I love this time of year of late winter gatherings and conferences and learning events when you get to see old friends and colleagues, and experience great optimism and excitement about strong connections and new ideas. Maybe even receive a hug or two! These are the gifts of these short days of the year, and just when they’re especially appreciated.

Here at the Center, connections between people, land, practice, and community are at the heart of what we do year-round. This issue is full of examples of that work. We bet that you too will be excited by our recently published “Global Food, Local Food” booklet (see page 3). Whether or not you’re fascinated by cultural crops from other parts of the world, the photos are beautiful and the reading is a pleasure. Hope you get a chance to take a look at it. I, for one, especially enjoy cooking at home in the heart of the winter. There’s no better way to warm the house, and it’s a great time to experiment.

While the winter routine may enable some folks to go to conferences, catch up on reading, or enjoy a snooze by the woodstove, the chance to kick back is not universal. For some, winter can present great challenges on the farm that result in lots of worry and frustration. Managing farm structures after a heavy snowfall (see page 6) is one such challenge, and getting livestock through the winter can be another. I enjoyed learning about winter grazing at our 19th Annual Grazing and Livestock conference (see page 5) held at Lake Morey in January. If you are faced with a winter-on-the-farm challenge, please don’t hesitate to reach out to one of the Center staff for support.

One of my favorite elements of last weekend’s NOFA-VT winter conference was singing together. It happened to be Valentine’s Day, so the subject of singing was “love.” Despite the sub-zero temperatures, the singing warmed my heart for the rest of the day. Here’s hoping that you too find ways to stay warm all winter long. ❥
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**PROGRAM NEWS**

**FRESH FROM THE FIELD**

*Contributed by Liz Kenton, Ben Waterman, Jenn Colby, and Ginger Nickerson.*

**Training and Savings Program for Vermont’s Next Generation of Farmers Seeks Youth Participants**

Our Youth Agriculture Individual Development Account (Youth Ag IDA) program (found online at [http://www.uvm.edu/extension/youth/vtyouthagida](http://www.uvm.edu/extension/youth/vtyouthagida)) is accepting applications for its next program round. We are seeking youth who are involved with or interested in agriculture to participate in a one-year program that will both provide learning opportunities to help acquire important business management skills, and help each participant save money towards the purchase of a business-related asset. Young farmers will exit the program possessing both seed capital and financial literacy skills: key components in establishing an independent enterprise or assuming more of a management role in the family farm operation.

Upon successful completion of the program, the participant's savings will be matched at a rate of 2:1 (up to a total of $1,000 in match funding), giving young farmers two program dollars for every dollar they save toward the purchase of a productive farm asset.

What does this look like?
- Participants attend a year (approximately 10-20 hours- depending on preference) of fun, informative, hands-on learning experiences (these classes have an estimated $1,500 value).
- Participants complete approximately ten hours of online coursework.
- Participants complete a business plan.
- Each young farmer saves $500.
- The program matches the young farmer’s savings with $1,000.

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The young farmer participant will then have that $1,500 to use for an asset purchase.

The program will provide structured financial literacy training, business management coaching and mentoring from qualified farm business management specialists and established farmers. Participants will develop basic skills necessary to leverage their equity, manage capital productively and be a successful entrepreneur.

Applications and more information can be found on the program’s website at http://www.uvm.edu/extension/youth/vtyouthagida/. The deadline for applications is May 15, with the program kicking off in June. Please email Program Coordinator Liz Kenton with questions: liz.kenton@uvm.edu.

Know your AAPs
We’re working on finalizing a new educational resource: the Vermont Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) Quiz. The AAPs are the minimum land stewardship and water quality protection standards that every farm operation is required by law to follow. They are not complicated. Our goal is to make learning the AAPs easy and fun. Test your own knowledge of the AAPs. The full 20-question AAPs Quiz and supplementary links and resources will be available at http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/

Here’s a sampling:

"True or False: Accepted Agricultural Practices include substantial additional investments in infrastructure or equipment designed to reduce surface and groundwater pollution." You got it! False! If you had answered “true,” you might have been thinking of current best management practices (BMPs), which require substantial investment. The AAPs, on the other hand, should not require a farmer to make substantial additional investments beyond what is normal for day-to-day operations.

Why are the AAPs important? Farmers can become better land and water quality stewards by knowing the AAPs and using them as guidelines. Farming practices stay in compliance with the law. Service providers can do a better job assisting in planning activities when using the AAPs as guidelines. For more information about the Vermont AAPs quiz, contact Ben Waterman at (802) 656-9142 or ben.waterman@uvm.edu.

“Global Food, Local Food” Book Published
"Global Food, Local Food," a 42-page guide to growing and cooking African and Asian crops in the Northeast, is hot off the press. Produced in partnership with the Association of Africans Living in Vermont New Farms for New Americans program, the project is the culmination of years of learning unique cultivation and culinary practices with resettled refugee and immigrant farmers and gardeners in the Burlington area.

The purpose of the guide is to help Northeast farmers and gardeners adapt important crops of world cultures into the local food system to be grown for market, home consumption or medicine.

The guide includes interesting facts, sources of seed, nutritional and medicinal uses, cultivation tips, harvest and (Continued on page 4)
post-harvest advice, and personal anecdotes for eight culturally important crops. The guide also contains seven recipes we compiled after visiting the kitchens of new American farmers and gardeners. We reveal their culinary secrets and traditions passed down through generations and across cultures. “Global Food, Local Food” is a treasure. We hope you will experiment with the featured crops, processing methods and recipes. Please tell us what you learn! The guide is available for free download at http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/.

Pastured Livestock & Water Quality in Vermont
We were grateful to Vermont Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Ross for attending the 2015 Grazing and Livestock Conference in January, and for his statement that, “Well-managed agricultural lands are one of the best ways to protect water quality.” Well-managed grazing is one of the simplest, most economical tools for providing high quality livestock feed as well as contributing to improved water quality, carbon sequestration and the retention and creation of soil. The beauty of this system is that it doesn’t require expensive tools, machinery, or structures. It does require good observation skills, taking the time to walk pastures, good fencing materials, a good water system, and flexibility. The Center’s Pasture Program provides research, education, and supports for our region’s farmers to convert to or improve upon grass-based systems for raising livestock. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of surveyed farmers who have received technical assistance from the Pasture Program in the last 10 years report improved environmental conditions; imagine what we could accomplish for Vermont’s soil and water quality if all livestock farmers were to incorporate grazing practices.

Safe Use of Sanitizer for Produce Growers
All produce growers take steps to assure the fruits, vegetables and berries leaving the farm are safe for consumers, and many use sanitizing products to reduce the microbial load on harvested items. Sanidate® is one brand name of a Peroxyacetic Acid (PAA) type of sanitizer commonly used by Vermont produce growers.

PAA is an effective sanitizer that’s approved for certified organic operations, and an environmentally safer choice than others. These leave no residue behind, and break down into oxygen, water, and acetic acid. But in commercial, concentrated form, PAA is highly corrosive and will burn eyes, nose hairs, skin and clothes. It if gets into your eyes you can be blinded.

If you’re using (or considering using) PAA on your farm, we want you to be safe! Follow these important steps for safety for you and for your farm’s workers:
• Vent the cap (or get a vented cap if it did not come with one) or the container will expand and leak!
• Buy a spigot for safe dispensing.
• Wear protective gear: glasses or goggles, gloves, long sleeved shirt, closed shoes, and pants or apron.
• Store safely: place container inside open plastic tub to contain drips and spills. Do not store near other chemicals.
• Only use and store in well ventilated areas.

We are finalizing a full, illustrated publication for safe use of PAA, and will have it available for free download at www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture very soon. Any reference to commercial products, trade names, or brand names is for information only, and no endorsement or approval is intended.

Sign Up for Swine
The Pasture Program was a recent recipient of a Working Lands Enterprise Grant focused on support and expansion of profitable, environmentally beneficial and well-managed swine production. This partnership with NOFA-VT will work on creating greater connection between existing experienced and new swine producers at all sizes and stages of growth; offering educational opportunities for producers to learn more about swine nutrition, health, housing, and value-added products; and developing further tools and options to help future expansion be successful. If you are a swine producer (or know someone who is) join the VTSWINE listserv at https://list.uvm.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=vtswine.
For 19 years, the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, the Vermont Beef Producers Association and the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture’s Pasture Program have explored conference themes in building community and ecological resilience, integrating natural systems and growing the local food movement. This year’s theme, and perhaps the most telling, “At the Junction of Livestock and the Environment” added to the decision-making discussion as the immense Lake Champlain watershed comes under pollution diet restrictions.

“Livestock are at the intersection of environmental issues, both positive and negative,” said Conference Coordinator Jennifer Colby of the Center for Sustainable Agriculture. “In this heightened arena, now is the time to have an honest dialogue between grass-based livestock farmers and public policy-makers who may not be aware of scientific data and practical farm conservation solutions. To help move this forward, we want to create shared learning opportunities between livestock and environmental management systems, always keeping a strong connection to long-term profitability.”

Special guest attendee, Vermont’s Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Ross, added, “Our number one priority is water quality. There is no question, we have problems in agriculture, lake communities, with impervious surfaces and streambank erosion all the while being exacerbated by intense rainfall events and climate change issues. Solutions in agriculture come from well-managed land. This is our goal and why this grazing conference is so vitally important to the conversation of good stewardship.”

The 300 folks who participated in this year’s forum were treated to Friday intensive workshops on the next levels of swine production aptly coined, “From Breeding to Eating.” The comprehensive track featured the University of Missouri Extension’s State Swine Breeding expert, Tim Safranski; UVM Extension’s Joe Emenheiser; author and gourmet celebrity butcher, Cole Ward and Vermont’s own Ben Nottermann and Zach Bartlett. Another track focused on silvopasture (the practice of combining forestry and grazing of domesticated animals in a mutually beneficial way) in the Northeast by popular speakers, Joe Orefice of Paul Smith’s College and Brett Chedzoy with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Also featured was the first water quality panel to address how livestock, riparian areas and policy fit together. Higher levels of management and common sense approaches were the theme of this lively plenary that was moderated by Molly Lambert, retired State Director of USDA Rural Development. Panelists included Dwight Dotterer, former dairy farmer and Chief of Nutrient Management systems for Maryland Department of Agriculture; Curt Dell, USDA-Agricultural Research Service Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit; Marli Rupe, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation; and John Roberts, former dairy farmer and current Small Farm Water Quality Inspector, Vermont Agency of Agriculture.
To add a twist to this, the actual snow load on a roof is often less than the load on the ground. This is because winter winds can blow some of the snow off of the building (however, if snow drifts occur on the roof, loads can significantly increase). Typically, as roof slope increases, the snow load decreases because snow tends to slide off instead of build up. Wetter, 'sticky', snow can resist this blowing and shedding and tends to remain in place much longer.

There are a number of reasons why roofs can fail. If the actual snow load on the roof is greater than the design load, then there is a danger of collapse. Improper building design and faulty construction can also result in failure, as can older buildings that have been subjected to decay or damage. In addition, buildings are typically only designed to hold the design loads for about a month before structural fatigue weakens the roof and collapse can occur.

If you believe there is too much snow on your building, the best thing to do is to remove it. Shovels, snow rakes, and brooms work well for this. This can be a potentially dangerous task and should only be performed using the utmost caution and safety procedures. There is often ice under the snow, and heed should be given to any overhead electrical lines. For larger buildings, properly trained individuals should be consulted as removing the snow in an unbalanced manner can result in unequal point loads and increased risk of structural failure.

Wood buildings often exhibit certain signs before they fail. Sounds such as creaking, cracking, and moaning of building components can indicate potential failure. Any bowing of structural members should also be viewed as a warning sign. If you notice any of these signs, safely and quickly evacuate the building of animals and livestock.

A local meteorologist reported that he had never seen snow like this in almost thirty years of being in Vermont. Let’s hope that this is not a sign of things to come, but be prepared nonetheless. ☽
PRACTICAL PRODUCE SAFETY

Produce Safety: It Matters for all Vermont Produce Growers

Guest Contributor Christa Alexander, Farmer, & President of the Vermont Vegetable & Berry Growers Assn. (VVBGA)

I’m a farmer, so thoughts about food safety are not new to me. Even before I joined the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association board and started hearing all about the new federal Food Safety and Modernization Act, food safety was first in my mind as my farm grew over the last decade.

As an operator of a diversified farm producing both livestock and vegetables, my husband and farm crew and I implement food safety practices every day. We have a written farm produce safety plan and employee training protocol that covers everything from harvest techniques to worker hygiene, to wash and pack standards to ensure our products are safe for our customers. This is information and practices we have put together on our own with guidance from UVM Extension and others over the past several years.

Food safety is important to us: we do it because we should and because it’s good business practice, but it’s something we’re fairly quiet about to the public. But all that is going to change. The public is going to be hearing more and more about the new federal regulations governing food safety on farms. And whether or not a farm is large enough to be forced to comply with regulations, all farmers should want to talk with our customers about what we’re doing for on-farm food safety. Wholesale buyers are going to demand documentation of food safety practices (if they don’t already) no matter the size of the farm. CSA members are going to start inquiring, and farmer’s market customers are going to want to know how we wash your greens, how we fertilize our fields, and more. Food safety is not something just large farms have to worry about!

As food safety on farms comes to the front of consumer concerns we need to be ready. Over the next few years, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and its large-farm food safety credentials (such as Harmonized GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices) will drive fresh produce market standards and public perception. But the majority of Vermont’s smaller and more diversified farms will be exempt from FSMA, and thus lack credentials in a changing market place.

UVM Extension and the VVBGA are now acting in front of this market change, developing a cost-effective produce safety accreditation (PSA) program to provide these needed credentials for Vermont’s diversified produce farms. This program aims to maintain the credibility of Vermont-scale farming and reduce food safety risks, while increasing farm efficiency and produce quality.

My advice to my fellow farmers is this: Maybe you’re building a new cooler – do it with food safety in mind. Maybe you’re adding livestock to your farm operation – do it with food safety in mind. Maybe you’re hiring employees for the first time – train them with food safety in mind. UVM Extension and VVBGA are here to help you make practical food safety choices for your farm operation. The produce safety practices promoted by the PSA are common sense and science-based. The process is not overly cumbersome, though it does require some thought and planning. Learn more about it and do it now before your growing season ramps up and pushes it to the back burner. You and your customers will be happy you did.

This piece is adapted from a blog post Christa contributed to the Vermont GAPs and Produce Safety blog at http://blog.uvm.edu/gnickers/2015/02/09/foodsafety-government-and-your-farm/.

Photo courtesy Jericho Settlers Farm. An example of food safety practice implementation on Jericho Settlers Farm: A new barn built with airflow and solarization in mind to help with sanitization and drying of wash and pack areas.