



The University of Vermont



SCHMIDT FAMILY FOUNDATION

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CONTACTS:

UVM: Adam White

adam.white@uvm.edu

802-557-8430

Schmidt: Danielle Simpson

danielle@11thhourproject.org

(415) 595-3753

University of Vermont Receives \$1 million from Schmidt Family Foundation to Launch New Institute for Agroecology

New academic institute and center for action and learning will advance healthier, sustainable and just food systems globally

BURLINGTON, Vt. and SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — The University of Vermont (UVM) today launched its [Institute for Agroecology](#) dedicated to advancing just, sustainable food systems, and supported by a \$1 million grant from the Schmidt Family Foundation's 11th Hour Project.

The UVM Institute for Agroecology, approved by the UVM Board of Trustees earlier this year, will receive base funds from the university to begin its work immediately. It will build on more than a decade of work in agroecology at UVM, pursuing research, collaboration and movement building around the world.

“Our food system is in crisis,” said Ernesto Méndez, a UVM professor of agroecology, and faculty director for the Institute for Agroecology. “Business as usual is exploiting both human and natural resources—without making progress to end hunger and while deepening inequity. Agroecology is essential to confront the climate crisis, expand access to healthy food and to activate the power of farmers and community members who know their land and their food better than anyone else.”

Early priorities for the Institute will include convening national and global agroecology summits, advancing agroecology through communications and shared learning, conducting participatory research alongside farmers, farmworkers and other researchers and developing a leadership program for emerging young agroecologists. Specific research programs will focus on agroecology in the South American Andes and Africa, a process funded by the McKnight foundation's [Global Collaboration for Resilient Food Systems \(CRFS\)](#) program, as well as agroecology in Vermont and across the United States. The Institute will also offer programs for graduate and undergraduate students.

“The University of Vermont is proudly supporting this flagship Institute that will bring together leading researchers, students, farmers, and communities to work together in innovative research and education to support both at home and around the world. The connection between the local and the global is a vital contribution of the Institute to UVM's offering,” said Kirk Dombrowski, UVM's vice president for research. “The Institute for Agroecology complements the new Food Systems Research Center, focused on studying sustainable local food systems, and the Gund Institute for Environment, who will collaborate to grow agroecological knowledge across disciplines.”

The Institute will build on existing partnerships across grassroots movements and academic institutions to work collectively toward food sovereignty and healthier, more equitable food systems—all while incorporating Indigenous knowledge and local community wisdom.

Agroecology is gaining support worldwide—a rebuttal to decades of large-scale industrial agriculture practices focused on increasing yield no matter the environmental costs or the challenges posed to farmer livelihoods and public health and nutrition. Agribusiness has long driven and funded the research agenda in North American academia, and particularly at land grant universities.

The Institute for Agroecology seeks to restore and strengthen the relationship between food producers, civil society and academia, by uplifting local and Indigenous knowledge and approaching research holistically and collaboratively. The new center will take a systems approach to engage with these problems and challenge the status quo by centering equity, participation and social transformation in all of its work.

“Our global, industrialized food system has deepened inequities, and has disconnected humans from the source of our sustenance—leaving us with little sense of reciprocity to the Earth or respect for Indigenous knowledge that has sustained humans for tens of thousands of years” said Wendy Schmidt, president and co-founder of the Schmidt Family Foundation. “We are pleased to support the Institute for Agroecology as it works with our shared partners around the world to expand knowledge and repair the relationship between people and planet.”

The Schmidt Family Foundation, through its grantmaking program [11th Hour Project](#), has invested in agroecology for more than a decade, helping to establish the Berkeley Food Institute and Florida A&M’s Lola Hampton-Frank Pinder Center for Agroecology. The 11th Hour Project also supports the work of Coventry University’s Center for Agroecology, Water and Resilience in the United Kingdom—an important partner of the UVM Institute for Agroecology.

For more information, see the attached overview or visit
<https://www.uvm.edu/instituteforagroecology>

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About UVM

Since 1791, the University of Vermont has worked to move humankind forward. UVM’s strengths align with the most pressing needs of our time: the health of our societies and the health of our environment. Our size—large enough to offer a breadth of ideas, resources, and opportunities, yet intimate enough to enable close faculty-student mentorship across all levels of study—allows us to pursue these interconnected issues through cross-disciplinary research and collaboration. Providing an unparalleled educational experience for our students, and ensuring their success, are at the core of what we do. As one of the nation’s first land grant universities, UVM advances Vermont and the broader society through the discovery and application of new knowledge.

UVM is derived from the Latin Universitas Viridis Montis (in English, University of the Green Mountains).

About the Schmidt Family Foundation and the 11th Hour Project

Established in 2006 by Eric and Wendy Schmidt, the [Schmidt Family Foundation](#) works to restore a balanced relationship between people and planet. Through grantmaking and investments, the foundation partners with communities around the world in working for renewable energy, resilient food systems, healthy oceans and the protection of human rights. The foundation makes grants and impact investments through two programs: [11th Hour Project](#) and [Schmidt Marine Technology Partners](#).