

# UVM Extension Programming and Social Sustainability Executive Summary

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*The mission of University of Vermont Extension is to improve the quality of life of Vermonters...*  
– UVM Extension

## Overview

- Households and community stability are critical to the long-term sustainability of Vermont's agriculture.
- It is increasingly important for Extension to document all of the benefits resulting from our work. Our impact on local communities and households are often undervalued.
- Most sustainability research and outreach successfully integrates economic and environmental dimensions in defining the scope of a sustainable future, but social dimensions are vaguely defined and not well-integrated into research and outreach.

## What is Social Sustainability?

Social sustainability is the persistence of household and community social structures that, over time, support the long term stability of families and communities. Characteristics of a socially sustainable society include those that facilitate livelihood, health and satisfaction, and satisfy material, educational, individual and community needs, personal safety, and self-determination.

## Five Themes to Guide Social Sustainability Assessment

This project has adopted the following five themes of social sustainability for the Vermont model of social sustainability, which satisfy both criteria of meaningfulness and measurability:

- Quality of Life – social and environmental qualities that impact individuals
- Social Integration – alignment of values, interaction, and sense of place in a community
- Farm Succession – successful transfer of the farm to the next generation
- Entrepreneurship – vision, innovativeness and adaptability
- Equity – access to the benefits of society such as information, expertise and support, capital

## Background and Objectives

This project was initiated as part of the Vermont state SARE project, “Social Sustainability on the Farm,” and is designed to facilitate the UVM Extension mission “to improve the quality of life of Vermonters.” Extension would benefit from a consistent set of metrics to evaluate sustainability that integrates household and community as integral components of a sustainable and prosperous agriculture. Indicators of social sustainability should be measurable and meaningful to Vermonters and Extension.

## Next Steps

- Solicit Extension participation in identifying and drafting measures of social sustainability.
- Incorporate *meaningful* and *measurable* household and community indicators into Extension programming.