Good afternoon … and thanks for joining us … I’m Judy Simpson. Vermonters and their growing appetite for locally-grown food are finding a new way to get involved in food production. It’s called a Crop Mob. To find out more, here’s Across the Fence’s Rebecca Gollin:

Spending a Saturday morning weeding in the hot sun is hard work. So why would anyone volunteer to do it?

Joel Tilley, Crop mob volunteer - “I like trees and I like dirt and I heard about this....”

‘This’ is a crop mob, which is a new term for an old idea.

Dawn Fuller-Ball, crop mob volunteer - “we have a yahoo group for beginning women farmers and someone had suggested when someone was looking for help to try the crop mob and we were like, hey, what is a crop mob? And we looked it up, and sure enough here we are...”

A crop mob is a group of volunteers who show up at a farm to help with projects that can generally be completed in a single day.

Jessica Longobardo, UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture – “we’re working on a bunch of different projects with the conservation nursery,... right now, mostly weeding. We were going to work on an irrigation system potentially, and maybe some transplanting as well....”

Rachel Schattman, UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture – “Crop mobs have been a way for people to get work done together in different parts of the world for centuries, maybe as long as agriculture has been around...”

Rachel Schattman started the Green Mountain crop mob group with a friend after an article in the New York Times introduced them to the idea.
Schattman - “...last year we skinned a greenhouse for Adams berry farm, we cut seed potatoes for Jericho settlers farm, we do a lot of odds and ends, and I think it’s especially useful for a farm that doesn’t necessarily maintain a large crew, but they have a couple of jobs a year where they need a group of 10 or 12 people to show up and just do something really quickly,”

Lynn Wolfe, interval conservation nursery – “We have a really small staff, there's just two of us, and there's about four acres of trees to take care of, so any time we can get extra hands we're absolutely thrilled.”

This crop mob is taking place at the Intervale conservation nursery in Burlington.

Wolfe – “what we do is grow native riparian trees and shrubs for conservation projects. Our trees and shrubs are planted all over the state of Vermont and also in some areas in the state along shorelines like Rivers and streams, and they’re used for shoreline’s stabilization, habitat restoration, erosion control, to filter out nutrients that are flowing into our waterways.”

Wolfe says she only heard about crop mobs within the last year, but was eager to host one.

Wolfe – “...to get extra people that are excited to be down here on a beautiful Saturday morning, it's just wonderful, I mean they will do over a week’s worth of work than I could do alone, just by having some extra hands...”
Those extra hands come in all forms.

Schattman – “The mobsters who show up, I think are pretty diverse ....some younger people, some older people, and I think it was just really great for anybody who is kind of interested in food and wanting to get involved in farming but in a really low commitment kind of way...”

Rebecca Gollin, Across the Fence – “No experience is necessary to join a crop mob, and many participants are interested in learning about farming. Some volunteers do have quite a bit of experience; and some may even be farmers themselves...”

Fuller-Ball - “we have a small fiber farm, we have several alpacas, several merino sheep, black merino sheep, about three angora goats,”

Dawn Fuller-Ball and her husband came from their farm in Randolph to help out. They hope to host a crop mob in the fall.

Fuller-ball – “…we love the idea of a crop mob, we love the idea that there's a bunch of people that can... Basically descend on someone's farm, whatever that may mean, and help out for the day, a few hours or the day, and we love the idea of having people come and help us as well. We could use help with fencing, we could use help with digging a ditch to put in a line for our winter area for animals, we could use help with a lot of stuff, and instead of counting on your friends all the time to show up, and basically work for nothing, I think it's a really great idea to have a bunch of different people who have an interest in farming, and know how difficult it can be, how time consuming, how much energy
it takes, they can come and show up for a few hours and help each other out. It’s just a fabulous idea.”

With an ever-expanding list of willing volunteers and farmers who would like help, crop mobs are here to stay.

Jessica Longobardo- “I think people love to see what is actually going on on the farm, and to learn more about how their food is grown, where it’s grown, to meet the farmer that is growing their food…”

Tilley - “… we’re a part of the community,… And there are benefits besides the things that you can count or put on paper. It’s just a great way of doing things….”

Giving back to communities by giving time to farmers, the green mountain crop mob is ready to lend a hand. In Burlington, I’m rg with atf....

Thanks Rebecca. Joining me now are two people who were featured in Rebecca’s report. Rachel Schattman is the local food program coordinator with UVM’s Center for sustainable agriculture and Lynn Wolfe is the assistant manager of the Intervale conservation nursery in Burlington. Thank you both for being here. How important was it to have this group of people, and help you out?

Lynn.: Anytime within an extra hands in the field it is absolutely amazing. As I said earlier we didn’t have a staff of two people and we are fulltime throughout the season and part time in the winter. There’s a lot that needs to be done on any farm so it’s wonderful to have extra people come.

Judy.: In the past there were barn raisings now there are crop mobs it is sort of the natural backwards progression really?

Rachel.: I think that crop mobs are an excellent way for people to connect with the community and maybe something that is unique about them that’s different than barn raisings is oftentimes people don’t know each other before they attend the crop mob, but I do believe they are the same vein definitely related definitely about bringing people together.

Judy.: The socialization part is really important I would think. The show of any don’t know who’s going to be there and you need some new people.

Rachel.: It’s all about the relationship building.

Lynn.: Even on that day people who are exchanging e-mail trying to get hooked up maybe one woman is an artist and was talking to another woman that runs the farm and needs signs painted and that sort of thing that a great way to make connections among the volunteers.
Judy.: How does it actually work? How do you find out where to go if you're interested even in learning about this or thinking you might want to try it?

Rachel.: We have on the center for sustainable agriculture's web site which will show a later in the segment we have a calendar that lists all the mobs we try to put them together at the beginning of the summer so that people can plan ahead about which ones they might be able to come to we personally host one a month the green mountain crop mob does but to no other farms like the Intervale conservation nursery has other opportunities for people to come in and volunteer. Some farms have setups were you can do work trade day in return for food are vegetables so there are lots of opportunities and our organizing is just one of those.

Judy.: Are crop mobs being used in other parts of the country

Rachel.: Yes when my friend Emily from fair food farm and I started the green mountain crop mob we took our inspiration from a group in North Carolina and since then I believe there are 60 or so groups that operate under the name of crop mobs in different states.

Judy.: So who organizes and coordinates the crop mob?

Rachel.: Currently the center for sustainable agriculture at UVM extension coordinates the green mountain crop mob. It began last year when Emily and I started it as purely a volunteer activity. She and I are both working and also have our own farm and we felt like we weren't able to give it the amount of attention it needed in order to publicize it well or maybe we thought there could be more than one a month if someone had a dedicated amount of time to work on it and could take over so we moved it to the center for sustainable agriculture and our AmeriCorps Vista Jessica Lombardo has been managing it.

Judy.: Lynn for farmers how does it work? How does the farmer get involved to get this mob to come?

Lynn.: I had seen an E mail there's a farmer listserv there is a group of farmers of the Intervale. And the mail was sent out saying any farms at the Intervale or if you know of any farmers that as are interested in having a group of volunteers show up and help you with a specific task just e-mail. I believe it was you and that's how I heard about it so I jumped on the opportunity. Love to have extra people in the field set up a date and come down. It was a Saturday morning. It's really nice for people who often work regular Monday through Friday 9 to 5 jobs. They can get out in the sunshine on a beautiful Saturday morning and we provide snacks and have a good time hanging on the field.

Judy.: Rachel you been to several farms as a crop mobber and each one is a little bit different. Are there some stories that stand out for you?

Rachel.: Absolutely. Just as every farm is different every crop mob is different and really shaped by what kind of farm you're going to. There were a couple last year that were particularly interesting. One was symphony farm where they were making no till beds and laying cardboard and sifting
topsoil over the cardboard then they would cut into the cardboard plant it was a weak management technique that I had never had any experience with and it was really interesting to see. Maybe the most well attended crop mob that we had last year was at Emily’s farm fair food farm. She roasted pig there's a big potato dig and there was maybe 30 people there which was a large number for us and was a lot of fun. It was great.

Judy.: It sounds like it could be pre much any size a crop mob depending on what the job is?

Rachel.: Definitely we get between five and 15 people usually somewhere in there. Most often around the size that the Intervale conservation nursery ended up being which I believe was eight people. I think a lot of people are interested and we all lead busy lives but enough people show up to make it an exciting event.

Judy.: Do you find a lot of these people are who don't have time for their own garden but still one I have a little bit of that experience?

Rachel.: Absolutely.

Lynn.: Yes that's what I thought among the group as well. There is one man that works with plants and soil science and just as an interest in the natural environment but does not have his own farm. I think everybody likes getting their hands dirty and feeling a little more connected.

Judy.: Lynn can you tell me a little bit about some of the work you do at your farm and where some of these plantings go?

Lynn.: Absolutely we grow native trees and shrubs and they're sold all over the state of Vermont for restoration projects and mostly what you sell is repreparing species. Which means they like to have their roots what planted along Rivers and streams. Their sold to the fish and wildlife service the department of agriculture any sort of water conservation group. A lot of anglers associations natural resource conservation districts often by our stock but we also sell to anyone that is interested in having native stock. My supervisor the nursery manager mike angles and I you'll see a strong been all over the state collecting our own seeds and cuttings whenever method of propagation the tree or shrub needs and then we have a greenhouse at the Intervale and we often start them there and we will transplant them into our four acre field where the crop mob was held. The trees and shrubs will be there for approximately three years and we do one harvest a year during the spring which is often when we need a lot of help so I'm sure all called on crop mobs in the future for that. Then our trees and shrubs are planted in the spring as well.

Judy.: I know we've done some programs on the importance of having native species as far as plantings. There's a lot of popular plans in the past there have been put in or bush's that are not native that are starting to cause a bit of a problem so it would be interesting for people to learn more about what is native and to visit and suit it's available.

Lynn.: Absolutely we welcome anyone and everyone at Intervale whenever we can so we often have study students and interns come down and we like to spread whenever kind of knowledge we can
about native species that way. We also have hosted workshops in the past so anyone in the public can come and learn about species identification or even propagation techniques.

Judy.: Is the nursery part of the Intervale Center?

Lynn.: The nursery is part of the larger nonprofit Intervale Center. The Intervale itself owns or leases 350 acres of land within the city limits and they're on a number of programs. The real mission of the Intervale is to strengthen the community Food System and they do that through a number of ways. They have a farm's program where there's a number of small farms at the Intervale which you know a lot about.

Rachel.: That's where my farm is also.

Lynn.: There's everything from a berry farm to a chicken farm to diversified vegetable farms down there. There's also a business planning program there's the food hub which is a multi-farm CSA and there's the conservation nursery.

Judy.: Excellent if people are more interested in any information on the crop mob what should they do?

Rachel.: They can go to our web site at the center for sustainable agriculture at www.UVM.edu/~susagctcr.

Judy.: And as far as farmers who are interested in having some help same web site?

Rachel.: Farmers can go to that web site and e-mail us from there. There's obviously more farmers interested than there are months in the year but they can e-mail us and we try to make sure that we have a good geographic spread.

Judy.: Thanks so much. And also the Intervale if people are interested in finding out more about that?

Lynn.: You can visit our web site which is www.INTERVALE.org and it has tabs for every program that we run at the Intervale.

Judy.: All right thank you so much for joining me today. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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