



University of Vermont  
**INSTITUTE FOR  
AGROECOLOGY**

# Rooted in Vision, Growing Into Action:

## Advancing Regional Food System Transformation



August 12-14 | Knoll Farm, Waitsfield VT | Workshop Proceedings

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## Why We Report After We Gather

On August 12 and 13, 2025, New England food system advocates, researchers, practitioners, and others from throughout the food system and beyond convened at Knoll Farm in the Mad River valley of Vermont for “Rooted in Vision, Growing into Action: Advancing Regional Food System Transformation”—a gathering organized by the UVM Institute for Agroecology (IFA). Nestled in the foothills of the Green Mountains, Knoll Farm—rich with blueberry bushes and grazing sheep—served as a container for conversations, connection, meaning making, and knowledge sharing. With the warm presence of the sun, participants sought refuge under the shelter of towering trees and porch overhangs, which were themselves living testaments to the land’s history—the very trees Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow had planted upon becoming stewards of this land. For two days, we stepped away from the rhythms of daily life to immerse ourselves in a place-based experience with the strength of shared place, schedule, and routine as a backdrop. While the convening was fleeting with our return to respective homes, the threads of connections were pulled to all our corners of the region.

This report serves as an archive, detailed documentation, collection of stories, and reflective analysis of our time together during the Gathering. It is intended as a resource for all participants to revisit and reflect upon while gleaning meaning and galvanizing action, grounded by the experiences we shared. Through the pages, we hope to offer a space for deeper engagement with the conversations and exchanges that unfolded over the two days. As you read, consider the following:

- Which of the new insights or ideas that emerged in August resonate with you?
- What reminders of purpose, vision, and connection do you find in the words, stories, and reflections shared here?
- What relationships from the gathering would you like to nurture further?
- What threads of work, organizing, or action inspire you and how might they be advanced?

This report was authored by Bella Brodsky with the assistance of the UVM Institute for Agroecology.

**Front Cover:** Participants gather on the knoll for a closing circle during the IFA [Regional Food Systems Gathering](#) at Knoll Farm in Waitsfield, Vermont, August 2025. **Page 3, Left:** Participants discuss farmland access on day two on the hill near the pond during the gathering. **Page 3, Center:** Participants listen to Molly Anderson on day one inside the barn during the gathering. **Page 3, Right:** Participants chat in between sessions on day two at the gazebo during the gathering. Photos by the IFA.



## Why We Gather and Convene



One of the [six action strategies](#) of the **Institute for Agroecology (IFA)** is **convening**. Why does the IFA see the act of gathering as vitally important? Because convening:

1. Deepens relationships across the region amongst folks working to transform food systems.
2. Brings together a community of people navigating similar challenges, sharing expertise in niche areas, and appreciating the nuance and context of each other's work.
3. Offers a vessel for care—through food, space, facilitation, and organizing—so that energy can be directed toward cultivating relationships and deep work.
4. Offers sustenance to power continued work.
5. Provides a pause from everyday routine, offering space for reflection and critical thought. Stepping back from work allows room to breathe—and the clarity to see from new angles and fresh perspectives.

We recognize that it's not possible to bring everyone together due to time, resources, and other realities. There were gaps in who could be present, and much work that can and will continue to be done to bridge those gaps in the future (with great suggestions and ideas gleaned from the feedback survey and continued conversations had after the Gathering). We hope that those who joined—bringing with them years of relationships nurtured across communities large and small—will carry these conversations back to the people they know and care for, just as they brought the wisdom of those relationships into this space. We all know this work moves forward at the speed of trust, and we hope this gathering and this report will serve as one of those steps toward continuing to cultivate that trust into the future.



## Building on a Decade of Regional Food Systems Work

The 2025 gathering at Knoll Farm represents the second convening in what is an evolving tradition of regional collaboration and learning. Building on the momentum from our inaugural 2024 workshop, [\*“Weaving Just and Sustainable Food Futures,”\*](#) this second gathering was undertaken with the goal of expanding our collective understanding of transformative food systems work.

Both convenings directly build on over a decade of collaborative regional food systems work led by [Food Solutions New England](#) (FSNE), which held food summits in each of the six New England states (2011-2017), produced the visionary document, [“A New England Food Vision”](#) (2014), and spent over a decade fostering a network and cross-sector collaboration across the region. They also reflect the IFA’s [three foundational pillars](#)—Transforming Food System for Just Sustainability; Participatory, Transdisciplinary and Action Research; Center Equity—recognizing both the critical importance of this work and the opportunity to deepen it through our institutional commitment to agroecology, participatory action research, and food sovereignty principles.

The planning for the 2025 convening took place against a backdrop of escalating political and ecological crises, with ongoing climate impacts and rising authoritarianism creating a sense of urgency to move from dialogue to action. This context demanded a gathering that could hold both the necessity of continued visioning to resist the narrowing of imagination that crisis can produce, as well as addressing the need for tangible steps to be identified and taken. The theme, *“Rooted in Vision, Growing into Action”*, emerged to honor both imperatives. The convening was structured around the understanding that transformative action must be continuously rooted in vision, while authentic visioning must be grounded in concrete possibilities for change.



**Above:** Participants gather for the “What’s the Use of Food Imaginaries?” session led by Molly Anderson on day one near the outdoor kitchen of Knoll Farm. Photo by the IFA.

## **Analysis: The Role of Visioning**

There is deep pain and grief as we strive to understand, heal, and repair the injustice woven into the very fabric of our food system—wounds that have existed for generations. There is tension and urgency as we do this work within a country still shaped by ongoing systems of extraction and inequity. It becomes even more difficult under a dominant system of governance that often seeks to actively undermine progress—dismantling years of hard-won efforts toward food justice, removing support for frontline communities, and reinforcing policies that deepen the very inequities we aim to transform. While we attend to current needs for the survival of our communities, farmers, farm workers, fishers, and planet, there is rarely time to explore alternative futures. Yet if we don't imagine the future, how will we know what we're striving for? How do we engage meaningfully in building a just, nourishing food system if we can't envision what it looks like? Colonialist, capitalist, and dystopian narratives have narrowed our collective imagination, making it difficult to picture foodways rooted in justice and care. Visions of the future are often painted in pessimistic and doom-laden hues which demoralize and demobilize communities. While we name and confront the deep dysfunction, harm, and exploitation within today's food system, we must also make space for possibility: for regeneration, for justice, for abundance, for resilience, for joy, for diversity. It's a courageous and radical act to envision.

## **What Emerged from the Gathering**

After the Gathering, organizers from the IFA collected notes from sessions and group discussions and set to organizing and analyzing them. The themes and narratives that emerged from this work are categorized into Goals and Visions, Obstacles, and Solutions. (You can find session and group discussion summaries in the coming pages.)

As with any visionary articulation, this report is meant to serve as guidance for our collective work and communications, not a rigid, mandatory structure to follow. We recognize that the institutional and organizational systems in which we work create both opportunities and constraints—affording us different platforms, resources, and relationships while also establishing boundaries around how we can engage. Rather than seeing these limitations as obstacles, we understand them as defining complementary roles in our shared transformation work. Some of us will advance this work through institutional channels, others through grassroots organizing, and still others through research, education, or community building; all approaches are necessary and valuable pieces of the whole. We hope that by weaving these outlined threads together, we can push them further while supporting one another in continuing and building upon work we're already pursuing. That is the beauty of gathering in this way: all our work feeds into the bigger picture of a new food future. We understand that our paths toward these visions and solutions will be guided both by the trust established in our communities and by the possibilities and limits of the systems in which we operate.

## Goals and Visions of a New England Food Future

Much of the discussion during our time at Knoll Farm centered around visions of what a just and equitable food future should look like. Below are five visions that capture what participants described as motivating their current or future work.

### **Release scarcity mentality and welcome abundance**

Envision and work toward a region, nation, and world where dominant systems are built to nurture, sustain, and uplift community, rather than divide.

### **Repair Harm**

Recognize both deliberate and inadvertent harms perpetuated by dominant systems, coupled with commitment to transformative healing, through pathways of collective liberation, reparations, justice, and sovereignty.

### **Shift Power**

Advance the public good by fostering structures in which communities are meaningfully represented, equitably resourced, and in control of shaping their collective future.

### **Celebrate joy, deliciousness, and rich food culture**

Continuously uplift and champion all that is alive, wonderful, and present in the New England food system and beyond.

### **Live in right relationship with all beings (humans, animals, fungi, plants, and places)**

Practice anti-racist, anti-colonial, and ecological frameworks that honor and restore our inherent interdependence and interconnectedness.



## Obstacles

We know the problems are huge and seemingly intractable: corporate control, working within or outside the dominant systems, runaway oligarchic government, systemic racism, and more. This gathering revealed the significant efforts already happening, as well as the potential for further work to overcome these barriers. Without discounting the severity of the identified issues, we intentionally chose to not list them in detail so as to not perpetuate their narratives or pit one cascading issue against another. Every one of us is navigating a whole host of obstacles at any given time, and we hope that we can continue working together to tackle them.

## Solutions

What is a vision without tangible steps towards realization? Below you will find a summary of ideas that folks throughout the Gathering are already working on and/or want to pursue further. As mentioned above, we want to recognize that pursuing these solutions is going to look different for everyone depending on their positionality, capacity, access to resources, and more. We hope these solutions will act as a guide for the work you're already pursuing while encouraging you to think deeper about the relationships you can foster to move that work and additional efforts forward, together.



**Top Left:** Participants drawing in the barn during the food systems visioning session on day one. **Top Right:** Katie Horner, Anisah Madden, and Ike Leslie demonstrate a fishbowl exercise during the “Building Solidarities, Crafting Liberatory Relationships” workshop on day two. **Bottom Left:** Sam Cave shares her thoughts during the “What’s the Use of Food Imaginaries?” session led by Molly Anderson on day one. **Bottom Right:** Participants build a timeline during the “Reflecting on past regional network building efforts for food systems change” session with Anisah Madden and Karen Nordstrom. Photos by the IFA.

## Solutions (cont.)

### Mobilizing your resources\* towards a Just Transition

*\*Money, time, community relationships, knowledge, land, and others*

Each of us holds access to some form of resources, and it is our shared responsibility to leverage them for a future grounded in community, justice, and sustainability. This requires inclusive, equitable, and adaptive systems—ones that repair historical damage but also envision new ways of being in right relationship with one another and the earth. This work is greater than any one person; it is the sum of many interconnected efforts. We must trust that others are tending their part of the whole, just as we tend ours, as we move together towards a just transition and collective transformation.

We saw this show up in the **farmland access conversation facilitated by Alex Redfield and Katie Horner** where a participant asked: “Are there ways to concentrate resources to support work already happening in this area including BIPOC led groups?” In discussions on cooperative models during **agroforestry with Ernesto Mendez and Matthew Burke**, there was mention of using equipment sharing co-ops to lower barriers to resources. Extending beyond physical resources, the **solidarity track with Anisah Madden and Katie Horner** talked about the power of “being in real relationship with one another and considering everyone as all beloved community,” a valuable approach to center. Knowledge also emerges in the context of historical information and patterns, an important resource to uplift, during the **Reflecting on Past Regional Network Building Efforts for Food Systems Change with Anisah Madden and Karen Nordstrom**. A participant said, “If you ignore history, you’re doomed to repeat it. Without institutional stability, you’ll lose some knowledge of what’s been tried or explored and what could be used to move things forward.”

### Co-creating learning pathways that serve as catalysts for systemic transformation

Education is more than the transmission of information—it is a critical tool to foster inner transformation and collective action. A holistic approach to education embraces complexity, failure, and emotional regulation, which challenges traditional models centered on mastery and external achievement. Education expands participation, drawing more people into shared efforts towards change. It helps cultivate a collective understanding of how the world works: a shared narrative. It begins with recognizing that knowledge is co-created.

In the **education track with Emily Hoyler**, she mentioned “the need to move away from the dominant mastery and proficiency system in education towards undoing and incorporating nervous systems and bodies.” In the same conversation, participants talked about the role of education for knowledge transfer and multigenerational/multicultural learning, as well as inner direction and navigation of uncertain times. In the context of agroforestry knowledge-sharing, participants talked about education being an “untapped resource”. There are many obstacles, such as financial barriers to the adoption of agroforestry practices, and education can serve as a means of lowering barriers and increasing implementation.

## Strengthen community ownership in shaping decisions and inspire partners to commit to community-rooted solutions

It is essential to center communities in public-interest decision-making and foster participatory governance within and outside of organizational structures. A place-based approach ensures that solutions are grounded in the unique histories, ecologies, and social dynamics of each community. Building trust, ensuring accessibility, and investing in long-term relationships are important steps in the process.

Grounding food systems work in place is critical, ensuring that it is relevant, contextual, and supportive of the community it impacts. Matthew Burke alluded to this in the agroforestry track: “We must recognize the regionality of knowledge. We know a lot about different kinds of systems in different places and contexts and need to be aware of applicability.” **During the imaginaries track with Molly Anderson**, participants talked about the “need for democratic governance and inclusive participation in food systems” in the food system futures they are imagining. This thread continued into the **farmland access conversation facilitated by Alex Redfield and Katie Horner** when thinking through solutions to stopping corporate control. One potential answer? Community governance mechanisms.

## Balance the needs between emotional resilience and action

Systemic transformation requires not only structural change but also the inner strength to grapple with difficult emotions like grief, fear, and anxiety. Emotional resilience allows us to continue showing up while also honoring the need for space and boundaries. It’s a delicate balance: for some, this work is deeply tied to personal identity and purpose; for others, it may simply be a job; for many, it’s somewhere in the middle. What matters is the presence of care through support networks, emotional literacy, and open, destigmatized conversations that affirm this experience. Resilience doesn’t require denying emotions, but it does require learning to carry them with care.

When participants were **imagining future food systems with Molly Anderson**, they discussed the importance of processing grieving lost futures in the food system or beyond. The conversation also led to themes of generative conflict. These ideas of regeneration and growth through relationships were again echoed in the **Respectful Confrontation track with Kelly Asato and Curtis Ogden**. “We’re not encouraged to bring emotion to certain contexts” — yet doing so can lead to meaningful relationship building, transformation, and powerful mobilization.



## Next Steps: How the IFA is Using This Report

This gathering exemplifies the IFA's approach to co-producing and mobilizing knowledge to support just transformations in food systems. From our perspective, rather than conducting traditional academic research, the convening itself serves as a methodology—bringing together diverse practitioners, researchers, and organizers to collectively analyze challenges and develop strategies for systemic change. But we know that this gathering and report are only as good as actions that come from it, and we want to lead by example and share what next steps the IFA is taking after publication.

As reflected in the sessions of the gathering, the IFA is working across multiple disciplines, including agroforestry, pedagogy and learning, and regional governance. We will be using this report and the emerging goals and solutions to analyze our own work in the region, asking the questions:

- How does our current work align with these goals and solutions, and where should we pivot or expand?
- What additional work should we undertake, and how will we build the networks needed to accomplish it?
- How can we support those who are already advancing these goals and solutions?

In addition to considering all the informative and crucial feedback, with an aim of making any subsequent gatherings more accessible and robust, we will also be dedicating time and resources, where available, to support emerging ideas that are directly or tangentially related to the Gathering. Is there something that you've been chewing on? Working on? Want support? Reach out and let's chat!

## Conclusion

As we mentioned above, this report serves as an archive, detailed documentation, collection of stories, and reflective analysis of our time together during the Gathering. It is intended as a resource for all participants to revisit and reflect upon while gleaning meaning and galvanizing action, grounded by the experiences we shared. We know that we are all working across different communities and with different strategies, and we hope this can aid in fostering continued collaboration to strengthen that work and build out new pathways toward a brighter future. We leave you with these questions in hopes that they will inspire more next steps.

- Reflection and Connection: What insights from this gathering resonate most strongly with you and which relationships do you want to nurture further?
- Action and Implementation: What specific threads of work or organizing from the discussions inspire you, and how will you move them forward in your context?

Below you will find summaries of the sessions to further help with your processing. We are also including contact information for everyone who attended that Gathering and didn't opt out. Please reach out, continue building networks, and we look forward to working with you in the future.



**Above:** The full group of participants pose for a photo on the Knoll Farm barn deck on day one of the gathering with the Northfield mountain range in the background. Photo by the IFA.

## Session Breakdown

### Envisioning Food System Futures

with Bella Brodsky

This session centered the idea that visioning is a muscle to exercise and strengthen, and when we do it collectively, it can help us understand each other's work more intimately. How can we weave visions and strengthen our works? How can we embrace plural visions and hold complexity? Exploring possible futures, both individually and together, helps guide the work we do on the ground today. How does the way I plant seeds now shape the future I imagine?

In the opening visioning workshop, we started by exploring what holds back our imagination—what subconscious barriers do we carry that limit our ability to envision bold, radical futures? Ideas emerged, such as disconnection from who we are and our responsibilities as stewards of land and social cohesion, corporate dominance, scarcity, extraction, and individualism. Together, we named these constraints, sharing these on a screen as a collective reflection. As a symbolic act of release, we each wrote down one of our constraints on a slip of paper and placed it in a basket, setting the intention to let it go for the next hour to freely imagine.

With that sense of openness, we turned to zines (small DIY booklets) as a means of reflecting and articulating the themes that shape our visions of the future. Participants wrote down words including *just*, *equitable*, *compassionate*, *regenerative*, *healing*, *abundance*, *celebratory*, *autonomy*, *democracy*, *delicious*, *alive*, *queer*, *communal*, and *public interest*. From there, we shifted into a sensory-based meditation, closing our eyes and listening to a guided story that invited us to fully enter our own imagined food systems, noticing the smells, tastes, sounds, and sights of these possible worlds. To bring those personal visions into conversation with one another, we took sticky notes and wrote what had been relinquished in the food system, what had been regenerated, and the signs of resilience. Coming together collectively, we gathered around large pieces of paper to create art that represented visions of food system futures.



**Left:** Karen Nordstrom places a sticky note on an easel which reads “what are signs of regeneration” during the visioning exercise. **Center:** Lindsey Berk reads a zine during the visioning exercise. **Right:** Group drawing begins during the visioning exercise. Photos by the IFA.



## What's The Use of Food Imaginaries?

*with Molly Anderson*

Objectives were to first consider how imaginaries become reality (e.g., Project 2025 being implemented now in the US) and second, to consider the parameters of the imaginary food system that we want to participate in. A few participants described their own food systems; almost everyone in the group depends, to some extent, on the industrialized food system for essentials, although people varied in how much local, environmentally-sound and fair food they purchased and consumed. Several people in our group have large gardens or live on farms, and grow a good proportion of their diets.

Next, we discussed six social imaginaries produced by the Great Transitions Initiative in Boston: market forces, policy reforms, breakdown, fortress world, eco-communalism and what they call a “new paradigm”, which incorporates so-called “green technology”. We talked about what is missing from these visions, as a segue to what we need in our own preferred imaginary food system. We wrote down these attributes as the first step in developing core values for a new vision of New England agriculture. There was no demand that everyone must agree to all of these values, and some are undoubtedly more important than others to individuals in our group, but all will contribute to the discussion.

## Reflecting on past regional network building efforts for food systems change

*with Anisah Madden and Karen Nordstrom*

In this session, participants explored how regional collaborations and collective power have been built over the last 20 years. The group first shared reflections on the importance of looking back: to honor the work of our ancestors and elders, to glean lessons learned and carry them forward, and to remember all that we have collectively accomplished.

Participants then co-created a timeline spanning from 1985 to the present. The timeline exercise revealed concentrated periods of regional organizing activity around 2010-2015 and again in the 2020s. As participants spoke about the different ‘accomplishments’ marked on the timeline, it was clear that these successes represented moments in an ongoing historical trajectory, built on decades of organizing efforts whose contours have morphed and evolved over the years. We then divided into three breakout groups to explore different examples in more depth:

The **racial equity group** considered the efforts of Food Solutions New England, one of the first white-led networks to catalyze conversations about racial justice in predominantly white food systems organizations. Another participant spoke about the impact of school food leadership programs for BIPOC-youth in Connecticut: today, some program alumni co-direct formerly white-led groups.

However, participants noted an ongoing challenge: white-led organizations continue to take up the majority of space in food systems work, while BIPOC-led groups are developing their own priorities in parallel. While affinity groups and ‘own’ spaces that are safe and welcoming are crucial, this trend highlighted the ongoing work that is needed—particularly by those in positions of structural power—to prioritize solidarity building work through listening to those who are systematically marginalized and working to redistribute resources more equitably.

The **Farm-to-Institution group** discussed elements of successful cross-sector collaboration by “bringing together intersectionality” across education, agriculture, and public health. Successful collaboration arose from diverse funding strategies, peer-to-peer mentorship, and strong relationships that provided “resiliency” when funding disappeared, and strategic framing around health outcomes.

The **open-source technology group** explored “technology sovereignty” through community-centered design (in contrast to “extractive” corporate approaches), evolving toward questions about “decentralized tech governance and knowledge commons.” Participants closed by sharing lessons learned from elders, ranging from “how to make herbal medicine” to “how to always save a place for joy.”

*If anyone who attended this session would like to have a follow up conversation or share further reflections, please contact Anisah and/or Karen: [anisah.madden@uvm.edu](mailto:anisah.madden@uvm.edu) / [karen.nordstrom@uvm.edu](mailto:karen.nordstrom@uvm.edu)*

## Agroforestry

**with Ernesto Méndez and Matthew Burke**

The agroforestry track allowed us to gain an understanding of participants’ knowledge and experience in agroforestry, and to begin to articulate a vision for agroforestry in the northeast region. We further reflected on the role of IFA and potential collaborators in moving toward this vision.

The first session centered on current understandings and practices of agroforestry, with attention to research and education. Participants had backgrounds in research, education, extension, urban and rural agriculture, and non-profit sectors. The willingness to share openly despite differences in familiarity with agroforestry was encouraging. Participants started the first session by visualizing and describing their perspectives on agroforestry, including diverse farm and forest practices. Participants also positioned these practices within current challenges and social contexts. We approached agroforestry from the perspective of agroecology and the pillars of the IFA, including co-creation of knowledge, equity, and systems transformation. As a group, we discussed common definitions of agroforestry and their limitations, while sharing our own work and experience with agroforestry and related practices. We raised questions and issues around a variety of topics including funding and resources; equity; tools and equipment; cooperative production; animal agroforestry; leading examples of practice and knowledge sharing; relationships to permaculture; food forests and forestry; and the unique conditions of implementation for this region. We closed by asking participants what they believed we would need to collectively address to advance agroforestry in this region and created the word cloud on page 15.

**Prompt: “In three words, please tell us what key needs we need to address to advance agroforestry in the region.”**



During the second day’s session, we combined the remaining two topics to foster generative discussions in small groups. These sessions on agroforestry explored both the historical positioning of tree-based agriculture in the Northeast and possibilities for its future. By examining the presence and cultural roles of tree crops and agroforestry across the precolonial, colonial, and modern landscapes of the Northeast, participants explored ways to strengthen understanding and implementation of agroforestry today and into the future.

We began by narrating the historical context of the United State’s Northeast temperate agroforestry, including its deep pre-colonial roots and the challenges of the region’s colonial legacy into the present. We emphasized Indigenous and traditional practices and their ongoing relevance and dynamism, noting that colonial settlers encountered a managed forest. Historically, the Northeast functioned as a managed food forest with widespread Indigenous use, stewardship, and cultivation of nut-bearing trees as a staple food source. The abundant hickory, chestnut, oak, and walnut trees in northeastern forests were casualties of the efforts to impose the familiar colonial pattern of “fields and fencerows” to the landscape, encouraged by settler-colonial laws that granted landownership to “improved” (read: cleared) land. The cultural practices of incorporating these tree fruits and nuts into diets — and the trees themselves — are still missing from our region. We acknowledged the need to turn toward regeneration and healing of relationships through agroforestry.



Referencing drawings from the last session, we worked on articulating future visions of agroforestry as a guiding practice for agriculture, forestry, and land stewardship in the region. Participants pointed to major drivers—urbanization, dietary shifts, biodiversity loss, and climate change—that will shape the future of New England’s fields and forests. A recurring theme was the regionality and temporality of knowledge: systems that thrive in one climate may not translate to another; systems that thrived in a particular moment may need to evolve for current and future application. Important points of discussion included the following: dietary changes, nut production, the need for demonstration and support of farms in practice, plant materials and seed supplies, technology, knowledge production and training, social organization, and relationships to Indigenous communities.

We reflected on the social needs and the network of actors necessary to achieve this vision. Together we brainstormed a diverse set of organizations, sectors, and social agents that could be brought together and mobilized for temperate agroforestry, keeping in mind the role of the IFA in centering education and research. Participants also highlighted ongoing experimentation on farms and opportunities to support that work with research. Of particular note was the need to build relationships with, and offer solidarity and resources to, Indigenous partners: to support their efforts to build/share/expand on the deep expertise that Indigenous colleagues hold. Questions of scale, viability, and cultural perception remain central: what would it take for agroforestry to become a dominant production system? How can motivations and resources be deepened to sustain long-term investment? Who can we build relationships with and what can we offer? Next steps could involve further developing this vision and elaborating this set of actors, while continuing to work with, learn from, and follow the lead of growing and committed group of regional practitioners.

These discussions grounded participants in an agroecological approach to agroforestry, provided context for the historical and contemporary context of agroforestry in the region, and opened a vital exploration of existing and emerging practices, futures visions, and possible pathways to their realization in this northeastern region.

*Questions and reflections are welcome: [matthew.burke@uvm.edu](mailto:matthew.burke@uvm.edu); [ernesto.mendez@uvm.edu](mailto:ernesto.mendez@uvm.edu) . Thanks to Alex Redfield for insightful contributions during the sessions and to this summary.*

## **Respectful Confrontation**

**with Kelly Asato and Curtis Ogden**

This session centered on cultivating embodied awareness, respectful confrontation, and relational resilience through a blend of somatic, emotional, and communicative practices. The Respectful Confrontation Method encourages moving from “conflict” to “confrontation” as an intentional way of addressing tension. This method requires players to acknowledge unmet needs, emotions, and personal histories while practicing assertiveness over aggressiveness. Assertiveness involves clarity, confidence, and grounded self-expression without overpowering others. Central to the work is self-respect: dropping from head to heart, rooting in worthiness, and practicing self-regulation.

We explored inner landscapes: how past shaping, body signals, and internalized beliefs influence current behavior. This approach is relational and honors spiritual and ancestral connections. We explored the foundation of resilient power in grounding, focus, strength, and flexibility. This work asks people to be accountable for how we all show up, and to co-create spaces of healing and understanding.

### **Cookin' up Farmland Access: Developing Recipes to Resource Values-Centric Land Projects** *with Alex Redfield and Katie Horner*

Following up on a session on farmland access at the 2024 IFA Regional Gathering, this discussion was designed to support participants in reverse engineering successful land access projects to inform future collective strategizing and resource development. Recognizing that transformative land access work is dependent on context and circumstance, and that “transformative” efforts can differ widely; participants used several case studies to identify what assets, relationships, barriers, and solutions were applicable across regional examples. (Some efforts could focus on bringing new people into traditional pathways of developing generational wealth, others could focus on dismantling those traditional pathways)

Small group sessions investigated new farmland access projects in Vermont, New York, and Maine, with models that emphasized farmer cooperatives, community land trusts, institutional partners, and/or individual land transfers. Across these case studies, participants noted the value of interpersonal skills in facilitating the development of effective and impactful land access opportunities. Beyond the more commonly identified barriers to transforming the land tenure paradigm (access to capital, financing models, market viability for working lands-based enterprises, etc.), the discussion noted the importance of skills related to conflict resolution, interpersonal relationships, decision-making protocols, and governance to ensure projects have the best chance for success over time.

Land access projects are inherently tied to specific people or places. The discussion also explored the potential for a regional conversation on directing more resources and building support to strengthen the underlying capacity for these efforts to succeed on a larger scale.

*If anyone who attended this session would like to have a follow up conversation or share further reflections, please contact Alex and/or Katie at [alex@wildlandsandwoodlands.org](mailto:alex@wildlandsandwoodlands.org) / [catherine.horner@uvm.edu](mailto:catherine.horner@uvm.edu)*

### **Building Solidarities, Crafting Liberatory Relationships** *with Anisah Madden and Katie Horner*

This session explored how researchers, food systems professionals, grassroots organizers and others are already building and could build solidarity with each other to strengthen collective power for change. We opened the session by asking “what does solidarity mean to you?”

We heard that the meanings, motivations, and practices of solidarity vary widely, and depend on contextual and relational power dynamics across race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, geography, and historical and contemporary experiences of oppression.

A key theme that emerged was reflexivity: being able and willing to listen to those on the frontlines and critically self-reflect on our practices and how we show up for those most impacted by oppressive systems. Accountability around our role in reproducing power dynamics, taking risks when others cannot, and getting out of the way when needed were highlighted. One participant described solidarity as “a felt sense of safety”. Participants emphasized the importance of taking practical actions to redistribute power and resources, noting the greater responsibility of those in leadership positions to attend to this work.

While participants recognized the need to embrace discomfort and messiness as part of authentic relationship-building, the facilitation team for this session later recognized the necessity of trauma-informed approaches to solidarity building, as this work brings up difficult topics that impact people differently. Finally, participants reflected that it was important to collectively learn from historical examples of how solidarity has been enacted, where it was lacking, the need to make repairs for past harms, and the need to continue to work towards more caring and equitable relations.

*If anyone who attended this session would like to have a follow up conversation or share further reflections, please contact Anisah and/or Katie: [anisah.madden@uvm.edu](mailto:anisah.madden@uvm.edu) / [catherine.horner@uvm.edu](mailto:catherine.horner@uvm.edu)*

## **Learning and Education at the End of a World**

**with Emily Hoyer**

In this conversation, we explored how education can serve as a transformative response (a portal) to the challenges of societal collapse and uncertainty. We questioned traditional models that prioritize mastery and perfection, and instead emphasized the importance of fostering emotional regulation, resilience, and a tolerance for complexity. Through stories of experiential learning—especially in food systems and land-based education—we recognized the healing potential of hands-on engagement and the need to reconnect body and mind in learning environments. We discussed the concept of a care economy, where contributions are valued on capacity and context rather than constant productivity. This led to reflections on how cultural norms around perfectionism and external validation can hinder growth, and how failure should be normalized as a vital part of learning.

Throughout the session, we asked: what is education for in times of collapse? The answers pointed toward creating spaces for inner transformation, lifelong learning, and collective care. We acknowledged the grief, fear, and anxiety that weigh on us and considered how education can help us hold these feelings without being overwhelmed.

*If anyone who attended this session would like to have a follow up conversation or share further reflections, please contact Emily: [emily.hoyer@uvm.edu](mailto:emily.hoyer@uvm.edu)*





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