

Taste of Place



Food and Place in Vermont



What is Taste of Place?

Vermont's take on *terroir*

The Taste of Place Initiative aims to:

- Recognize products that are of high quality and unique to Vermont
- Create producer-driven tools and standards to promote and market place-based products
- Find new ways to promote and preserve Vermont's working landscape
- Tell the story of Vermont's food traditions

Methods:

- 2008 conference with experts from France, Quebec, and Vermont
- Research visits to Quebec and France
- Technical sessions with producers in Hardwick
- Market research studies
- In depth research on geographical designation systems, food and culinary history, and the Seal of Quality
- Producer working sessions



Working Sessions

October 1 – Burlington

- 57 participants, including 20 producers
- Presentations and discussions focused on process and opportunities for place-based foods and designation systems
- Maple, cheese, wine, apple, and meat producers met in industry-specific groups

November 18 – Randolph Center

- 32 participants, including 18 producers
- Group discussion on where producers see cooperation taking place and research, tools, and policy needs
- Discussion focused on consistent quality, the importance of quality raw products, and self-regulation



The Discussion

Major themes

- Quality, standards and knowhow.
- Need for solidarity at the producer association level
- Producers' ability to get quality raw products
- Self-regulation vs. legislation
- Role of certification, and monitoring
- Status and value of Seal of Quality
- Economic value of designations
- Need for more research



Industry Specific Issues

Maple: Strong product; maple is already inherently connected to the Vermont brand; use of existing maple purity laws and standards that define and protect maple; past and current discussions of a certification program

Cheese: Safety and quality of raw product are key; diversity is a source of strength for cheese industry; establishing relationships between fluid milk producers and artisan cheese makers

Wine: Whether to focus on wine from Vermont-grown grapes vs. wine produced in Vermont; not enough raw product; attention to other fruit wines; grape growing as ag diversification tool; lack of technical assistance and research for VT growers and wineries; AVA designation



Industry Specific Issues

Apple: Focus on in-state sales or export; fresh product or value-added; questions about economic advantage to a designation

Meat: Already certification/inspection/labeling standards (USDA, COOL); meat industry is very diversified; opportunities for whey or apple-fed or pasture raised pork

“The strength of Vermont is a diversity of products and quality. We are ahead of other states.”

“Standards are happening at an individual level.”

“Local producer associations need to be supported by their members.”



What We Heard

Research action items

- Perform economic analyses for place-based foods
- Define quality for different products
- Engage the University of Vermont
- Investigate cross-border collaboration

Tools and infrastructure action items

- Create a producer-driven (not top-down) designation system
- Coordinate support for producer associations
- Facilitate the creation of self-assessment tools
- Provide state assistance with inspections to certify best management practices
- Increase technical assistance for producers



Producer Action

Producer discussions and action

- Maple association merger and continued discussion of best management practices and certification
- Vermont Grape and Wine Council Taste of Place Committee
- Cheese makers discussions on self-regulation and standards to insure quality and safety
- Apple producers plan to bring up topic at February meeting

Recommended next step:

- **Strategic facilitation for producer groups to develop shared standards and priorities for moving forward**



Supporting Research

Seal of Quality

- Recent research into Vermont's Seal of Quality and an investigation of state labeling and marketing efforts around the country illustrated that geographic location is the selling point and Vermont Origins Rule already regulates labeling. Recommendations from this research included:
 - Look outside government model for funding and to use funds for promotion, not enforcement
 - Target marketing efforts at point of sale displays as opposed to on product labels
 - Allow producers to create standards
 - Coordinate promotional efforts at the state level, especially the departments of Tourism and Marketing and Economic, Housing and Community Development and the Agency of Agriculture, Food and markets.



Supporting Research

Market research

- Recent studies suggest that a place-based designation system for Vermont food products should originate from a genuine, sincere effort to inform consumers of the beneficial attributes of specific Vermont-based food products.
- Consumers in Vermont and the Philadelphia, Boston, and New York metro areas clearly expressed that:
 - Cheese and maple syrup are best suited for place-based labeling, followed by apples, apple cider, maple candy, and milk.
 - A labeling system should be run by an independent, third-party certification committee and a group of farmers and producers – not a state government agency.
 - A place-based designation system would not negatively impact the Vermont brand, as long as the connection to Vermont is noted.

Market Research (continued)

Consumers indicated that they are willing to pay an average premium of up to 52% in Vermont and 59.6% in the metro areas for food products that have two or more of the characteristics that are important to them as a consumer.

- In Vermont, attributes that indicate that a food product was grown on a family farm and that farmer and farm workers get a fair wage commanded the highest premium, followed by the identification of a product as being “made in Vermont.”
- In the metro areas, the attributes that garnered the highest premiums were: made using environmentally friendly methods, fair wages for farmers and farm workers, and the place-based concept of a food having unique flavors that reflect the region where it was made.
- In the metro areas, the “made in Vermont” attribute on its own resulted in the second lowest premium



Complementary Research

Tools and strategies

- Missouri Regional Cuisines Project
- California's regional marketing groups
- New Jersey state label (Jersey Fresh, Jersey Grown, Jersey Seafood)
- Concord Grape Belt
- Oregon and Oklahoma - nonagricultural state agencies regulate state label
- Wisconsin "Healthy Grown"
- American Origin Products (Napa Wine, Idaho Potato, Kona Coffee, Vidalia Onion)

State sponsored programs

- Goals range from marketing campaigns to promoting culture to increasing production and consumption of local products.
- As of 2009, 64% of state-sponsored programs did not have minimum requirements for a product to claim the state's label.

* see full report for more examples *

Expert Recommendations

Elizabeth Barham, University of Arkansas

- Focus on maple and cheese and use those designations to reinforce other sectors
- Provide support/assistance to producer groups to develop and articulate standards
- Look at collaborating with other northeast states and Quebec to create a globally significant region

Expert Recommendations

Council on Reserved Designations and Value-Added Claims (CARTV), Quebec, Canada

- Designation system should include:
 - 1) Recognition of designations including a public process
 - 2) Certification of products using the designations
 - 3) Market surveillance of products and enforcement
- Two approaches:
 - 1) State regulation that establishes the legal framework for a designation system and ensures that this system can process various types of applications for designations from the review stage to the final decision stage.
 - 2) Case-by-case review of individual requests for designation by the Agency of Agriculture.

Quality and Standards

Producer group roles

- For any of these efforts to be effective, there must be a consistent message based on the concept of quality.
- Quality must be defined in relation to:
 - Characteristics of the raw and finished products
 - How the food is produced
 - The land where it is produced
 - The livelihoods of the people who produce it

These standards need to be developed by the producer groups, but they can't do it alone...

Recommendation

Based on a careful analysis of the outcomes of the producer working sessions, the expert recommendations, and extensive research into tools and strategies used for place-based designation systems around the world, it is clear that the next step is **strategic facilitation for producer groups to develop shared standards and priorities for moving forward.**

“Let the industry groups come up with their own standards that will continue to perpetuate the quality.” – *Jacques Couture*

“The state can’t oversee quality, but can encourage economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of the working landscape.”

– *Amy Trubek*

Strategic Facilitation for Producer Groups

The Agency of Agriculture should dedicate VT Agricultural Innovation Center Funding to support producer-driven strategic planning. Each industry group would undergo a structured, facilitated process, including:

- SWOT analysis for industry
- Development of specific goals (i.e. association labeling, supply chain development, certification, communications strategies)
- Definition of standards of quality for raw and finished products, how food is produced, land base, and livelihoods
- Articulation of quality, uniqueness, and knowhow so producers can leverage new and growing markets
- Identification of strategies and tactics to reach goals
- Establishment of measureable outcomes
- Implementation/ pilot testing
- Short-term evaluation and secondary needs assessment



Strategic Facilitation for Producer Groups

- This support should take the form of facilitation for producer associations (or producer working groups). The priority industries are **maple**, **cheese**, and **fruit wines**. Each of these industries are at different levels of development and will require customized approaches.
- Implementation of the strategies and tactics will be up to the producer groups after the facilitation process with follow-up from the Agency of Agriculture.

Strategic Facilitation for Producer Groups

Suggested timeline

- This chart details the schedule of activities with meeting points for each producer group marked by ✓

	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.
Identify TOP facilitator	█						
Project start: Outreach to producer groups, set meeting schedule		█					
SWOT analysis	█	█	█ ✓	█			
Develop goals			█ ✓				
Define standards		█	█	█ ✓			
Articulate standards				█			
Identify strategies and set measurable outcomes		█	█	█	█ ✓		
Implement tactics/pilot testing						█	
Evaluation and secondary needs assessment						█	█ ✓



Thank You

Working Session Attendees

74 producers, researchers, legislators, visiting experts, and others working in the agricultural sector

Working Session Advisory Committee

- **Koi Boynton**, Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- **Paul Costello**, Vermont Council on Rural Development
- **Jacques Couture**, Couture's Maple Shop and dairy farm, Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association
- **Mateo Kehler**, Jasper Hill Farm and Cellars at Jasper Hill
- **Will Stevens**, Golden Russet Farm, Vermont House Representative
- **Amy Trubek**, University of Vermont
- **Elizabeth Barham**, University of Arkansas
- **Denis Paul Bouffard & Baudouin Niogret**, Council on Reserved Designations and Value-Added Claims (CARTV), Quebec, Canada

... and **Roger Allbee**

Taste of Place Report

www.foodsystemresearch.net/taste-of-place

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