Since the passage of that act nearly 100 years ago, our connection to Vermont communities has deepened. In this issue, we will look at the ways in which UVM Extension cultivates healthy communities, from helping people to shop

smarter, eat healthier and save money, to supporting the profitability of family farms and the working landscapes they keep open.

On the following pages we will take a close look at a UVM Extension program that helps communities analyze their opportunities and challenges, think about alternatives, and plan a strategy for community and economic development. We will also discuss an important economic driver in Vermont, tourism, and our work with communities to strike a balance between sustainable development and environmental conservation. We will highlight the work of citizen volunteers who are making greener communities and healthier landscapes, and showcase

a program which helps people improve their health through proper nutrition. We will focus on the needs of military youth whose family members have been deployed, and will examine the economic impacts of agriculture in rural communities.

This is the second of three issues that UVM Extension is publishing during its Centennial year to highlight the ways in which we help individuals and communities put research-based knowledge to work. The first issue, on food systems, can be found at: <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/centennial/>. We invite you to join the conversation on our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/uvmextension>) and leave your comments about these stories, your experience with Extension programs, as well as keep up to date about

ongoing UVM Extension programming that serves Vermont.

Over the past 100 years much of Extension's work has been to strengthen communities, by teaching leadership and communication skills, increasing youth involvement in communities, and promoting economic development and collaborative community projects. While communities have changed much during this time, UVM Extension's commitment to the health of those communities, and the people who live in them, has not.

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# Tourism to Strengthen Vermont

By Mark Aiken

In the early 1980s, the economic outlook for Bob and Beth Kennett's Liberty Hill Farm in Rochester was bleak. "We needed to diversify our income," says Beth Kennett. The Kennetts reviewed their assets: 100 Holsteins, 7 extra bedrooms in their early 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse, and a big red barn. "And pancakes," says Kennett. "I make really delicious pancakes."

Tourists visit Vermont for its landscape, its strong sense of place, and its authenticity. It makes sense that many would want to market our state's attributes for the obvious economic gains that visitors bring. UVM Extension works with Vermont owners and operators to promote economic and environmental sustainability for the agricultural and tourism industry.

### Breaking New Ground

The Kennetts had been operating a bed and breakfast on their dairy farm for several years when Bob Townsend, a community development specialist from Extension, encouraged Beth to become involved in the Vermont Travel Industry Conference. The Liberty Hill Farm model — an inn on a working dairy farm — didn't have a label at the time, but now falls under the label of agritourism.

The success of their operation, says Kennett, hinges on their recognition that they are innkeepers *and* dairy farmers, not one or the other. The very landscape that makes Vermont a desirable destination for tourists is closely intertwined with the state's agricultural history. "Farmers own the working landscape that engages the tourism industry," says Kennett.

When Bob Townsend retired, natural resources expert Lisa Chase, who had studied ecotourism in Ecuador, joined Extension. Chase now directs the Vermont Tourism Data Center, a collection of researchers and people who work in tourism. "We take research and apply it in the field," says Chase. "It creates a great cycle of informed decision making."

During the development of the 740-mile

Northern Forest Canoe Trail linking upstate New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Quebec, and Maine, trailblazers turned to Chase. "We needed to study the trail's economic impact on this route," says Kate Williams, the trail's executive director. "We wanted to understand what was happening and what the potential was." Williams counts on Chase's group when she needs research or data-based answers. "Everyone may *think* one way," says Williams. "But the data may say something different."



**Bikeways like this one, in Waterbury, direct cyclists through town to key visitor locations and support stations. (Photo: John Alden)**

### Striking a Balance

Some may argue that bringing tourists to Vermont farms to pet the cows or press picked apples makes theme parks of farms, but many believe in the power of educating visitors. Beth Kennett feels strongly that the educational component of what she does adds legitimacy to her business.

When one of the Kennett grandchildren hands a guest eggs from a favorite chicken or introduces them to Pansy the cow, learning occurs as guests become familiar with the people and animals behind the food. The Kennetts are farmer-owners of the Cabot cooperative. According to Kennett, her guests leave knowing that to buy Cabot cheese is to get milk from Pansy. "By working with UVM Extension, we try to maintain that educational focus," says Kennett. "Lisa Chase helps us prove our economic value so that we can continue our educational mission."

### Using Data to Understand Impact

When Chase looks at economic value, she looks at the impact of tourism on communities. One family from Boston that visited Liberty Hill in March, bought syrup at a local sugar shack, ate lunch in Rochester village, shopped at Rochester Hardware and six other businesses, and filled their car with gas. "They've been coming here for 23 years," says Kennett. That's measurable impact.

Part of the state's challenge is to quantify what tourism means to Vermont. To that end, last year Chase deployed student researchers to administer an agritourism survey to look at the quality of life for those in the business, including time spent with their families, job satisfaction, and whether they make a livable wage.

The Vermont Tourism Data Center has partnered with National Geographic to create a geotourism MapGuide of the Northeast Kingdom; is currently writing a grant to study "trail towns" impacted by hiking, biking, and water trails; and is working with the Vermont Farms! Association to develop their Web-based resource for farmers interested in agritourism.

The positive impacts for hosts and visitors can definitely be measured. Liberty Hill helps visitors understand that they can make informed choices about the food they eat. "Some people, when they go on vacation, want a more authentic experience," Chase says. Beth Kennett agrees and admits that the mountains, rivers, and pancakes may be glorious, but in her business "it's all about the cows."



### More About Agritourism

#### UVM's Web-Based Resource:

<http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/agritourism/>

#### Vermont Tourism Data Center:

[tourismresearch@uvm.edu](mailto:tourismresearch@uvm.edu)  
802-656-0623 or 1-866-318-9516

#### Vermont Farms! Association:

<http://vtfarms.org/>

# EFNEP and Healthy, Affordable Food Choices

By Melissa Pasanen

Four women sit around a table in the kitchen of the Burlington Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) Family Room listening intently to Louise Brunelle detail the nutritional value of whole grains. Brunelle, one of six regional educators for University of Vermont Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), moves on to explain community supported-agriculture (CSA), and notes that the women, new Americans from Bhutan and Somalia, would probably qualify for a free CSA share.

The women then turn to the recipe of the day: chocolate-beet cake made with beets from a farm they visited during the seven-week Around the Table with Local Foods session. They are one of ten groups in Chittenden County and the Northeast Kingdom to test a new local foods version of Extension's core EFNEP course. It covers a wide range of topics, from how to read package labels to how to budget and store food safely. The bottom-line benefit is clear to participants: "I wanted to know how to prepare healthy food for me and for our family," said Burlington resident Mina Giri.

With this as with all of their programs, EFNEP educators worked in partnership with local community hosts like the VNA, the Milton Family Center, and St. Johnsbury Head Start. Participants bought vegetables from local farms, and concluded with community celebration meals. "People really quickly developed a sense of loyalty and connection to local farms," says Rachel Schattman, Extension's Local Food Program Coordinator.

Bill Half of Harvest Hill Farm welcomed a class to his farm in Walden, where they brought a picnic made from his ingredients and helped dig potatoes. He loves that he now sees some of the families at the farmers' market, like the young son of one woman who was always excited to see Half and "made the connection several times."

## Better Skills Lead to Healthier Choices

EFNEP's Amy Davidson, explains that the program's overall goal is "to help limited-resource Vermont families plan meals, practice safe food handling, stretch their food budget, and become more physically active through a series of hands-on lessons." The target audience is pregnant women and families with children at home, as well as youth in low-resource areas.

The focus goes beyond imparting specific

knowledge to help participants change behavior, Davidson explains: "They build skills: how to cook nutritious meals, how to manage time, how to save money on their grocery bill, how to find value around family meals, the importance of sitting down together." There are other benefits, too. "One of the big things about EFNEP is that upon completion of the program, you get a graduation certificate," Davidson explains. "Many of our participants have never received any kind of graduation certificate and it's really meaningful to them. It's empowering. It makes them feel that they can go on and do other things they didn't think they could do. It gives them a sense of self-worth and self-esteem." As Dean of Extension Doug Lantagne points out, "UVM Extension is focused on providing education and support for all Vermont residents, and EFNEP is a great example of how we can improve and strengthen the future of our state."

## Partners for Healthier Families

The Barre office of Vermont Works for Women (VWW), an eight-week work readiness program, has partnered with EFNEP since 2010. Through VWW, EFNEP offers kitchen-based sessions that teach cooking on a budget, how to get kids to eat healthy foods, how to find the best supermarket deals, and even how to cook with food shelf ingredients. "It's very practical and really transferable," says VWW's Anna Lowrie. "It helps them feel more capable and confident [and] builds community for our group."

EFNEP educators also receive individual referrals from health and social services agencies. Across the state, they make customized home visits to about 150 clients annually. One participant in Addison County, with two children at home, explained the challenges she faced trying to feed her family well on her modest paycheck. Visits from EFNEP educator Susan Bodette, "showed me where we could cut costs and still have good nutrition," she said. "Susan gave me lots of options and recipes and ways to customize them. Who would ever have thought to put cabbage in stir-fry?"

## Beyond Classrooms

Vermont's EFNEP team is always working on new tools and programs. One new offering is Book-in-Bag, an in-school program adapted from Kansas State Extension, which received



Extension educator Louise Brunelle teaches Vermonters, including many new Americans, how to prepare healthy, affordable food. With 81,000 Vermonters, including 23,000 children facing food insecurity, programs like EFNEP connect families to food sources and build life skills. (Photo: Melissa Pasanen)

initial Vermont funding from the Turrell Fund and reached 30 classrooms and 500 youth last fiscal year with its messages of food safety, nutrition basics, and healthy snacks.

At Miller's Run School in Sheffield, Vermont, families received an introductory letter, recipes, and a post-program survey from the Book-in-Bag program. Teacher Mary Ann Hertz was pleasantly surprised by how many families reported that their children tried new foods at home. "The children really did connect with this," she says. "It did transfer to home. It was a great home-school connection." Orleans Elementary school counselor Sharon Moffatt echoes Hertz's praise for the program, "to have these UVM Extension resources who will travel to us, it fills in the gaps [and] enriches what we can offer our community," she says.



## How to Contact EFNEP

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# Vermont Communities ‘Take Charge’

By Mark Aiken

Ted Hartman, cofounder of the St. Johnsbury Area Local Food Alliance (ALFA), believes that community development starts in one place – with community members. That’s why in 2009, St. Johnsbury citizens concerned about the environment and the local food system arranged their first community meeting. “The turnout was small,” Hartman remembers. “And the first year was marked with growing pains, the need to educate consumers, and the need for us to learn.”

The problems facing ALFA went beyond strengthening the regional food system, increasing food sustainability, and helping community members access affordable, healthy, locally produced food. To effect change they needed to reach out, get people together, and initiate a dialogue. Hartman turned to UVM Extension. “In the second year, I contacted Bill McMaster to learn how to effectively connect with the community,” Hartman explains.

## Taking Charge

Bill McMaster coordinates Extension’s Take Charge/Recharge Program — a program that helps communities prioritize needs, visions, and projects in preparation for community action. McMaster helps communities “take charge” of their projects in order to best spend their time, efforts, and money.

In the case of St. Johnsbury ALFA, McMaster sent Hartman a manual containing the principles and curricula of the Take Charge/Recharge Program and asked the group to look it over. Then he made suggestions for how to hold another, more successful community forum. Under McMaster’s guidance, Hartman and his team spread the word by posting flyers and notices, writing press releases, inviting key community leaders, giving interviews on local TV, and enlisting the local food co-op. McMaster taught them to use social media and to generate a mailing list. On the night of the meeting, there was a major snowstorm, almost prompting organizers to postpone. “Eighty people showed up,” says Hartman. “That’s compared to 15 at the first one.”

Take Charge/Recharge is based on a curriculum for responsible economic



**Communities like Brandon, in Addison County, are using resources from UVM Extension's Take Charge/Recharge Program to identify their assets, establish their development priorities, and chart a course toward a stronger, more vibrant downtown. Involving citizens in the process helps strengthen community ties and reaffirms each town's unique goals and character.**

(Photo: John Alden)

development that was designed by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, headquartered at Michigan State University. McMaster rewrote the curriculum specifically for Vermont and expanded the original to reach beyond economics, while he was serving as a community development and housing director in the Northeast Kingdom. The first community to “take charge” and prepare to “recharge” was Hardwick, whose downtown area had been ravaged by fire.

Hardwick’s revitalization prioritized the rebuilding of burned buildings in its downtown, to include retail spaces and affordable housing. The plan also focused on the importance of arts, tourism, and agriculture in the region. McMaster was involved in many of the initial steps, but he didn’t stop once the ball was rolling; that’s where “Recharge” comes in. “Communities should revisit what’s been done, and look at what’s next,” McMaster says. He helps in that process, too.

## Objectives and Follow-Through

“Bill has been involved in every step,” says Patricia Sears, executive director of the Newport City Renaissance Corporation (NCRC). Downtown revitalization in Newport began in the 1980s and 90s, but as recently as a few years ago, empty storefronts and struggling merchants still punctuated Newport’s central district. In 2009, with assistance from McMaster and UVM Extension, Newport received an American Institute of Architects grant to form the NCRC, which functions as an economic arm of the local government.

McMaster served with concerned citizens and municipal leaders on a steering committee for the NCRC. “Bill makes sure we have as many stakeholders involved as possible,” Sears says. “He helped facilitate discussions and helped us adopt an assets-based approach.” This means that Newport first determined what they had and then what they needed, Sears explains.

One key point in holding productive

meetings, is organizing next steps, focus groups, and sub-committees. Newport’s meetings have resulted in the construction and reorganization of multi-use buildings (retail, office spaces, and residential) in the downtown area, the establishment of community gardens, and a farm-to-table program supporting commerce between local farms and restaurants. Their efforts continue, with four NCRC committees that look at ways to make Newport more welcoming to outsiders, restructure the city and region’s economics, promote the downtown area, and redesign city streets for traffic of all kinds.

## Leading by Example

“UVM Extension really walks the walk in terms of coaching communities, bringing resources like grants and partners to our attention, and giving us access to research and other information,” Sears says.



**Groups like the Memphremagog Arts Collaborative celebrate community and revitalize downtowns with galleries like this one, on Main Street in Newport, that promote local arts and artists.**

(Photo: John Alden)

With McMaster's guidance, Newport has adopted an approach that emphasizes relationships and turns them into partnerships. For his part, McMaster tends to credit the communities for their successes. "I teach them things," he says. "But they do all the work."

Prior to heading Take Charge/Recharge, McMaster wrote grants to help Extension secure federal funds to support Vermont communities, including a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) award called Keep Growing. This program focuses on Essex and Caledonia counties in Vermont and Coos and Grafton counties in New Hampshire. Much like Take Charge/Recharge, Keep Growing encourages communities to identify goals for a development plan. But instead of one community working alone, the communities involved in Keep Growing support planning that occurs across the entire region. Keep Growing is the USDA's first multi-state development grant.



Programs like Take Charge/Recharge encourage communities to reflect on their past, present, and future as they redefine their priorities and assess their progress toward new goals. This exhibit at the Memphremagog Arts Collaborative (MAC) Center for the Arts in Newport, links the history of Newport to the present life of local arts through old photos and new works of art. Shown here is Jim McKimm, director of the MAC Center for the Arts. Their current exhibit, "Newport: An Imaged Perspective," runs through September 3. (Photo: John Alden)

### Communities of Interest

The communities that reach out to McMaster are not only cities and towns. Local interest groups, artists, food communities, and other organizations have applied McMaster's approach to goal-setting, outreach, and follow-through. Defined as communities of interest, these groups are linked by their common concerns more than their geography. Communities of interest that have participated in Take Charge/Recharge are diverse and range from St. Johnsbury's ALFA and the Memphremagog Arts Group to Russian Educators and the Great North Woods.

UVM Extension isn't new to community development matters; for years it has held seminars for municipal government officials and town officers. Patricia Sears feels highly fortunate to have an ally like UVM Extension. "They are real people," she says, "just like the people that make up our community. There is a misconception out there that Extension is all about agriculture; it's not. It's about people."



## Take Charge/Recharge Vermont

### Communities of Place

Barton	Derby	Morrisville
Bradford	Derby Line	Newport
Brighton	Essex	North Troy
Burke	Groton	Peacham
Burlington	Hardwick	Plainfield
Cabot	Jay	Underhill
Charleston	Jericho	Waterbury
Concord	Kirby	

### Communities of Interest

Barton Celebration of Youth Forum  
 Brighton Youth Forum  
 Farms to Community Forum  
 Honduran Mayors  
 Memphremagog Arts Council  
 NEK Agritourism Group  
 Newport Renaissance Inc.  
 Northeast Kingdom Collaborative  
 Northeast Kingdom Community Action  
 Nulhegan Gateway Association  
 Orleans County Citizen Advocacy  
 Russian Educators  
 St. Johnsbury Area Local Food Alliance  
 Great North Woods Steering Committee  
 Waste Management District - NEK

To find out more about Take Charge/Recharge, contact:  
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# Supporting Military Kids in Their Communities



UVM Extension, as the home of 4-H, is building our future leaders by providing youth with opportunities to gain life skills that will serve them and their communities for years to come. These girls, participants in Operation: Military Kids Vermont, benefited from the experience of a retired IBM employee, Katherine Norris, who gave her time to help with robotics. Local camps and activities such as these build resilience in kids confronting the challenges of deployment. For more information on Operation: Military Kids Vermont, contact Stephanie Atwood at 802-656-0346 or [stephanie.atwood@uvm.edu](mailto:stephanie.atwood@uvm.edu). (Photo: Melissa Pasanen)

## By Melissa Pasanen

In Norwich, kids and college students play frisbee and hula-hoop together. At a Newfane riding stable, a youngster climbs on a horse for the first time and steadily gathers confidence. Pre-teens in Colchester work together programming robots. These participants all share a common bond: they are members of military families taking part in programs organized by Operation: Military Kids (OMK) Vermont.

In Vermont and across the country, OMK is run by Extension 4-H state organizations, working to fulfill the 4-H mission of engaging and building our future leaders by providing opportunities for youth to master life skills that will serve them and their communities for years to come. "OMK is a statewide collaboration with two primary goals," explains Sarah Kleinman, UVM Extension's State 4-H program director. "We work to develop community support for military children and families and to provide positive youth development opportunities

for military youth."

Vermont is home to more than 2,000 school-age military children and youth, and recently completed its largest deployment since World War II. While peak deployment activity is over for now, there are still deployed Vermonters and families affected by past and current service. "It takes at least 6 to 12 months to get back to normal, if there is a 'normal,'" says Kleinman, "and it takes everyone to support a family through the emotional cycle of deployment ... Ultimately, it is about community."

## Counting on Community

OMK draws heavily on community members, schools, local businesses, and nonprofits to build a robust support system. During OMK community trainings, participants hold up a tarp that is balancing a number of balls. The balls represent the kids whose lives are affected by the deployment of a family member; the adults ringing the tarp represent the web of community support needed to help build strong, resilient kids. Kleinman and OMK

coordinator Stephanie Atwood explain that helping the broad community understand military culture and the full cycle of deployment with its impacts on children and families is especially important in Vermont, where there is no military base.

Pam Loomis of Barre wholeheartedly agrees. Her husband has been deployed three times since 2006. "People think when you're military everything's taken care of, but if you don't live on a base, you don't have all those resources," she explains. "With the Guard, we're so spread out. It's easy for families to get lost in the cracks." As soon as Loomis learned about OMK through a newsletter, she not only signed up her two daughters, but jumped in to volunteer, helping to create and solicit donations for Hero Packs that are given to children of deployed parents. "Kids go through a lot," Loomis says. "The smiles on the kids' faces — they were so psyched when we gave them the backpacks, or held game nights with our church youth group ... You know you're creating a solid foundation in these kids' lives when their world is upside down. If your kids are happy, your community will be happier."

"Communities want to help," Loomis says. "They just don't know how to help, but OMK really gives the community an awareness." OMK partners like the Greater Burlington YMCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, American Legion Posts, 4-H clubs, martial arts studios, private businesses, and the American Red Cross step up to support these kids. Together with community-service groups around the state, Vermonters have helped put together and distribute more than 550 Hero Packs to kids of deployed service members.

## Partnering with Educators

Supporting military youth as they develop their own strength is key to this program. It might come, as it did at Essex High School, from inviting an OMK representative to do a faculty and staff training on how to support these often invisible military students. Counselor Siobhan Barber recounts how the high school created a support group that made cards for some students who didn't have a cohort in their own schools. "One fourth-grade boy was just in tears. He put them up around his door. He loved them," she says.

OMK offers Ready, Set, Go! resources and activities like the tarp exercise to educators,

community groups, and volunteers so they can better understand deployment's effects on children of various ages. At Montpelier High School, Matt McLane, coordinator of community-based learning, found out about OMK and is hoping to set up a mentoring program. "This is an organization that can really impact every community in the state," McLane says. Due to confidentiality guidelines, he explains, "it's often not clear who is impacted by deployment, but there are people in the military all over the state." OMK helps communities reach out to those who serve, even if they don't know their names.

## Helping Youth Find Their Voice

OMK's teen group, Speak Out for Military Kids (SOMK), has used the program's mobile technology lab to create, film, and edit a public service announcement featuring the teens and their message about supporting kids during deployment. It was distributed to every supervisory union in the state. Sixteen-year-old Aaron Roberts of Barre participated in SOMK during his stepfather's 2010 deployment. It helped him connect with other teens in the same situation and learn broader life lessons, he says. "Everyone has an inner strength," Aaron observes. "It helped me identify what mine was." Rita Durgin, the mother of two boys whose dad was deployed for 10 months in Afghanistan, signed her sons up for many OMK activities "so they could be with other military kids," she says. "I think it was good for them knowing they were all going through the same thing. They had a bond. It was safe."

Kyle Hill of Barre, recently volunteered to help OMK teen workshop participants build Web pages where they share techniques for stress management. Hill, a Vermont Air National Guardsman himself, volunteered his time as a community member, a Guard member, and also as a grateful parent of a military youth who has participated in an OMK leadership and self-defense camp hosted by Villari's Martial Arts Studio. "Military kids are a little different than your average kid," Hill said. "Anytime you get to interact with these kids, it's great."



# Promoting Vermont Farm and Dairy Viability

By Melissa Pasanen

Like many dairy farms across Vermont, the Corse Farm in Whitingham has faced its share of challenges since it came into the family in 1868. In 2007, the couple had almost finished transitioning their 60-cow dairy to organic in hopes of more financial stability when they experienced a devastating barn fire. Luckily only the building sustained damage, but the emotional impact was significant. “When you’re in that kind of shock, getting help is a key part of moving forward,” says Linda Corse.

A team from UVM Extension’s Farm Viability Programs helped the Corses evaluate rebuilding options. “It definitely was a very valuable service to help us get through a very difficult and trying time,” says Linda Corse. Today, there’s little that makes Linda and Leon Corse happier than having their daughter Abbie bring her 20-month-old son along when coming to work on the family’s dairy farm. They are almost as happy that Abbie, who just turned 29, seems interested in taking on part of the enterprise someday. “It was a surprise to all of us,” Leon Corse says with a soft chuckle, “including her.”

## Helping Farmers Envision

Extension specialists such as Dennis Kauppila advise farmers on how to deal with the opportunities and challenges they face, like transitioning to the next generation, cash flow issues, expansion into new markets, exit strategies that keep land in agriculture, physical plant improvements and analysis of production practices. Situations vary with specific personalities and circumstances—“All this real life stuff,” Kauppila says, as well as hopes and dreams. “I always ask, what is the farm that’s in your head?”

Kauppila has worked for over 25 years to assist Vermont’s dairy farmers in building management skills to help them weather variable milk prices and other external factors like feed and fuel costs over which they have little control. Mark Cannella, Director of Extension’s Viability Programs, explains that his team’s task is to provide one-on-one business management education and business planning advice to help farmers map out their future and develop a business plan that positions their farms to profit, succeed, and grow.

“We’re really educators,” explains Cannella. “We help to educate and empower farm managers to satisfy their goals. Our training and programs are there to help them



**Three generations of Grahams work and own their Williamstown farm, keeping future ownership of the farm secure so that family members can focus on their lives and their community.**  
(Photo: John Alden)

improve their ability to manage their business. Sometimes that’s providing guidance to help solve problems they know exist and at other times, we help shine a light on considerations that weren’t previously in their scope. The goal is to help them identify their own roadmap to both financial and other kinds of success, like taking care of their family and employees and the land. It’s not just about the bottom line.”

The Corses continue to call on Extension and meet periodically with Kauppila for balance sheet check-ins. They have also worked with Extension to obtain grant funding for a utility vehicle to help them continue farming despite some physical limitations.

## Keeping Farms in Communities

The UVM Extension Farm Viability Programs work with many types of farms, but dairy is a major focus. “All the services that are required to keep the dairy farms in business,” says Cannella, ticking off veterinarians, feed and equipment dealers. “That’s the fabric of our rural communities. If the dairy farms are having trouble, there will be a domino effect.”

In central Vermont, Rodney Graham knew he needed to work on a transfer plan for his century-old Williamstown family farm where he’d been milking 65 Jerseys, selling to Organic

Valley, and sugaring. Beyond farming, the Grahams have deep roots in the community with family members serving on the school and select boards as well as the ambulance and fire squads; his wife is the town clerk, as was his mother previously. Both Graham’s son and nephew are involved in the farm and now they have a sound transfer plan in place. “If Dennis [Kauppila] hadn’t pushed me, I still wouldn’t have one done,” Graham admits. “It’s good that it’s done. I wanted to make sure things were set so the farm could go on if they chose.”

In East Hardwick, Jeremy Michaud and his two younger brothers have returned with their growing families - now in the fourth generation - to Clair-A-Den Farm, where they grew up. The brothers knew they had to expand beyond 120 cows to support four families and grew to milking around 500 whose milk they sell to Dairylea Co-op. “Then 2009 happened,” Michaud says, referring to a low-point for fluid milk prices. “We needed a different plan, something to keep us in business, something to keep us in Vermont, something to keep our children involved in agriculture if they want the opportunity.”

Working with a consultant through UVM

Extension’s Farm Viability Programs they evaluated their options and, over three years of hard work and self-examination, went “from a blank piece of paper to a 5,000-square-foot production facility,” Michaud says. They now churn out ice cream and non-fat yogurt, which they distribute around the state — even to school systems — with a full-time staff of 11, not including family. “Business planning is never finished. You are constantly making adjustments and changes,” Michaud says, “but when there was a tough question that needed to be asked we addressed it, so now they don’t bog us down; we can keep moving forward.”

## Many Options for Farmers

Sometimes it’s time to sell the farm. Extension can help there, too, as they did with Ursula and Bill Johnson’s 300-plus Holstein dairy in Canaan along the Connecticut River. “We have always maintained completely open land for anyone who wanted to hunt and fish,” says Ursula Johnson. Their partners in Extension understood the Johnsons’ commitment to open land and helped discover an eventual partnership with the Vermont Land Trust, ensuring that the land will continue as a dairy farm but remain an open, community resource forever.



## Support for Farms

UVM Extension’s goal is to strengthen the economic fabric of our communities by helping dairy and other diversified farms become more viable businesses. The UVM Extension Farm Viability Programs exist to help Vermont farmers map out their future and develop a business plan that positions their farms to profit, succeed, and grow. Farmers are paired with an adviser, working together to catalog assets, create a plan, incorporate ideas for new business ventures, and access loans and monies available to support Vermont farms. For more information on the program, please contact Christi Sherlock at 1-866-860-1382 (toll-free in Vermont) or [christi.sherlock@uvm.edu](mailto:christi.sherlock@uvm.edu).

# Master Gardeners Help Communities Thrive

By Mark Aiken

Eventually every home gardener has a question. Where can I get my soil tested? What are these red beetles in my lilies? What should I do with blight on my tomatoes? How do I prune my orchard? In the 1970s, Extension specialists across the country were being overwhelmed with home gardening questions. In an effort to remain accessible to the masses – and at the same time serve commercial clients – the Master Gardener program was born.

Most states offer Master Gardener courses, but according to Nancy Hulett, UVM Extension's Master Gardener coordinator, what separates Vermont's program is its accessibility. "We are trying to get people who will volunteer in their communities," says Hulett. Simply, many of these people have jobs; therefore, UVM holds its programs in the evenings at many locations via Vermont Interactive Television. "We want them, in turn, to teach the value of the outdoor world as goodwill ambassadors," says Hulett. Years ago, most participants were retired; now there is a much broader cross-section. "We have more 20- and 30-somethings getting involved," Hulett adds.

## The Course

Offered annually, the Master Gardener program is a 13-week course, offered in several locations throughout the state. One hundred eighty-seven participants became master gardeners in 2012 and went out to serve their communities in various ways. Many participants even go on to work in "green" industries.

Guiding the program is the concept of Integrated Pest Management. "We don't encourage or discourage the use of chemicals," Hulett says. "In our program, we explain *how* to use them. We identify the pest or disease, and identify potential solutions." One of the keys is considering economic, health, and environmental risks and then making informed decisions. And, of course, preventing problems on the front end when possible.

UVM faculty and industry professionals teach Master Gardener class sessions on topics like food production, soil fertility, weed management, and invasives. Annie Holdridge of Westfield, Vermont attended the class in 2008. "All of the sessions were valuable," she says, although she particularly



Community gardens like this one, in Burlington, enhance life for residents, promote community involvement through stewardship, and bring urban areas back to life.

(Photo: John Alden)

loved the first two sessions on botany and entomology. "Jon Turmel taught the entomology session," Holdridge says, referring to Vermont's state entomologist. "He loves bugs."

After graduation, many master gardeners continue to volunteer. Hulett speaks fondly of the "1000-hour club," filled with active members who serve a variety of functions, including staffing the Master Gardener hotline. Having taken the class, master gardeners are resources for other community members. And if master gardeners don't have the answer, they know where to find it.

## Gardeners as Ambassadors

Holdridge was new to her area when she first participated in the Master Gardener course. "Usually people taking the Master Gardener course are able to connect with another Master Gardener in their area," she explains. But, despite the approximately 200 people who participate in the program annually, there was no master gardener in the Newport area in 2008. Holdridge and her classmates quickly created a buzz.

Their first project was to establish a community garden in a depressed area of Newport. In the beginning, three master

gardeners managed the garden, but community members have since taken it over, and added two more sites. The Master Gardener program gives participants knowledge to address issues that face community and residential gardens. They then share this knowledge with neighbors, creating a sustainable network of engaged community members. The result is a more beautiful and productive living landscape.

Four years after taking the course, Holdridge continues to serve her community and the Master Gardener program; she staffs Master Gardener tables at events around Orleans county and organizes talks, programming, and informational sessions. Master Gardeners used to come up with the topics for these sessions; now, Holdridge says, "we have surveys at our events asking people what *they* want to hear about." This is part of the larger mission of Extension programs like Master Gardener: they call upon community members to engage in learning that they enjoy, and encourage them to give back to their communities. In Newport interest has spread, the surrounding community is better informed, and it's a more pleasant place to live.

The body of research, sharing, and

networking that UVM Extension provides – combined with the support of Extension services nation-wide – is vast. But all of this work would be useless without ways to share knowledge with the community. Master Gardeners and participants of other Extension programs like Master Composter and SOUL (Stewardship of the Urban Landscape) provide community members with knowledge to make informed decisions regarding issues like pesticide use or where the next community garden will thrive. The results are visible in greener communities and healthier landscapes across Vermont. For more information, contact the Master Gardener Helpline, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., at 1-800-639-2230 or [www.uvm.edu/mastergardener](http://www.uvm.edu/mastergardener).



## Vermont's Got SOUL

UVM Extension's Stewardship of the Urban Landscape (SOUL) program does for trees and communities what the Master Gardener programs does for gardens. Offered every other year, SOUL is an 8-week course aimed at helping communities value and protect their trees. The program includes a 20-hour volunteer commitment during which past participants have completed tree canopy assessments in their hometowns, started volunteer groups, led Arbor Day ceremonies at schools, and helped establish tree warden posts in towns that previously had none. "SOUL has been the catalyst in getting some communities involved in taking care of their trees," says program coordinator Kate Forrer. With trees increasingly credited for improving air quality, saving energy, increasing property values, and reducing runoff into nearby lakes and streams, SOUL's mission is good for communities and homeowners. To learn more about SOUL, contact:

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To calculate the positive impacts of multiple tree varieties in our region or elsewhere, visit:

[www.treebenefits.com/calculator/](http://www.treebenefits.com/calculator/)