



University of Vermont

Extension

Center for
Sustainable Agriculture

2023 Annual Report

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STORIES & HIGHLIGHTS

The mission of the UVM Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture is to advance food and farming systems that are economically and environmentally resilient, accessible to all, and support healthy people and communities in Vermont and beyond. We cultivate partnerships, support innovative research and practices, provide education and technical assistance, and inform policy to benefit Vermont communities.

Our work is necessarily inclusive and we are a learning organization. Our efforts are informed by research and data, and the overlapping spheres of experiences, relationships, and situations which make up the landscape of Vermont agriculture and food systems. Vermonters have always understood that we are here together and connected by practical necessity as much as by geography and culture.

This acknowledgement of connection continues to inform and guide us. We know that our ability to meet our mission happens only because of the support and generosity of our community, and that our reach and impact are directly tied to the relationships we build and the trust that Vermont's farmers and food producers place in us.

In response, our work continues to evolve strategically. In 2023, the Center expanded and pivoted toward a multi-tiered approach that intentionally provides services across a spectrum of points of engagement. This work ultimately belongs to our funders, donors, partners, producers, and communities as much as it does to any of us. With your help, we supported new and veteran farmers and food producers in adopting techniques, incorporating technologies, and securing funding that helped to improve their work, lives, communities, and bottom lines.

Keep reading to see some of the ways your donations build healthy, sustainable, and accessible communities and food systems across Vermont. 🌱



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Supporting Water Quality and Pasture Health with On-Farm Technical Assistance

Amber Reed

Pasture-based farmers look for assistance for a variety of reasons. Some need guidance identifying and securing funding for necessary improvements. Others may be looking for support in meeting organic standards or returning to compliance with state agencies. Still other farms may be dealing with animal health concerns, declining productivity, or degrading pasture and feed quality. In these situations, an on-farm visit to connect directly and draw up a specific and tailored plan is often the best and most helpful course of action.

An experienced farmer herself, Amber is a key member of the Center's Grazing and Livestock team, providing on-farm funding expertise and direct technical assistance to farmers who pasture their animals. As a grazing specialist, Amber spends her days working one-on-one with individual farmers. She develops grazing systems, pasture plans and maps, and designs water systems and fencing to keep grazing animals healthy, happy, productive, and out of streams and other water bodies.

To provide support to farmers, Amber partners regularly with Vermont's conservation districts, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and a number of associated partners such as Fish and Wildlife game wardens, the Audubon Society, and the Vermont Sheep and Goat Association. Her work also intersects with other UVM scientists, specialists, and Center staff as they collaborate to support farmers in accessing the knowledge and financial support which are necessary to find realistic solutions and make sustainable improvements to their operations.



visits



unique farms



of visits resulted in grants or grant applications to improve sustainability and water quality or to incorporate best practices



Incubating Innovation through Field-Based Education

Kelsie Meehan

To illustrate the transformative power of shared knowledge, consider the origin story of another beloved Extension program: 4-H. The intent of land-grant universities was to build agricultural expertise and encourage innovation among the citizenry. However, in the early 1900s, scientists found that farmers were reluctant to adopt unfamiliar crops or livestock breeds, or implement new and untested practices. Frustrated researchers decided to partner with public schools and the 4-H program was born. Young people were given access to new seeds, breeds, techniques, and ideas. Youth became community incubators and brought their learning and successes to their own families and communities. Farmers readily adopted innovations once they could see the results with their own eyes.

Partnering with the Center for Sustainable Agriculture and supporting innovation at this critical time in history has the same power. We understand that when we share practices and technologies — with real-world results. The reach and impact are magnified as they are shared neighbor-to-neighbor and handed down through generations. Innovation and knowledge, adopted and shared, are critical tools for co-creating safer and healthier communities and indeed in shaping a more sustainable, equitable and resilient future.

A major focus of our 2023 efforts was on field-based and farmer-based education workshops and programs. We facilitate programming across a spectrum of areas, from agroforestry best practices to nutrition education. One excellent example of these efforts is Kelsie's work with the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center (DBIC).

Kelsie hosted or co-hosted 12 public, on-farm education programs and demonstrations in 2023 in partnership with the DBIC, USDA, and Vermont's Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. Programs covered topics as wide-ranging as small ruminant health, benefits of bedded pack, and pasture management to support bees, bugs, and beneficials. These opportunities typically included Center staff and partners, and also farmers who fielded questions from their peers and from service providers. Farmers shared their own experiences about both their successes and struggles.

Much like the 4-H members in the early 1900s, these farmer-partners serve as early adopters and innovators, working alongside Center staff to bring new solutions to Vermont through collaboration and education.



22

Hosted on-farm education programs and workshops

18

unique locations

519

participants reached

73

hands-on education hours to participants



Leveraging Partnerships & Strategic Research to Grow Resilient Regional Food Systems

Andrew May

We understand that building vital and resilient food systems requires the consideration of many interconnected aspects beyond food production. A healthy system is only as good as the accessibility it provides; the clean water and healthy soils, communities, and environments it supports; and the social justice and economic viability it enables. Our daily work must encompass not only teaching but active, continuous, and rigorous learning.

Moving intentionally into collaborative food systems research was an emerging direction for the Center in 2023, and it is a development we are thrilled to grow into the future. With Andrew May's transition from the role of pasture coordinator to full-time food systems researcher, we are building capacity to enable expanded work in this area. We aim to become collaborative leaders in applied food systems research. We leverage our expertise to effectively implement relevant, science-based research and grant-writing, and cross-disciplinary relationship-building. We identify opportunities for new research and inform future policy direction and systemic needs.

With your philanthropic support, and in partnership with UVM's Food Systems Research Center, we are delving into innovative community-centered research work such as the ASPIRES (Alternative Systems Pathways for Interconnected Resilience, Equity and Sustainability) initiative and actively seeking out new opportunities to build resilient food systems in Vermont and across the region.



PARTNER & FARMER PERSPECTIVES

“Amber and Kelsie have been super helpful for our farm to navigate the programs offered by the state. They really want to see farmers excel at the work they are doing. They have been a pleasure to work with, always looking out for our best interest and helping us plug into programs that can be a little difficult to understand or access for a busy farmer!”

—Sebastian Von Trapp, Von Trapp Farmstead

“UVM Extension is a vital partner of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, providing educational opportunities as well as direct technical assistance to farms across Vermont. The team at the Center for Sustainable Agriculture have been instrumental partners in promoting grazing management and conservation on Vermont Farms. Amber Reed and Kelsie Meehan Braam’s expert technical knowledge of farm practices and comprehension of available funding programs, paired with their genuine connection to farmers results in effective conservation and farm management plans that meet the needs of the farm and promote environmental stewardship.”

—Mary Montour, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator

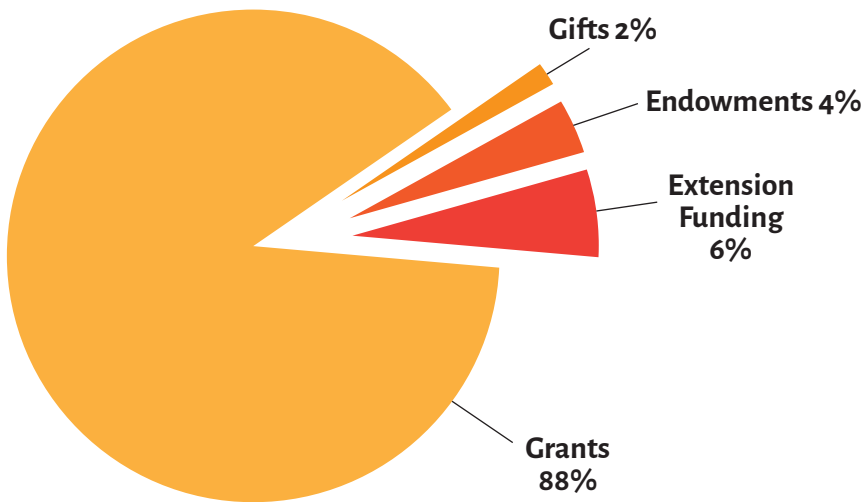


“In the summer of 2022, I applied for a grant that would support improving my water consumption for livestock and to support better rotational grazing practices. The help I received from Amber Reed, through her position at UVM, was invaluable. When I received the grant, the water system was a new endeavor for me and I needed direction and guidance. Amber was knowledgeable about these systems because she had designed one for herself. She knew all of the components that were required and even made a video for instructions on how to install it. There was a lot of communication that went back-and-forth and I could not have succeeded in this project without the support of UVM and knowledgeable and caring individuals who support best practices in farming.”

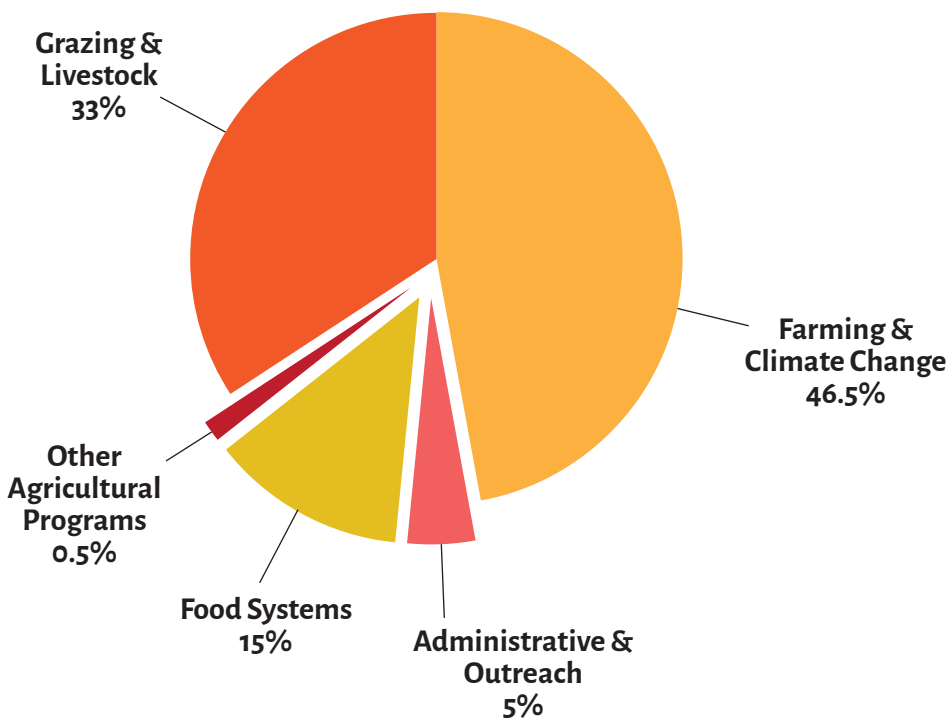
—Katherine Knox, Hands and Heart Farm



2023 FUNDING (\$914,373.00)



2023 EXPENDITURES (\$909,438.00)





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www.uvm.edu/extension/sustainableagriculture