

## Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

### Final Report

#### PROJECT TITLE

*Growing a Community that Feeds Itself*

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

The *Growing a Community that Feeds Itself* project is a collaboration between the Center for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), UVM Extension and the Saint Johnsbury Area Local Food Alliance (St J ALFA).

Health and food security are issues of great concern in Caledonia County, Vermont. According to the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, 1 in 5 children in this County are food insecure and 50% or more households qualify for free or reduced-price meals with the percentage of households in poverty exceeding the state average at 11.8%. This project was particularly timely given these levels of food insecurity and the recent draconian cuts to food stamps. Education related to food choice and nutrition can help alleviate food security as well as diet-related diseases. Hands on lessons which encourage garden-scale food production can help increase the effectiveness of nutrition education goals while creating consumer demand for local, fresh food. The important aim of this project was two part; one that education focusing on fresh vegetables, specifically fresh and dried beans, will increase low income Vermonters ability to access underused sources for healthy food, and two that this local food demand will create new opportunities for Vermont farmers to diversify their crops through bean production.

The **three objectives**, which the project team achieved, were to:

1. Provide low income residents of Caledonia County educational opportunities related to nutritious and healthy food choices, growing, cooking, and food preparation.
2. Explore the connection between garden scale bean production and participant knowledge of healthy food choices.
3. Provide an opportunity for experienced bean growers in the Northeast Kingdom to present their work to both workshop participants and other professional growers who do not yet grow dry beans.

#### PROJECT APPROACH AND ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Over the project period from 2012 to 2013, seven workshops were held focused on home-scale food production, healthy eating and cooking with residents of the Northeast Kingdom. Four workshops were organized in the first year and three in the second year. (See photos in Appendix).

The workshops combined discussion and working activities, starting with group discussion, then working in the garden, followed up with tastings, new recipes using beans, and recipe sharing. Lessons were adapted from the "Growing Connections" curriculum.

During the fall 2013, the program of three consecutive community workshops was held at Lyndon Town School in October and November where families attended to learn how to cook healthy meals with beans for their families. The workshops were targeted to food insecure populations. As an incentive to attend all three workshops, families, who were able to make this commitment, received a food package including bean ingredients for at least three meals, recipes, and a crockpot at the end of the course program. 10 families were rewarded with this incentive. When surveyed, participants' comments were very positive; "It was fun to experience the hands on harvest of the beans. And the recipes were great!" and "It was fun to cook with the young people." (See photo in Appendix)

Two events were held for commercial growers at the central location of Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier. (See flier in Appendix.). In 2012, farmers shared their experiences and methods in growing beans and food purchasers

shared their experiences in sourcing beans, and in 2013 the workshop covered growing beans at different scales and focused on getting beans to market from growing to processing requirements to selling at different volumes. The speakers were Jack Lazor of Butterworks Farm in Westfield, VT; Joseph Bossen III, owner and manager of Vermont BeanCrafters based in Moretown, VT, and Lynda Primm, technical advisor at NOFA. Jack Lazor has been growing dry beans for local and regional markets since 1995. Joseph Bossen uses locally and regionally sourced dry beans in his vegetarian products. Lynda Prim has experience in organic farming and growing and processing heirloom varieties.

□ Significant contributions and role of project partners in the project.

The primary project partners were the Center for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), UVM Extension and St J ALFA. Rachel Schattman and Suzy Hodgson represented CSA and UVM Extension, while Heather Burt represented St J ALFA. Rachel and then Suzy were responsible for project team coordination, project management, and hosting the growers' events.

Heather Burt was responsible for coordinating the workshops, and her significant contributions were adapting the curriculum to meet local community needs, selecting the relevant sites, recruiting and incentivizing participants, and teaching the workshops so that participants achieved the key learning outcomes of growing and eating healthy foods with beans to improve their food security. In addition to Heather Burt, collaborators on the workshops included Elizabeth Kenton from UVM Extension, Emily Keith from Gilman Housing, and Janet St. Onge, a teacher at the LEARN school in Lyndon. The workshops were held at the North Church in St. Johnsbury and at Lyndon Town School (LTS) for both LTS students and community members. LTS is a high poverty school with over 75% students qualifying for free and reduced lunches. The workshops were delivered with the help of Kingdom Community Services in Saint Johnsbury, the South Church, Gilman Housing Site in Saint Johnsbury, LEARN (Lyndon Educational Alternative Resources Network) School in Lyndon, and at the St J ALFA community farm in Saint Johnsbury.

□ **Goals and Outcomes**

Target	Goals and Outcomes
<p>1. Up to 33 low-income Saint Johnsbury residents per year (<b>64</b> total over 2 years) will be enrolled in workshops. These participants will be equipped with the skills to grow, purchase, and prepare local, fresh, and healthy dry beans. In the long term, this will positively impact the level of food insecurity and diet related diseases in Caledonia County.</p>	<p>The target of residents reached was exceeded by 30%. Over the two-year project period, <b>83</b> participants were enrolled in seven workshops. These workshops met the learning outcomes of equipping participants with skills to grow and cook healthy bean recipes. It is more difficult to measure the long term impact of food insecurity in Caledonia County, but feedback from the education and the enjoyment of healthy affordable eating indicates that these workshops will help increase food security.</p>
<p>2. Up to <b>15</b> farmers that do not currently grow dry beans will attend workshops given by an experienced local commercial bean grower. The workshops will cover best growing practices, barriers and opportunities for growing dry beans in Vermont.</p>	<p>This farmer target was exceeded by at least 100%. Altogether, <b>61</b> farmers and growers attended the two workshops. About half the attendees grew dry beans at a home or commercial scale and the remainder were interested in starting to grow beans, and/or finding out about processing requirements for different bean varieties and markets.</p>
<p>3. Increasing access of low-income Caledonia County residents access to healthy food</p>	<p>St. J Alpha Community Farm harvested approximately <b>1,200 pounds</b> of food from its garden including about 300 lbs of fresh and dry beans in 2013</p>

Outcomes and goals achieved beyond those set at the start of the project included multiple community events and an additional commercial growers meeting to discuss shared needs and cooperative arrangements for exchanging information in the future.

The community planting events were held at Lyndon Town School and at the North Church. Heather Burt estimates that 10,000 hours of people power went into the garden as volunteer work including St. J Academy volunteering 1000 hours this past season. This volunteer work included planning, planting, weeding, harvesting, and putting the garden to bed.

## BENEFICIARIES

Groups	Benefits
Farmers and growers	Better understanding of growing & processing requirements for dry beans
Farmers and growers	New contacts for sharing best practice and experience
St. Johnsbury, NEK low-income residents	Improved food security - Gardening skills for growing own home and new cooking skills, recipes, and cooking equipment
St. Johnsbury school age children	Life-long skills about growing food and healthy eating
St. Johnsbury Foodshelf	Locally grown food donations, stronger connection with community, improved food security
St. J Alpha Food Hub	Stronger links with school, residents, and community garden
St. J Academy students	Community service – garden work for community
Lyndon Town School, Lyndon	Healthy eating and improved knowledge of nutrition and diets
LEARN	Community gardening knowledge, skills, and capacity building

**Benchmark associated with Goal 1:** In Caledonia County, the proportion of households, which are food insecure exceeds the state average of 1 out of 8. According to Hunger Free Vermont, 1 in 4 children in Caledonia County are food insecure.

**Benchmark associated with Goal 2:** According to the United States Department of Agriculture 2007 Census, there were 7 farms in Vermont that grow grains, oilseeds, dry beans and/or dry peas. The publication of the 2012 USDA agricultural census is delayed and its release date has not yet been set. When it becomes available, the new number of Vermont commercial growers producing grains, oilseeds, dry beans and/or dry peas is likely to be a significantly greater number.

The 2013 commercial growers' event focused on the equipment and processing needs of scaling up production of dry beans and how different types of beans have different growing and processing requirements. Several future needs were identified including access to more efficient processing equipment, better exchange and sharing of market information, and the need for regionally adapted sources of bean seeds.

The participation in the workshops on food production and healthy eating was high, though it is difficult to measure the long-term impact. By designing a three-course program with a meal and cooking package incentive, Heather Burt was able to maintain strong participation throughout the workshops.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A transition in project staff meant that more time was needed to develop new working relationships for the project team in year two. Hence, a face-to-face planning meeting for project management, planning topics and approaches was held as soon as possible. The need for such meetings was also identified from the first year especially for the start of a new project team and any transition. With the challenges of growing beans at a community level, the project team decided to focus more of its community efforts on cooking with dry beans and enjoying the garden experience of growing beans without unrealistic expectations of producing high volumes.

The unexpected outcomes were both positive and negative. On the positive side, more participants, both farmers and residents were reached than originally anticipated. On the negative side, the experience of growing beans in 2012 was quite different than 2013 due to extreme weather events. Surprisingly, some new growers had better luck with

yields on a small scale than some more experienced farmers. The wide variation in yields over the project period underscored the importance of having conservative expectations of crop performance. At the community scale, one bean crop was decimated by deer, and at the commercial scale, several bean farmers had to abandon the bulk of their bean plantings due to saturated soils. These experiences at both the community and commercial scales reinforce the lesson that growing beans or any vegetables in Vermont is never a certainty and that selecting different varieties of beans with different growth behaviors can reduce risk and improve food security.

### □ Insights into lessons learned

1. Workshops tailored to meet the community's needs in **enjoying** cooking, preparing recipes, **and eating** tasty food were more effective in conveying information about nutrition and diet and ultimately should help strengthen a community which feeds itself (ie improve food security).
2. Face to face planning meetings between project partners are essential to both kick-off a new project as well to ensure milestones are met from one project year to the next.
3. Being part of the community and working closely with community partners who already have established relationships with target population e.g, the Department of Health's WIC program helps reach mutually-shared goals more quickly.
4. Incentivizing participants throughout a workshop program helps increase attendance and active participation. The hands-on cooking component is key to embedding learning outcomes about growing and preparing healthy food, that is, participants can learn a lot about growing but without some cooking ideas, the growing becomes less meaningful.

This project exceeded the specific quantitative targets set for participation. It is likely that this project helped improve food security. In Caledonia County, though the long-term impact is difficult to assess. The growers' events and following discussions with bean farmers showed a dynamic, growing demand for dry beans, but constrained supply of Vermont-grown dry beans. A number of barriers to further expanding the Vermont market for beans were identified including availability and efficiency of processing equipment, price variability in beans, and weather impacts. The summer of 2013 was not an easy season for growing beans with heavy June rains and saturated soils during planting and seed germination stages which limited yields. Despite these barriers, a significant result of this project was the continued enthusiasm of bean farmers to continue to work together and share information on growing, harvesting, processing, and selecting bean seeds so that they can increase their yields. Recent discussions with food cooperatives point to a growing demand for Vermont-grown beans and underscore the importance of this project in helping farmers share best practices to improve their dry bean yields in coming years and contribute to increased food security in Vermont.

### CONTACT PERSON

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**Appendix**

**Program at St. J Alpha community farm**



**Bean labyrinth planted at North Church**



# Getting Dry Beans to Market: *from growing to processing to selling*

Join us for an evening with  
Joe Bossen of Vermont Beancrafters  
&  
Lynda Prim of NOFA-VT

**April 15th, 6pm- 8pm**  
Kellogg-Hubbard Library  
135 Main St. Montpelier, Vermont

Please join us for a presentation about sourcing seeds, growing beans, and processing for different markets. Discussion to follow the presentation. Light refreshments will be provided. Joe Bossen uses locally and regionally grown dry beans for his bean products. Lynda Prim is fruit and vegetable technical advisor at NOFA-VT. This event is free and open to the public. Professional growers and potential bean purchasers are encouraged to attend.

To request a disability-related accommodation to participate in this program, please contact Cheryl Herrick, 802-656-5459 or [cheryl.herrick@uvm.edu](mailto:cheryl.herrick@uvm.edu), by April 9th for assistance.

Partial funding for this program was provided by the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

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**St. J ALFA**

St. Johnsbury Area Local Food Alliance

 VERMONT  
AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOODS & MARKETS



UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture

  
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION  
Cultivating Healthy Communities

Northeast Organic

  
Farming Association of Vermont

### Community Bean workshops



### Labyrinth at North church

AKS Garden Labyrinth (2014/2015 - 1200)  
Outer ring planted with bush beans  
purple, green and yellow  
Harvested 20 lbs of beans for the meal site  
neighbors harvested beans



### Meal Sites





