

Social Sustainability on the Farm

Looking Beyond Profitability to Build a Truly Sustainable Farm Business

2013 National Farm Viability Farm Tour Workshop

About the Tour:



While profitability remains the focus of any business planning process, it is important to integrate other personal, family, community and farm goals to maintain a truly sustainable business. On this tour, sponsored by the Vermont SARE program, we will visit three farms--Elmer Farm (a diversified horticulture operation), Scholten Family Farm (an organic dairy), and Lincoln Peak Vineyard (a winery using the farm's cold-climate grapes). We will explore how entrepreneurship, farm succession, quality of life, social integration, and equity issues play major roles in the ongoing viability of these and other family farms. Our farm hosts will introduce their farm businesses and discuss how these aspects have impacted their operations.

Farm Descriptions:

Elmer Farm

Elmer Farm is a conserved 90 acre farm located in East Middlebury. Spencer and Jennifer Blackwell, along with their children, Ida and Angus, grow 25 acres of mixed vegetables, grains, and dry beans. Elmer Farm grows more than thirty five different vegetables, an array of flowers and culinary herbs. This includes over 200 different varieties including many heirlooms. The Blackwell's, who started farming at Burlington's Intervale, purchased their farm in 2006 through the Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program, a project that provides qualified farmers with access to conserved farmland. At this stop, we'll hear more about the Blackwell's experience with that program, their connection to community and vice versa, and the balance of work and family. <http://elmerfarm.com/>



Scholten Family Farm

Scholten Family Farm is a farmstead cheese-making operation in Weybridge, just on the outskirts of Middlebury. Roger and Patricia Scholten (and their four children, Leanna, Abigail, Rachel and Daniel) have been farming in Addison County for 18+ years. They lease their 400 acre certified organic farm from Middlebury College and raise Dutch Belt cattle. They transitioned the farm to organic in 2007 and, upon studying cheese-making from UVM's Vermont Institute of Artisan Cheese, Patty started making cheese which is aged at the Cellars at Jasper Hill. Last year, Roger and Patty started to partner with daughter, Leanna, and her husband, Mike, and they now milk about 120 cows. The mission statement of the Scholten Family Farm is "to produce and provide from our family farm, the highest quality products for our consumers in an environmentally and socially responsible way for future generations." At this stop, we'll hear about the farm's transition to organic production and cheese-making; connections to the community including working with Middlebury College and on-field research projects with UVM Extension; and ideas for preparing for the next generation of farmers in their family. www.scholtenfamilyfarm.com



Lincoln Peak Vineyard

After 30 years of growing apples and pick-your-own strawberries on the farm, the Granstrom family—Chris, Micaela, and daughter Sara—began planting cold-hardy grapevines in 2001. Lincoln Peak Vineyard, located in New Haven, is now a vineyard and nursery; vines now cover 12 acres of the farm and the strawberry stand has been converted to a winery.



In addition to producing red, white, and rosé wines from grapes grown on the farm, Lincoln Peak Vineyard hosts daily tastings as well as tours and community events like art showings, harvest parties, and music concerts. At this stop, we will hear more about how these community events connect to the farm, the transition of the farm to its current enterprises, and successes and challenges of the multi-generational family farm. www.lincolnpeakvineyard.com

Trillium Hill Farm

We will also use Lincoln Peak Vineyard as a gathering place to hear from Sam Smith of the Intervale Center and his work with farmers on goal setting as part of his farm viability work. Joining him will be Sara Donegan of Trillium Hill Farm, located in Hinesburg. Sara and her husband James (and daughter Ruby) grow vegetables, raise beef cattle, and operate a farm stand on land that has been in James' family for about eight generations. Together, Sam and Sara will talk about how goal-centered and financial decision-making played roles in the mix of enterprises on the farm today. Sam will also talk his farm viability work, using farm goals as a filter for expanding and/or starting new enterprises as part of the financial planning process. www.trilliumhillfarm.net



Workshop Leaders:

- Deb Heleba, Vermont SARE Coordinator, University of Vermont Extension, debra.heleba@uvm.edu, www.nesare.org/State-Programs/Vermont
- Sam Smith, Farm Business Specialist, Intervale Center, sam@intervale.org, www.intervale.org