Good afternoon … and thanks for joining us … I'm Judy Simpson. We often discuss and highlight Vermont’s working landscape on Across the Fence. As many of you are aware, a non-partisan partnership began in 2010 that is looking at the future of the state’s working landscape. As part of today’s program we’re going to see a new video created by Vermont’s Working Landscape Partnership. It examines the difficulties facing our farm and forest economy as well as the opportunities that lie ahead:

What is Vermont’s working landscape? It is both a view and an economy. One built on the hard work of previous generations. It is the open land of our farm fields. The coniferous northern hills the sugar woods and compact villages a hardwood forest and the cultivated valleys that provide the distinctive look and feel to our communities. A recent study on the council on the future of Vermont reports that the overwhelming majority of Vermonters believe the working landscape is a key to our future. It is Vermont’s defining feature. Essential to the states brand to tourism and outdoor recreation. But even more to the sense of place of Vermonters. It is a core value that is central to what we love about Vermont. Yet our state faces a quiet but continuing crisis. Driven by the fact that it is increasingly difficult to earn a living from the land. If this is not reversed the working landscape from Vermont could disappear within a generation. For months working landscape partnership is a new non-partisan and broad based coalition dedicated to keeping our farm and forest economy vital. After a comprehensive look of available data the history of land and farm policy in Vermont and international models the partnership outlined its action plan to make the working landscape a defining principle for Vermont State policy and investment. It is time to celebrate and reaffirm that’s working farms and forests are at the center of the Vermont culture and arts community economy and way of life. The Vermont council on rural development launched this new partnership in December 2010 as leaders of the state Federal and nonprofit private sectors packed the Vermont State house for the summit on the future of the working landscape.

I see the future of this dairy farming industry in Vermont I see prosperity I see diversity I see change and I see a lot of young farmers coming back or staying on their family farm which needs to happen if we're going to have a dairy industry in Vermont.

Dairies orchards wood lots and forest product manufacturers are essential to the states character communities and culture however global competition a shortage of new capital complex Food Systems and the lack of cohesive state policy all threaten the economic viability of the state’s working landscape the trends are alarming. Farm revenue is down development pressure drives land prices up and forest parcels are getting smaller. 50 years ago half of the state's land was in agriculture that number has dropped by almost 60%. Today only 1/5 state's lands are being farmed. Despite the
increasing diversity of farm products dairy continues to dominate Vermont agricultural land use and production. However, many dairy farms are insignificant danger of failure. Since 1980 the number of Vermont Housing units grew at a rate far faster than the population. Vermont is losing close to 5000 acres of land and development each year. While it's true we have more farms than 10 years ago fewer farms produce any income that can support a family. That lower farm income has a big ripple effect. An estimated 96% of supplies for the farm are purchased locally. The Vermont Forest products industry is also facing unheralded prices. The number of males in Vermont has declined 43% since 2002. Greatly reducing are in state capacity of processing logs and lumber. The decline of working lands it has been gradual but steady. Despite the challenges there are tremendous opportunities to reverse the trend. Vermont has good soils and is within easy reach of the Boston and New York markets. There's an increased focus today on food and Energy Security and on locally sourced sustainably produced farm and forest products. Vermonters and visitors are strong supporters of the working landscape. Direct sales to consumers by Vermont farmers through farmers markets CSA's local restaurants and institutions have grown rapidly and Vermont leads the nation per capita in these areas. A new generation of farm and forest entrepreneurs are carrying a long tradition of thoughtful stewardship hard work and innovation. These emerging Vermont based companies are providing artists and cheese grains specialty wood products organic scenes fruits vegetables and other value added items. Recent reports indicate that Vermont could produce 25% of its energy needs from farm and forest resources. These examples show great potential but to see them come to fruition Vermonters will need to come together and commit to an economically vibrant working landscape providing fiber food energy and sustenance for the 21st century. The partnership believes this can happen by pursuing a bold action plan with five key proposals. Build a major campaign to celebrate the distinctiveness of our working landscape. Target strategic investment through Vermont agriculture and forest products development corporation. Designate and support working lands. Support working landscape enterprise development and conservation with tax revenue. Activate the development cabinet and build a state planning office. Hundreds of individuals and organizations throughout Vermont are already signed on in support of this plan. As momentum builds the partnership will work with the legislature and the governor to have these ideas drive state policy. It's time to add your voice. You can show our elected leaders how much Vermonters care about this issue. Become a member of the partnership stay updated help shape the campaign for the future of Vermont’s working landscape. The benefits of our open land and wooded hills are boundless. If Vermonters take action together we can build an agricultural and natural resource renaissance and help keep the landscape working for all of us.

Judy.: Our working landscape includes everything from forestry and agriculture – to diversified operations such as maple sugaring and apples. It also includes niche markets like grains and grapes. Recently, University of Vermont Extension has been providing educational workshops on another crop that involves our working landscape. For more that, here's Keith Silva:

Laskovski: Hi!

and this is how he grows shiitake mushrooms. Shiitakes need to be ‘woken up’ in order to fruit ... it’s called ‘shocking’ the logs.

Laskovski: I like it actually if the log has sort of a decent impact with the water to vibrate it and quote unquote shock it a bit.

Shiitake mushrooms have been grown in China and Japan for centuries. The traditional method for growing shiitakes is to use sawn logs from the shiit tree and place them alongside logs already growing mushrooms or containing shiitake spores. Shiitake mushrooms are now cultivated across the globe. Low in calories and high in vitamins B and C and these mushrooms are renowned for their flavor, versatility in cooking, and they even have medicinal qualities.
At Dana Forest Farm ... Laskovski uses sugar maples and beech trees to grow his mushrooms. Using sustainable forest management practices the trees are harvested, cut into logs, and stacked. This process insures that the logs are ‘dead’ in preparation to receiving the Shiitake spores.

Nick Laskovski / Dana Forest Farm: You won’t see shiitakes growing on fresh trees because they have an anti-fungal component which doesn’t allow mushrooms to grow on fresh trees ... Once that log dies, but it’s still fairly sterile then comes the portion of inoculating I’ll take the log and drill say about 50 holes into the log, space it around 4 inches or so and that sort of is spreading the spawn and giving it as much surface area to be able to bond. Once the holes are drilled then I cover the holes in food grade cheese wax. That seals in moisture and helps prevent against competitive fungus. Usually takes a year for a log to become fully colonized so they’re hanging out for a while. Given the weather, given the climatic conditions will determine how well these logs become colonized once that colonization occurs then the logs are ready for fruiting.

Laskovski is part of a three-year study in collaboration with the University of Vermont Extension’s Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Cornell University. The goal of this project is to increase the cultivation of shiitake mushrooms in Northern New England. Laskovski received a grant from SARE – the sustainable agriculture research and education program. The grant allows him to host workshops that provide hands-on opportunities in the production and management methods needed to grow shiitakes.

Laskovski: If I were to break down the pricing for 20 logs a stack like this it would cost you about $25 in spawn, $30 for a tool, you have to consider the chainsaw that you would need to cut the trees down ... you could do a stack like this for probably $100. If each log were to produce a pound of mushrooms over its say per year which might be exaggerating a bit, say a half pound or pound of mushrooms and you were able to sell that mushroom pound for $15 a pound multiply that by 20 per year so $300 for a $100 investment so it’s a 200 percent return. Obviously $300 isn’t really that much, but that’s where this might be able to play into a supplemental hobby if you will.

At $1 an ounce Laskovski’s ‘hobby’ is literally starting to pay off.

Laskovski: I had my first mushroom sale yesterday so it worked out (laughs). Keith Silva: you had your first mushroom sale yesterday of all time? Laskovski: Not of all time, but as Dana Forest Farm.

Menard: I got this little claim to fame of being his first customer

Charlie Menard is the executive chef of the Inn at the Round Barn Farm in Waitsfield. The Inn is located a few miles from Laskovski’s farm.

Charlie Menard / Inn at the Round Barn Farm: As a chef I’m constantly looking for the highest quality freshest product that I can get. Next, as a native Vermonter it’s really important to me to support the local economy and support our neighbors and lastly I’m involved in the hospitality tourism essentially tourism business and as an ambassador of sorts to that I really love being able to deliver as much of Vermont as I can. Of course we’re know for our Vermont cheese our maple syrup, but to say to somebody these mushrooms were grown right up the road really puts us forward and shows us as a progressive forward thinking community.

There are only a handful of shiitake growers in Vermont. It’s a niche market that Laskovski and others are hoping will bear ‘fruit’ in the years to come.

Menard: Really we’re right at our impetus. Dana forest farm started last year and it takes a year for these logs to be ready for fruiting we’re just getting into that stage where these logs are going to be producing for the first time. And next year I’ll have twice as many logs that are going to be ready and at that same time I’ll inoculate more and continually add to this operation. There’s close to 800
logs here currently and my plan is to do at least 500 to 1000 logs each year maybe until I reach 10X or I get bored with it. One of the other.

As the saying goes, all good things come to those that wait ... for Mushroom devotees that wait for Vermont grown shiitake mushrooms is almost over ... almost. In Waitsfield, I’m Keith Silva with Across the Fence.

And that’s our program for today. Thanks for joining us ... I’m Judy Simpson ... I’ll see you again next time on Across the Fence.