

Chart Notes

What is success? How will you know when you have achieved it?

- When my land reaches its full productive capability (bring back worn-out land, rehab abandoned/lesser value land).
- When I can keep up with my markets—expand capacity to meet market demand.
- When I can make more retail sales (not wholesale), which brings more money, more fun.
- When I can balance financial sustainability day-to-day with long-term goals. Keep up with inflation, increase production.
- When I can make a decent enough living farming to raise a family.
- When my farm can offer opportunity for the next generation.
- When I can get smaller, have more free time for myself & my family while making a living.
- When I can put up my own forage as opposed to buying it.
- When I can market all my products within a 1-hour drive of my farm.
- When I can expand my land base.
- When I can improve my quality of life while having less work and less pressure.
- When I can do more direct marketing.
- When there is less regulation associated with direct marketing.
- When changes in regulations can result in decreased costs to the consumer.
- When I can be financially self-sustainable.
- When I can achieve profitability and work less by increasing efficiency.
- When I can meet market demand.
- When I can improve my quality of life, get away from the farm occasionally.
- When we can complete a successful transition from one generation to the next.
- When I have a good balance of my time.
- When I can get the majority of my income (~80%) from my farm.
- When I can have a good relationship with my family members.
- When there is good health—both in the humans and the soil.
- When I am maintaining a diverse, healthy landscape that is interesting to work in.
- When I can develop partnerships, to be able to streamline (specialize) and expand to keep markets.
- When I can expand my land base (ownership) for long-term perennial crops.

What have been your successes and challenges as a new farmer?

Successes:

- Being in Vermont there are a lot of good resources: IC, NOFA, FVE, NRCS, FSA, Rural Vermont (wish there were policies for small farmers).
- Help with transition from older generation. Lots of help. Good support network.
- Farmers' markets.
- Conferences/educational opportunities.
- Networking with other farms helps—this is key. Help from Rich Wiswall with costs/business records.
- 2+2 scholarship key—graduated without any debt.
- FSA loans for beginning farmers, able to take more risk than VACC, Yankee Farm Credit.
- Knowing how to write a business plan.

- “Success is the residue of good planning.”
- Business planning and marketing through FVE.
- Networking with other farmers, farmer-to-farmer, having other farmers’ perspectives. Can we formalize those relationships more?
- Recently transitioned to both partners working full-time on the farm. Debt free. Off-farm employment to help pay for infrastructure. FVE—planning and two implementation grants. NRCS—cost shares, set-up cost.
- Young farmer network—farmer organized, now all farmers who want to learn something new.
- Trying to maximize value we can get out of all operations, stay small.
- Coming from nonfarming background, workshops, conferences, apprenticeships are helpful.
- Access to technical assistance has been a challenge, but really helpful when can get there.
- Change in attitude toward owning land—maybe don’t need to own land (or large plot).
- NRCS, EQIP, Agriculture Management Assistance. Farm site visits/phone/e-mail.
- Loyal customer base, but can’t meet demand—regulation, processing.

Challenges:

- Access to technical production information for medicinal herbs as a niche crop.
- LAND. Access, cost, competition from nonfarming, affluent buyers charging a lot per acre for farmer to hay.
- Access to viable, productive, affordable land.
- Marketing—finding time to market perishable crops, such as berries. Developing marketing skills.
- Labor to help with marketing (farmers’ markets, restaurants).
- Competing with larger farmers—maybe pool resources as a response, to do collective marketing.
- Multiple demands on small diversified farms—hard to be good at everything.
- With beef—processing, labeling (USDA), quality of product (working with processor). No control over what happens at processor—lose product, don’t get what you asked for.
- Access to meat processing.
- Anticipated cuts to processors will hamper access. (Solution: more on-farm slaughter, more facilities closer to the farms.)
- Processing regulations—small goat farm treated like cheese/milk plant. Regulations designed for different scale (larger) not appropriate for on-farm milk, organic farm.
- FSA loan process not as smooth as would like.
- Access to land. Tried to work out long-term lease that didn’t work.
- Need more service/help working out land access, creative land tenure options, have a place to connect people.
- Affordable land for sale isn’t always near best markets for local products.
- May need a centralized point of access for all this information. It’s all around out there, but don’t necessarily know what doors to knock on.
- Networking is great but it takes time.
- Slow, incremental development because don’t have a lot of money to invest (debt averse). Payback takes a long time to come.
- Sourcing agricultural equipment, to find appropriate affordable used equipment.

Assistance: What would be helpful?

- Need high-speed internet, cell phone service. When you’re not connected you lose business.
- Increase limits on on-farm processing of poultry (maybe 5000) so can make some part of living on it. Better return on on-farm infrastructure investments.
- Change regulations on taking food waste for pigs (from store) to reduce purchased feed and input.
- Increase access to capital (affordable for an agricultural enterprise).

- Can't get loan to buy neighboring farm—need access to affordable credit.
- More help in detail of how to transfer farm to next generation; more one-on-one as opposed to workshops.
- Increase help for farmer to navigate processing—see Stockman Grass Farmer. What happens at the processing plant. Workshops on various slaughter/butcher processes. Monitor.
- Increase thinking on learning program for how to acquire essential skills. Learning plan for people from non-farm background who are already farming/working.
- More emphasis on backyard/hobby farmers, because that's where a lot of farmers grow from. (Got help from the Carrot Project.) More access to small-scale capital for tools, truck.
- Increase collaborative solutions. Community meat locker (like Jasper Hill, but with meat.) But the challenge is do you have a cooperative cooler or someone else to market.
- Increase limits on loans—more low-interest loans available.
- Restrictions on resale price of conserved farms so they are available for agricultural use.
- Mediator program for conflict with lenders, family mediation.
- Continued coordination through NCFN—sharing equipment, buying in bulk (grain, to lower feed prices), join Rural Vermont.
- Be sure to get on lists for Vern Grubinger, Ann Hazelrigg, and Jon Turmel.
- Use farmers' markets to do outreach to beginning farmers—visit farmers where they are.
- More help setting up record-keeping/bookkeeping systems, templates.

Feedback/questions from service providers

Q: What about health insurance? Is it an issue?

- Only choice as self-employed is through the Chamber of Commerce or Catamount, and it is unaffordable.
- Too expensive. Workers' compensation—but if you make a claim rates go way up.
- Use off-farm job for family, but workers' comp is issue for employees. Will be looking for further information as the farm grows.
- Fluctuation in milk prices/capital gains means VHAP kicks you off.
- Racked up \$60,000 in bills. Worked the network, got back on Catamount.
- You need it.
- VHAP—great but success means will lose eligibility.
- Might be good to have incentives for farmers to encourage safety, health: “get credit for taking care of yourself.”
- Join Farm Health and Safety Task Force.

Q: Farm business management—what do you use, where do you want to be?

- QuickBooks.
- “Sharpie in the greenhouse.”
- “Pencil on the barn wall.”

Q: Community infrastructure and food systems

- What is the best investment in infrastructure and technical assistance?
- Building Intervale Center Food Hub concept.
- Key to network/connection is having coordinator of effort. But want to be self sufficient and have profit due to increase in efficiency go back to the producer.

Q: How best to reach farmers?

- Need web-based forum so farmers don't have to travel.
- More e-mail discussion lists—more production/enterprise oriented.
- Clearinghouse place.

- There is a real thirst for technical assistance in the intermediate and “upper level.”
- More attention from Agency of Agriculture and UVM on enterprises other than dairy—better, more information for diverse farms.

Q: What do you want from UVM Extension?

- Need more technical assistance on poultry, swine, nontraditional forage crops. Some is available in other places but is it appropriate for Vermont?
- Link to SARE grants, to get SARE results.
- Online is good, but also need hands-on, in person.
- Farmers as teachers/mentors.
- Farming in schools.
- Extension in schools—connecting with guidance counselors, address disconnect between schools and community.

Q: How to use wealth of knowledge in farm community?

- Change times of meetings.
- Keep it local—discussion groups
- Reach out to farmers—proactive assistance, one-stop shop.