

Vermont New Farmer Network  
Poultney, VT  
March 30, 2010

## **Chart Notes**

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

#### Successes:

- Incredible number of generous, experienced farmer mentors willing to share information and hold the hand of beginning farmers.
- Receptiveness to seeing farming succeed, helpfulness, offers of land, from established farmer/landowner.
- Building a Sustainable Business course (UVM Extension)—an example of educational opportunities, Vermont is leading the way in education and support. Strong network of support, good speakers.
- Buy Local movement—lots of organizations helping to create demand.
- RAFFL (Rutland Area Farm and Food Link), local organization.
- Education about local foods, sustainability, in elementary/high schools has helped, but could do more.
- Growing Places course and Building a Sustainable Business course were huge for helping set things up.
- Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association, apprenticeships, and the winter NOFA conference all helped to build skills.
- Extending the growing season.
- Vermont scale—farmers markets, lower population density helps.
- The nature of the work leads to a healthy lifestyle. It can be a stressful work environment, but being outside and eating healthy food helps.
- RAFFL produces a Locally Grown Guide for co-marketing, reaches 40,000 consumers.
- Mentoring.

#### Challenges:

- Challenge to keep Buy Local movement going; it could still cascade further.
- Need intentional work to build the market, not just “riding the wave” but also “paddling” to keep going.
- Difficult to be both the producer and the marketer; challenge of getting products out the door.
- Pricing—how do you have time to do the book work in addition to the growing. Balancing time.
- Figuring out pricing, developing the skills to run the business.
- Access to money: “It’s a lot of work to get a couple dollars.”
- Overcoming preconceived notions of local food being way more expensive, which is not necessarily true.
- Challenge of scaling up, finding the technologies to enable the farmer to scale up.
- Using technology to decrease variable costs.

- Organizational support lacking for helping to market, how to sell products, what to charge.
- Population density makes it difficult to do direct marketing; also need to wholesale.
- Do we have the capacity to feed our population? Can we feed all our citizens? Can't do it with small-size diversified farms. How do we keep what we value and still be able to feed the people. Currently only feed those who seek us out.
- How do we extend our growing season?
- Lack of control over what happens when livestock goes to processing facilities—repercussions for marketing, pricing.
- Slaughter prices and regulations.
- Disease (specifically for bees).
- Finding long-term secure land access, particularly to purchase. Short-term nature of access inhibits sustainable practices.
- How do you find land that you're not going to have to leave in 2 years?
- Small-scale agriculture impacts on land/economy are so small compared to commodity agriculture that small-scale is often overlooked by traditional services and infrastructure; for example, feed testing, compost testing, loans.
- Logistics of rentals, putting it all together: money, facilities, equipment.
- The best agricultural land is sought for development.
- Access to productive agricultural soils.
- Competing with developers (Addison County). People are sitting on the land, waiting to develop it.

**Assistance: What would be helpful?**

- Focus on education in schools.
- Courses like Growing Places: the materials, holistic approach, encouraging vibe, and language were all helpful.
- Collaborative efforts—farmers thinking outside the box together.
- Digital format can be limiting—offer more ways to access information.
- Greater knowledge about farmer-friendly tax laws (discovered accidentally through VT Department of Taxes).
- A clearinghouse for things like financial products, opportunities, information about insurance, taxes, loans, regulations.
- Services offered at the farm—more people coming to the farm, the way dairy farmers are approached.
- More outreach to the farm by service providers, vendors.
- More on-farm learning: include apprentices, field workers, to reach aspiring farmers at the farm.
- Opportunities to participate in on-farm research (production, equipment).
- For Rutland County, a processing unit (commercial kitchen) to extend the season and open new markets. Need something less expensive than Food Venture Center.
- Food hub for distribution of products. For example, ag resource programs and Foodbank.
- Information is very dispersed, sometimes overwhelming; need consolidation, need to know where to find experts.

- In context of transition from large garden to small farm, web sites with production and other information would help.
- Vermont Seal of Quality program brought value, helped small farmers; needs to be revived and strengthened.
- Resource fairs: make them bigger, bring vendors. Make a point of getting resources farmers are looking for.
- More funding for organizations that do marketing on behalf of farmers, more connection-makers, "pit-traders." Farmers can then just focus on growing. For example, CSA drop sites.
- New Farmer Initiative through RAFFL. Regional, for networking and information sharing, making connections between farmers, like Food Works model.
- Could use more programs like Food Works that build consumer demand.
- More effort to consider agriculture as part of an economic development authority.
- Using grant money: regional planning office, expand technical services to assist farm businesses. Co-ops, co-branding, marketing cooperation.
- How can Rutland County be better supported—how are statewide services integrated into Rutland County.
- Address barriers in schools to getting good, fresh, healthy local food. Agencies could make a difference.
- Use caution regarding handing off marketing to intermediary.
- Fewer regulations that impede small-scale farmers; scale-appropriate regulations.
- How to balance food safety and small farms, GAPs, voice at the table.

### **Feedback/questions from service providers**

#### **Q: Do we need to attend more to non-direct markets? Are farmers exploring options? Do we have a glut of direct marketers?**

- Yes, some would like more non-direct marketing.
- Opportunities to aggregate with others.

#### **Q: If you were exploring larger markets, who would you look to for help?**

- Student interns, bring expertise to us; students interns could work with RAFFL.
- Aggregating product for CSA.
- Go to food hub on Intervale Center web site and follow IC models.

#### **Q: What about farmer-to-farmer sharing about food hub model?**

- Observations: Co-ops need to figure out a way to collaborate without falling into traps of other models.
- Land Link program is being kick-started again.
- Can we feed ourselves? Agriculture jobs for Vermonters: how do we create jobs, connect?
- If we can feed ourselves, benefits would be increased. Include this concept in looking for funding, land usage.

--Side-by-side comparisons, also education on how to understand \_\_\_\_\_.

--Give basic information, using basic financial terms.

--Land linking: is land turning over and farmers are not aware, or is land not turning over? Take advantage. Organization.

--Better off renting.

Scholarships