

Vermont New Farmer Network  
Westminster, VT  
April 2, 2009

Notes

**What is success? How will you know when you have achieved it?**

- When I'm happy
- When I have money in the bank, am able to pay bills, meet the business threshold
- When I'm not working more than one job to support my family
- When I have the ability to donate food to nonprofits
- When I can own my own property
- When I don't feel threatened by market fluctuations, can have a stable work environment
- When I can support local—don't have enough money to do that now
- When there is respect and appreciation for my job in my local community
- When there is support for locally grown products, and increase in the amount of food grown locally
- When I am less dependent on grant sources, more autonomous, a cooperative system of support that is not government funded
- When there is environmental, social, and economic success in the community
- When I have more time for life activities
- When I am providing jobs at decent pay
- When I am able to build a modern facility that decreases my impact on the environment
- When I have room for growth
- When I have a cushion
- When there is more local independence and self-sufficiency so I am not bringing in more inputs

**What have been your successes and challenges as a new farmer?**

Successes:

- Experience on other local farms (buddy experience before making my own financial investment)
- Having advice and a helping hand (land, equipment); collaborative relationships
- CSA model with community support in continued purchase agreements
- Use of Cooperative Extension, NRCS, FSA grants & on-farm visits
- NE Vegetable and Berry Growers seminar
- VT Farm Viability Program—business resources, which are foreign language to farmers. Tilling the Soil of Opportunity (MA).
- Farmers' market and connections there; loyal customer base; winter farmers' market
- Vermont Land Trust
- Willing workers

#### Challenges:

- Willing workers
- Ability to pay workers
- Funding available only to larger farms (>10 acres?)
- Social issues—ability to reach out to schools & rehab organizations to increase next generation of farmers. Farming is not just business but a healing opportunity; change in community attitude to farms.
- Family
- Trying to find good compost
- Mechanical skills and help with equipment
- Slaughterhouse USDA approved; change in regulations; tanning options
- Resource for capital for beginning farmers
- Scary legislation, TSP for lobbying
- Protocols to sell to grocery (wholesale); Good Farmer Program; where is farmer voice in new legislation?
- Rules about hiring people (such as workers comp); can't afford insurance. What about charging rates per number of employees, or grants to pay premiums?
- Current use—huge penalty if you go out of business (need more exceptions)
- I'll never own my own land doing what I do. I'll have to quit farming to own land. What is the future for Vermont farming if young farmers can't get land to farm?
- Pressure of development, open space decreasing.

#### Assistance received and needed

- Low-interest microloans (\$300 to \$2000)
- Business plan assistance: Farm Viability Program; Working Landscapes
- SARE grants
- Local university providing recruitment for farm laborers
- Micro grants for tractors, farmers' markets, greenhouse, labor; currently limited to those who own farms
- Easier/local grant process, more accessible, less red tape
- Exchange with others interested in local and quality, like in Europe
- NOFA—matching funds for CSA
- Post oil solutions—learning about how to use/afford fresh food; need to promote farmers' markets more
- WIC, Farm to Family, Food Stamps now at farmers' markets
- Farm Land Link Vermont – stagnated
- Tax breaks—need more incentive to get land back into farming
- Need more money from NRCS for TSP instead of equipment
- Holistic workshops

#### Feedback/questions from service providers

**Q: Would an incubator farm concept appeal to you, rent long term?**

**Q: What is the best way to get information to farmers?**

- Networking sessions
- Social events
- Some areas are competitive and some are collaborative
- Create a go-to list for references, ideas, support, questions
- Listserves
- Conferences
- Post oil: “No garden left behind”
- Prefer on-site workshops, trade shows

**Q: Equipment sharing or rental?**

--Custom operators—most farmers are interested in access to equipment, not hiring someone to come in with equipment. Competition is also an issue.

**Q: How do we get Land Trust to work with parcels less than 50 acres?**

- VLT barriers—small parcels are more expensive per acre
- Now rethinking that to start working with farmers like UVM Land Link used to
- Stewardship necessary but endowment is less for less acreage

**Q: What would have helped you better to start up?**

- Still issue with capital and land access