



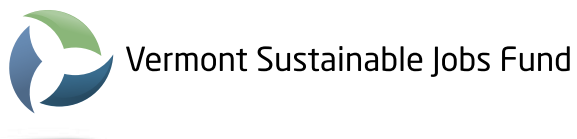
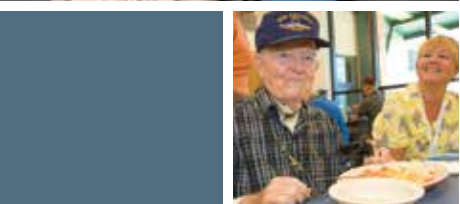
farm to plate

STRENGTHENING VERMONT'S FOOD SYSTEM

Chapter 4, Section 1 Food Security in Vermont

Prepared By:

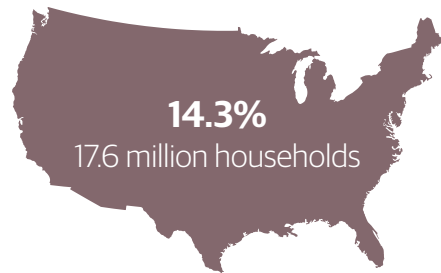
Rachel Schattman, Center for Sustainable Agriculture, UVM Extension
 Virginia Nickerson, Center for Sustainable Agriculture, UVM Extension
 Linda Berlin, Center for Sustainable Agriculture, UVM Extension





Key Messages

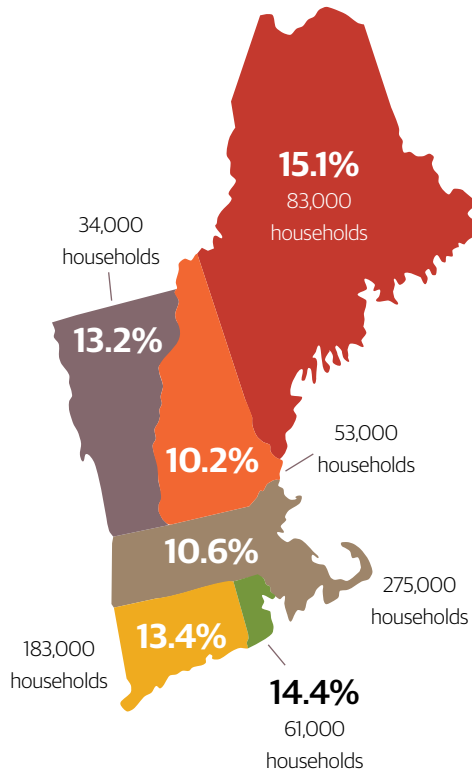
Food Insecurity, 2013



The Great Recession (December 2007 - June 2009) has increased food insecurity in the United States.

The percentage of food insecure American households increased from 11.9% (over 15 million households) in 1995 to 14.3% (17.6 million households) in 2013. The percentage of low food security (i.e., reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet) and very low food security households (i.e., indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake) have increased in every New England state.

The percentage of food insecure, particularly very low food secure, Vermont households increased from an average of 9.1% (greater than 22,000 households) from 1999 to 2001 to an average of 13.2% (greater than 34,000 households) from 2011 to 2013.



Click on graphics in this document for additional information.

► **Trends In Supplemental Assistance Programs (federal funding):** Participation in the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) has increased from 9.3% of the U.S. population in 1980, to 15.1% (over 47 million Americans) in 2013.

- SNAP participation in New England increased 46.2% (+619,441), while the population of the region increased only 1.3% (+189,086). The percentage of New Englanders receiving SNAP benefits increased from 9.3% of the population in 2009 to 13.4% in 2013. In 2013, 16% (100,541) of Vermonters—nearly one out of every seven Vermonters—received benefits.

SNAP Participation, 2013



» **Good News:** In 2007, 3 Vermont farmers' markets had EBT card readers that accept SNAP benefits. In 2014, 38 out of 56 summer markets and 17 of 22 winter markets accept EBT.

- *National School Lunch Program* (NSLP) participation in New England declined 6.75% (-81,196 students) from 2009 to 2013. Both the total number of students enrolled in Vermont and the number of students enrolled in NSLP decreased from 2009 to 2013. However, the percentage of Vermont students participating in NSLP increased slightly during that period, from 59% of all students, to 61% of all students.

- Participation in the *Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children* (WIC) has levelled off recently and a few theories have been offered: declining birth rates; a perception that it is easier to acquire SNAP benefits; more generous SNAP benefits compared to WIC; and a declining schedule of benefits for children as they age. WIC participation in New England decreased 8.6% (-23,776) from 2009 to 2013, and Vermont had the highest percentage decrease (-15.2%, -2,660 participants) of any New England state.

► **Trends In Charitable Or Emergency Food System Programs:** The [2014 Hunger in America](#) study estimates that approximately 18,700 Vermonters access food from the [Vermont Foodbank](#) network in a typical week and 153,000 people (24% of the population) are served annually. In 2014, the Foodbank distributed 1.3 million pounds of fresh produce.

Foodbank Participation, 2013



- The Hunger in America study found that Vermonters assisted by the Foodbank network frequently live on the edge of their financial resources and commonly make spending tradeoffs between food and utilities, transportation, and medical care. About 71% of households use many coping strategies, including purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food, or buying food in damaged packages. Fresh fruits and vegetables were the top products desired by clients of Foodbank network agencies while, at the same time, agencies said that the top obstacle for buying healthier food was that it was too expensive.

» *Food Rescue:* from 2011 to 2013, close-to-code, perishable, and shelf-stable food rescued from Vermont farms, restaurants, stores, bakeries, cafeterias, food manufacturers, and distributors increased about 67%, from 600 tons in 2011 to 1,000 tons in 2013.

► **Trends In Community Food Security Projects:** In contrast to the charitable system's necessary approach of providing free and low-cost food to people in need, community

food security programs seek to build capacity and infrastructure to enable individuals and communities to grow, access, and prepare fresh, nutritious foods for themselves in a long-term sustainable manner.

- A new network and website, the [Vermont Gleaning Collective](#), provides a streamlined and standardized volunteer registration process, gleaning coordination and communication, and data tracking.
- The new [Farm to School Census](#) reveals that the six New England states rank in the top ten for school districts that offer farm to school activities. Vermont ranks fifth in the nation, with 91% of responding school districts offering farm to school programs. Vermont had a higher percentage of school districts that had edible gardens or orchards (81%) and served food from these gardens or orchards (82%) than the rest of New England.
- For the 6 New England states, local fruits and vegetables were the most commonly purchased items. Respondents were also asked to identify food categories they "Would like to buy." Meat, grains/flour, and beans/seeds/nuts were commonly mentioned.
- Vermont has more than 300 community gardens. This number includes school and teaching gardens, neighborhood gardens, and allotment gardens. Many of these gardens serve low to moderate income households.
- Refugee resettlement has increased cultural and racial diversity in Vermont over the past 20 years, especially in Chittenden County, where many families have been placed due to the availability of social services. The [New Farms for New Americans Program](#) (NFNA) is collaboratively run by The [Association of Africans Living in Vermont](#) (AALV) and the [Intervale Center](#), with support from the [University of Vermont Extension](#). The program currently helps over 90 New American households produce their own fresh, local, and culturally appropriate foods. A 2014 assessment of food insecurity among NFNA participants found that they saved money through their participation, which they were able to use on household expenses, supplemental food purchases, contributions to savings, or donations.

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CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

Food Security in Vermont

How can we reduce food insecurity in Vermont? How can we increase the vitality and value of Vermont's food system while ensuring that all citizens have equitable access to fresh, healthy, local food?

Hunger (i.e., a painful sensation caused by a lack of food) and food insecurity (i.e., an inability to access enough food to meet basic needs due to financial constraints) are issues of growing concern in America.

The *U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service* (USDA ERS) reports that the percentage of food insecure American households increased from 11.9% (over 15 million households) in 1995 to 14.3% (over 17.6 million households) in 2013. The percentage of very low food security households—households where some family members consumed less or eating patterns were disrupted due to limited resources at any time during the previous 12 months—increased from 4.1% (over 4 million households) in 1995 to 5.6% (6.8 million households) in 2013. Ten percent of all households with children were food insecure in 2013.¹

The percentage of food insecure Vermont households increased from an average of 9.1% (greater than 22,000 households) from 1999 to 2001 to an average of 13.2% (greater than 34,000 households) from 2011 to 2013 (Figure 4.1.1). Vermont ranks 34th in the nation for the prevalence of food insecurity, fourth highest in New England after Maine, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.² Emergency food assistance organizations have reported an increasing number of clients in recent years. As the cost of food

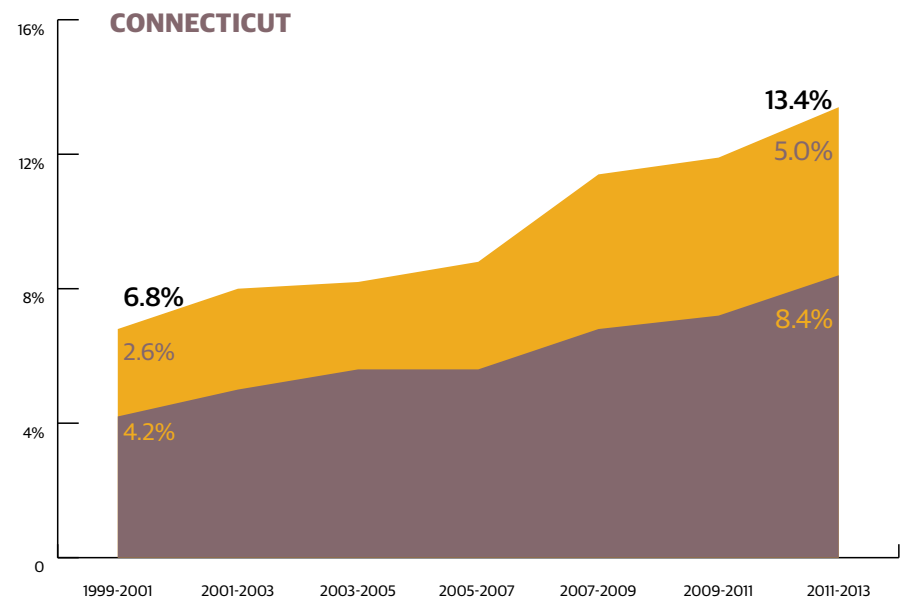
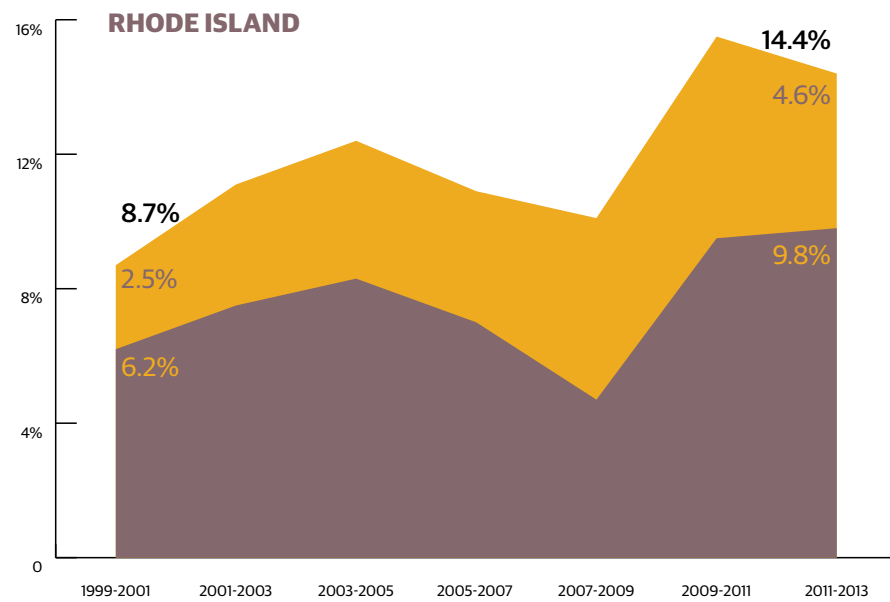
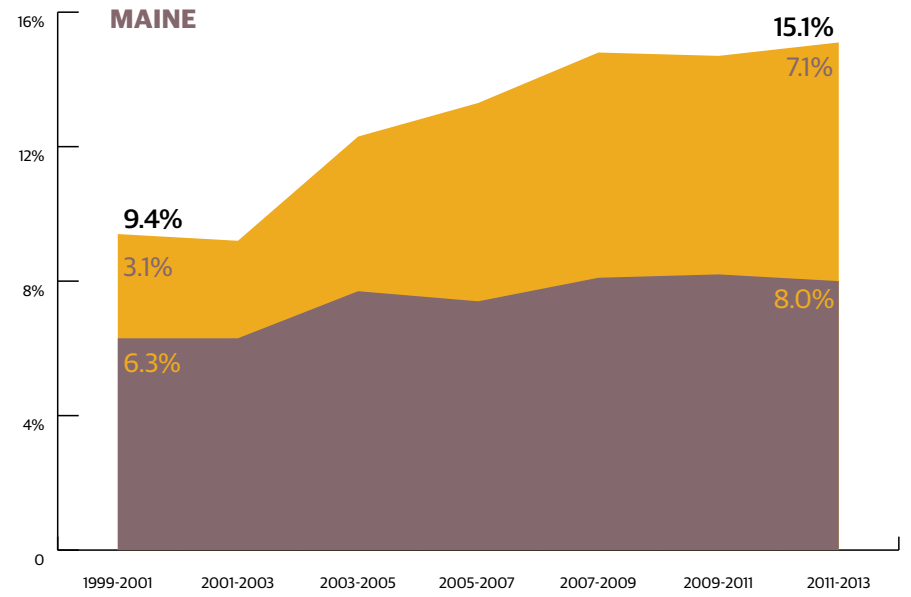
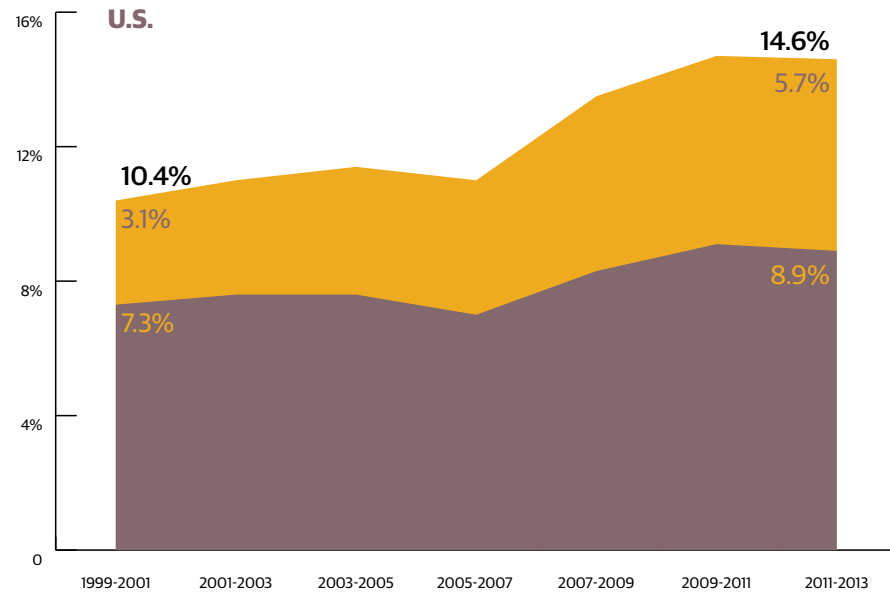


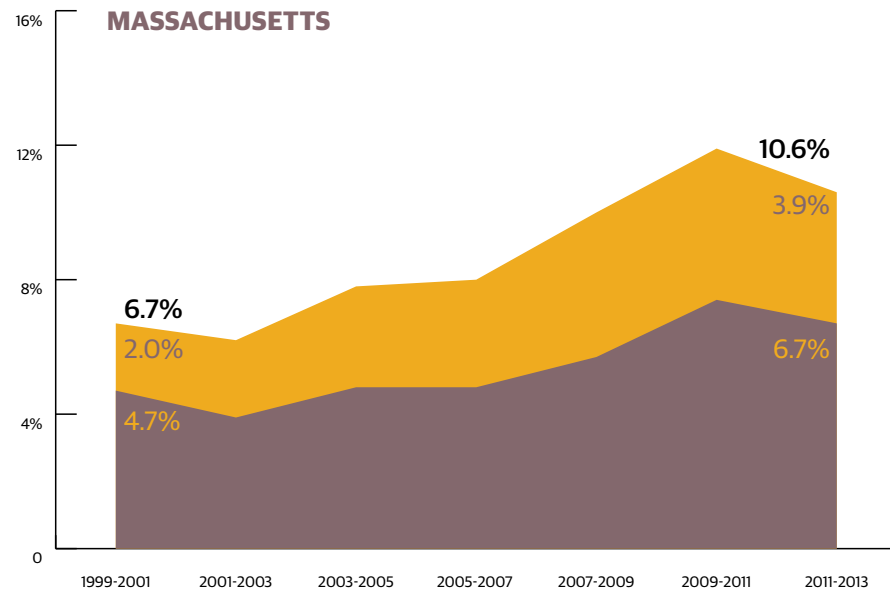
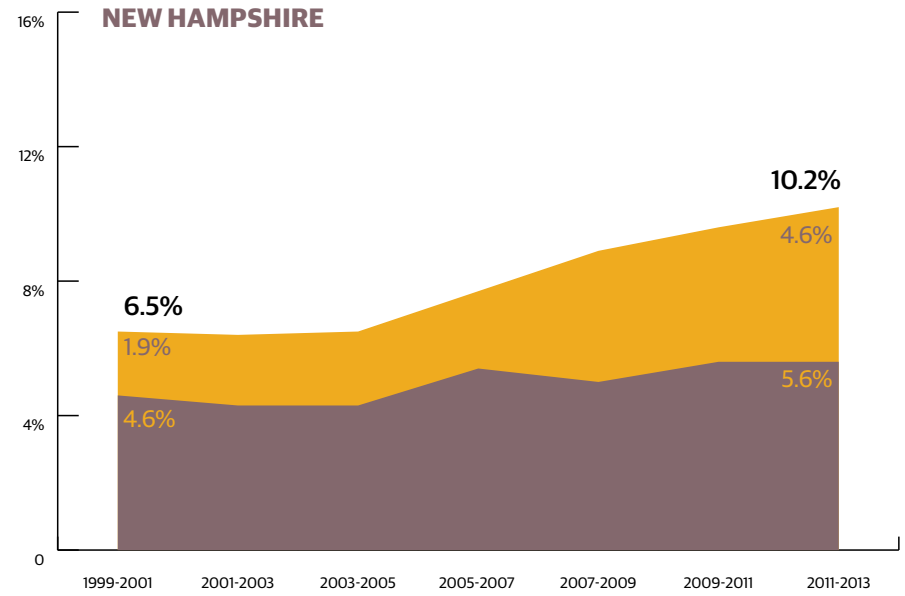
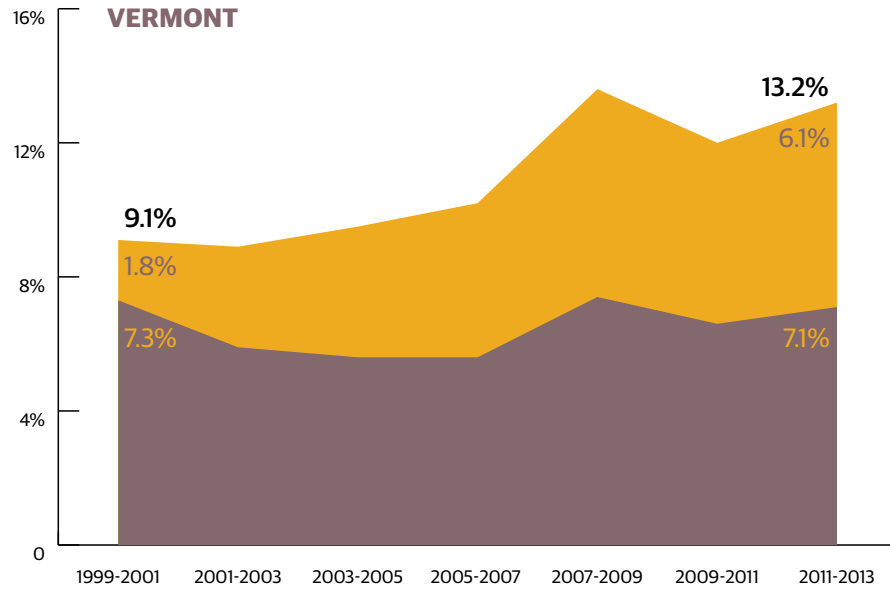
Vermont women and children "putting food by" in a Middlebury canning kitchen operation.

PHOTO CREDIT: UVM Special Collections

Figure 4.1.1: Food Insecurity in the U.S. and New England, 3-Year Averages, 1999-2013

VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY LOW FOOD SECURITY





Source: USDA Economic Research Service, www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/readings.aspx.

continues to rise and the impacts of the “Great Recession” (2007-2009) have lingered, many Vermonters are forced to make difficult choices. They may choose inexpensive, unhealthy food so that they can afford basic necessities such as heat, transportation, and medicine. Additionally, although the local food movement has provided access to an expanding market for Vermont producers, many farmers are not able to secure a reasonable standard of living for their families (e.g., net farm income in Vermont is lower today than it was in 1970), and low income Vermonters may not be able to incorporate fresh and affordable local foods in their diets.

Dissolving the Double Bind: Improving Access to, and the Availability, Utilization, and Stability of Local Food

A *double bind* is a situation in conflicting messages from a single source inhibit a person's ability to make an appropriate response, and creates a situation in which someone "can't win."³ Efforts to enhance food access and the economic success of Vermont's food system may constitute a double bind for policy makers, businesses, philanthropists, and communities: **How does Vermont increase the vitality and value of its food system while ensuring that all citizens have equitable access to fresh, healthy, local food?** When problem solving around these two issues is conducted separately, the success of one effort may come at the expense of the other.

This does not have to be the case. Many organizations and individuals in Vermont are working on these issues simultaneously, often with great success. Given Vermont's highly localized food system relative to other states, we are well positioned to lead the way in applying creative problem solving, leveraging appropriate resources, and developing programming at the intersection of food access and farm viability.

Because food insecurity is rooted in poverty, we must ultimately address income inequality and employment opportunities in our society.⁴ At a national level, African-American and Latino households experience food insecurity at a rate three times that of white households. Many food service workers of non-white backgrounds earn poverty wages or below minimum wage. White workers, on the other hand, have greater access to employer health insurance and paid days off, and are less likely than other workers to labor over 40 hours per week. Vermont, while notably less racially diverse than much of the United States, is home to a growing population of New Americans. As the diversity of Vermont's populations grows, we must work together to promote food access, availability, utilization, and stabilization in our food system.

Access, Availability, Utilization, and Stabilization

To conceptualize how programs in Vermont are addressing food security, we have used an internationally recognized framework that arranges food security efforts into four categories: access, availability, utilization, and stabilization.

FOOD ACCESS refers to the way people obtain available food. Normally, food is accessed through a combination of home production, purchase, barter, gifts, borrowing, and food aid. Food access is ensured when communities and all households and individuals within them have adequate resources, such as money and transportation, to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Access depends on income, and on the price of food. It also depends on market, social, and institutional entitlement programs that individuals can access.

FOOD AVAILABILITY in a country, region, or local area means that food is physically present because it has been grown, manufactured, imported, or transported there. For example, food is available because it can be found in markets; because it is produced on local farms, on local land or in home gardens; or because it arrives as aid.

FOOD UTILIZATION refers to the way people use food. This depends on the quality of the food and people's preparation and storage methods, nutritional and cooking knowledge, and health status.

FOOD STABILITY refers to the consistency with which access, availability and utilization are achieved. Periodic fluctuations in any of these three conditions can increase the risk of malnutrition and hunger. Weather conditions, natural disasters, and economic changes such as food price increases and unemployment can all effect food stability.⁵

Three of the goals identified in the Farm to Plate (F2P) Strategic Plan relate to food security for Vermonters.

GETTING TO 2020

Goals 3, 10, and 15 address the need to increase access to fresh, local food for all Vermonters.

Goal 3: Vermonters will exhibit fewer food-related health problems.

Goal 10: All Vermonters will have a greater understanding of how to obtain, grow, store, and prepare nutritional food.

Goal 15: All Vermonters will have access to fresh, nutritionally balanced food that they can afford.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

This section provides an overview of food security efforts in the state, highlighting those strategies that integrate the use of local foods and the development of relationships between the agricultural community and food insecure populations. The Analysis section (page 41) outlines objectives and strategies that will most effectively promote **(1) equitable food access for all Vermonters, and (2) increased opportunity for Vermont farmers and food processors**. If implemented, these efforts will improve the health and well-being of Vermonters, as well as increase economic opportunity in Vermont's food system.

The combination of the recent "Great Recession," high unemployment, and climbing food and fuel prices has driven record numbers of Vermonters to seek assistance from both the emergency and supplemental food systems. **The USDA reports that the percentage of food insecure Vermont households increased from an average of 9.1% (over 22,000 households) from 1999 to 2001 to an average of 13.2% (over 33,500 households) from 2011 to 2013. Vermont ranks 35th in the nation for the prevalence of food insecurity, fourth highest in New England after Maine, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.**

This increase in food insecurity is apparent across the country. In the fall of 2009, [Feeding America](#), the nation's largest food bank organization, [surveyed 176 food bank network members](#) across the United States. They found that 99% of the participating food banks experienced an increase in demand for emergency food assistance from 2008 to 2009. A similar national study conducted in 2008 reported charitable food sites experiencing a 30% increase, on average, in the number of people visiting food pantries.⁶ The USDA has designated hunger and food insecurity as focal areas for the [National Institute for Food and Agriculture](#), a USDA agency that funds research, education, and extension programs at Land-Grant Universities.

Many pressures affect food access in Vermont. Limited incomes, poverty, and lack of transportation are significant contributing factors to hunger and food insecurity, though they are by no means the only causes. The concept of **food deserts** (i.e., areas in industrialized societies that lack access to healthy and affordable food) has commonly been used to describe the effects that these barriers have on food insecure individuals and families.⁷ However, it has also been argued that food deserts

are an inadequate metaphor for food insecurity, and therefore, concentrating on increasing physical access to food in the absence of education or policy change will be ineffective.⁸ This argument calls for transportation issues (i.e., physical and economic barriers to food access) to be addressed in concert with education and policy-based efforts. It is apparent that addressing food access is a complex and multifaceted puzzle.

Strategies for addressing food access fall into three categories:

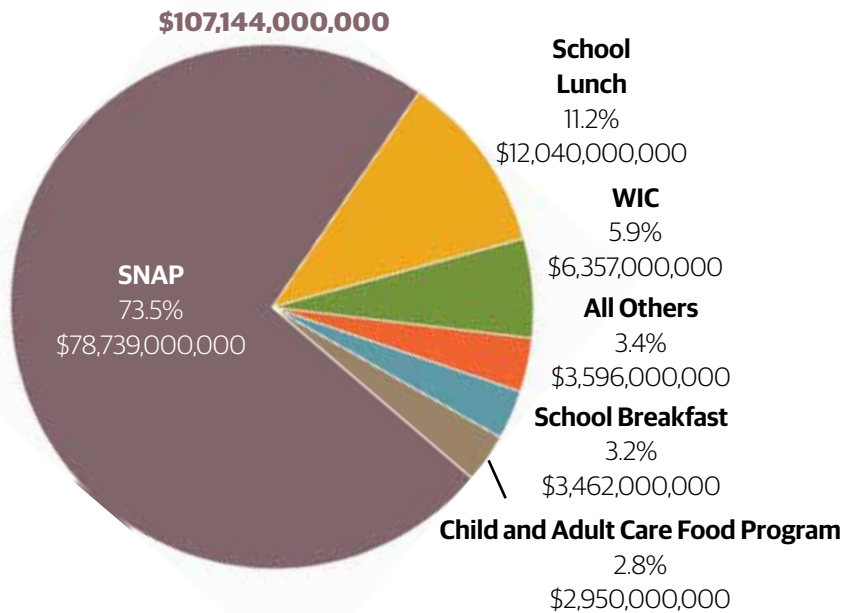
- 1) **Supplemental assistance programs** (often federally or state funded) to increase the consistency and nutritional quality of meals accessed by vulnerable groups;
- 2) **Charitable or emergency food system** activities meet the needs of citizens in crisis by providing food through food shelves and other mechanisms; and
- 3) **Community food security programs** focus on building communities' capacities to feed themselves through job training, food and nutrition education, and infrastructure development.

This section examines the barriers and opportunities in Vermont for all three types of strategies. Leveraging resources to effectively and efficiently reduce food insecurity while continuing to develop Vermont's food system economy is a formidable task. The following sections provide an overview of food access and local food-related efforts and programs around Vermont.

Federal Food Programs

This section presents an overview of the federal food assistance programs that support Americans. It highlights efforts that specifically address the intersection between the local food system and increasing food access. The federal government spent over \$107 billion for food assistance programs in 2013, an increase of 27% from \$84 billion in 2009. The Supplemental Assistance Program (SNAP, page 7) receives the largest share of funding, 73.5% (\$78 billion), followed by the National School Lunch Program (page 10), WIC (page 12), all other programs, the School Breakfast Program (page 10), and the Child and Adult Care Program (page 12) (Figure 4.1.2).

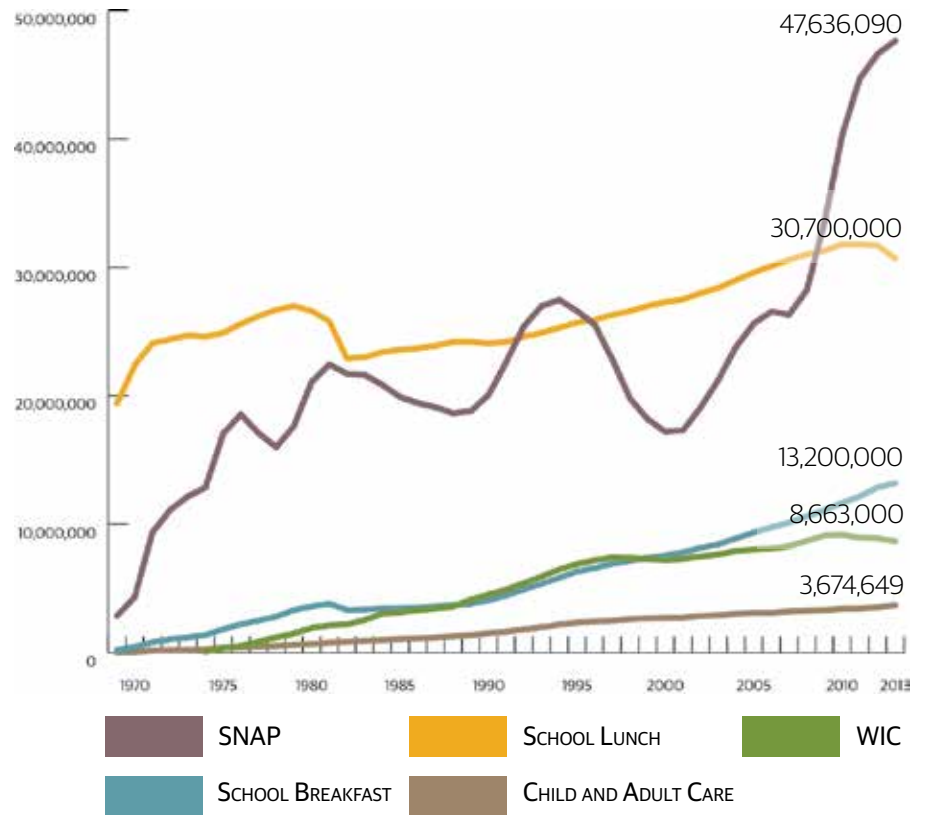
Figure 4.1.2: Federal Food Program Funding, 2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Overview, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/overview.

Total participation in federal food assistance programs has grown over the past 40 years (Figure 4.1.3, the sharp decrease in the early 1980s reflects the fact that Puerto Rico participated in SNAP from 1975 to 1982 but subsequently received services from a separate program). The percentage of the U.S. population participating in each program has remained relatively consistent since 1980 except for a recent uptick in SNAP participation (Table 4.1.1).

Figure 4.1.3: Participation in Federal Food Programs, 1969-2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Overview, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/overview.

Table 4.1.1: Percentage of U.S. Population Participating in Federal Food Programs

	SNAP	School Lunch	WIC	School Breakfast	Child and Adult Care
1980	9.3%	11.7%	0.8%	1.6%	0.3%
1990	8.1%	9.7%	1.8%	1.6%	0.6%
2000	6.1%	9.7%	2.6%	2.7%	1.0%
2010	13.1%	10.3%	3.0%	3.8%	1.1%
2013	15.1%	9.7%	2.7%	4.2%	1.2%

🔑 SNAP/3SquaresVT and Harvest Health Coupons

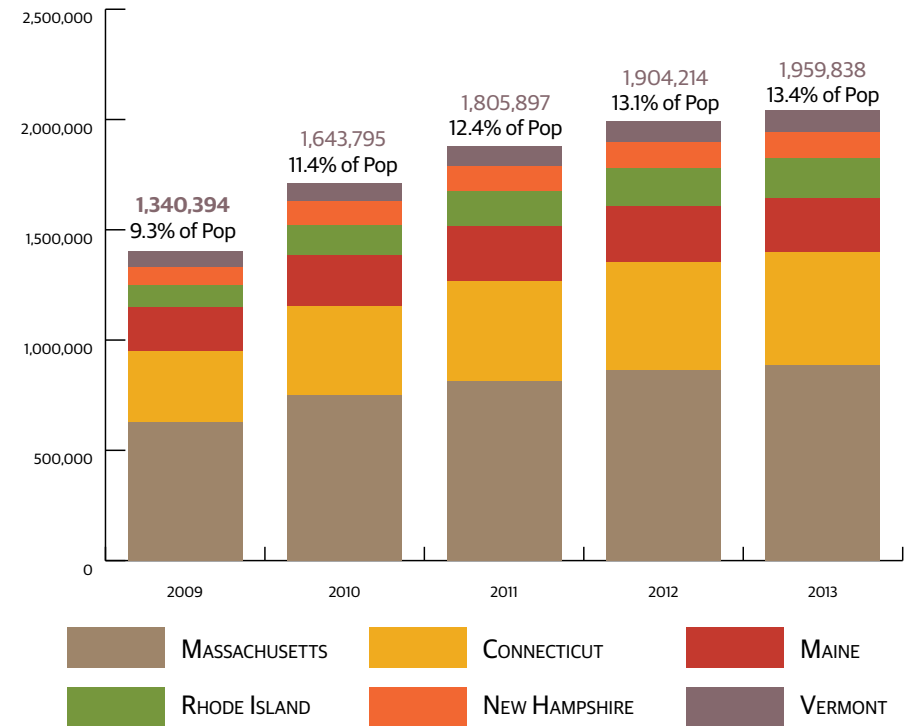
The federal Food Stamp program was introduced in the United States in 1939 toward the end of the Great Depression. Since the beginning of the program, there has been a strong correlation between unemployment rates and participation rates in the Food Stamp Program.⁹

In October 2008, the national Food Stamp Program was renamed the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP). In Vermont, it was renamed *3SquaresVT*. It is administered by the *Vermont Department for Children and Families* (DCF). Vermonters can apply for the program at one of the twelve DCF *Economic Services Division (ESD) District Offices* around the state, online at mybenefits.vt.gov, or by calling toll free **1-800-479-6151**. Information about the program and where to get help with the application process is available on the DCF *3SquaresVT* website or at www.vermontfoodhelp.com.

Most 3SquaresVT participants get their monthly benefits on electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, which work like debit cards. If all household members are 65 or older or receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), their 3SquaresVT benefit is direct deposited as cash into their bank accounts. 3SquaresVT benefits may buy a large variety of food items, including meat, dairy, cereals, vegetables, cold prepared food, seeds to grow edible plants, and edible plants. They cannot be used for hot meals, pet food, soap, paper products, alcohol, cigarettes, and other nonfood items.¹⁰ 3SquaresVT recipients qualify for more than just direct food assistance. Children getting 3SquaresVT benefits qualify for free school meals, and a data-sharing process between DCF and the state Agency of Education means that their parents do not have to fill out the meal application form from the school. 3SquaresVT enrollment can qualify Vermonters for help with paying telephone bills as well.

A wide range of Vermonters takes part in 3SquaresVT. Participation exceeded 100,000 for much of 2013 but began to decline that fall, after the federal economic stimulus law that raised benefit levels expired and Vermont had to reinstate the federal restrictions on eligibility for able-bodied adults aged 18-50 without dependents. **The March 2014 caseload included 92,936 people in 47,853 households, of which 36% were families with minor children, 33% were working, 40% included people with disabilities, and 25% included someone age 60 or older.** Benefits

Figure 4.1.4: SNAP Participation in New England, 2009-2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, SNAP, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap.

that month averaged \$228 per household, and 89% of the households received at least \$50 in food benefits.¹¹

In the wake of the Great Recession (2007-2009), SNAP participation in New England increased 46.2% (+619,441), while the population of the region increased only 1.3% (+189,086). This means that the percentage of New Englanders receiving SNAP benefits increased from 9.3% of the population in 2009 to 13.4% in 2013 (Figure 4.1.4). Although Vermont has the smallest total number of SNAP recipients in New England, Vermont ranks third for number of participants as a percentage of total population (Table 4.1.2). In 2013, 16% (100,541) of Vermonters—nearly one out of every seven Vermonters—received benefits from 3SquaresVT.¹²

Table 4.1.2: Percentage of New England Population Participating in SNAP

	VT	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI
2009	11.60%	7.34%	15.27%	9.52%	5.96%	9.71%
2010	13.67%	9.40%	17.29%	11.44%	7.93%	13.20%
2011	14.69%	10.56%	18.66%	12.31%	8.61%	15.25%
2012	15.43%	11.23%	19.03%	12.97%	8.84%	16.46%
2013	16.04%	11.83%	18.75%	13.26%	8.86%	17.11%

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, SNAP, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap.

Benefit amounts are based on household size and income. The gross income limit for most Vermonters is 185% of federal poverty standards, which in 2014, was a monthly income of \$1,773 for a single person or \$3,012 for a family of three. Households must also meet a lower income limit (e.g., \$1,628 for a family of 3) after counting the several deductions for basic living expenses like housing and utilities. The maximum monthly allotments are listed on the USDA SNAP website, www.fns.usda.gov/snap/how-much-could-i-receive. The food benefits are completely federally funded, but 50% of the cost of administering the program falls to the state. Nearly half of all SNAP recipients in the United States are under the age of 18. According to the [Food and Nutrition Service](http://www.fns.usda.gov) (FNS) of the USDA, 76% of benefits go to households with children, 16% of benefits go to households with at least one disabled person, and 9% of benefits go to households with elderly people.¹³

3SquaresVT benefits are transferred electronically to recipient EBT cards on a monthly basis. Before this system was put in place, food stamp recipients were able to use their paper food stamps at farmers' markets, farm stands, and other direct marketing venues. Since the transition to this electronic system, many direct marketing venues including farmers' markets are unable to accept 3SquaresVT benefits, primarily because they do not have access to the necessary technology to process electronic payments in an efficient manner. While free EBT machines that require phone line hook-ups are available, many farmers' markets and on-farm pick-up sites are located outdoors or without a phone line. Local food advocates in Vermont have been working hard to increase the prevalence of wireless card readers at Vermont farmers' markets.

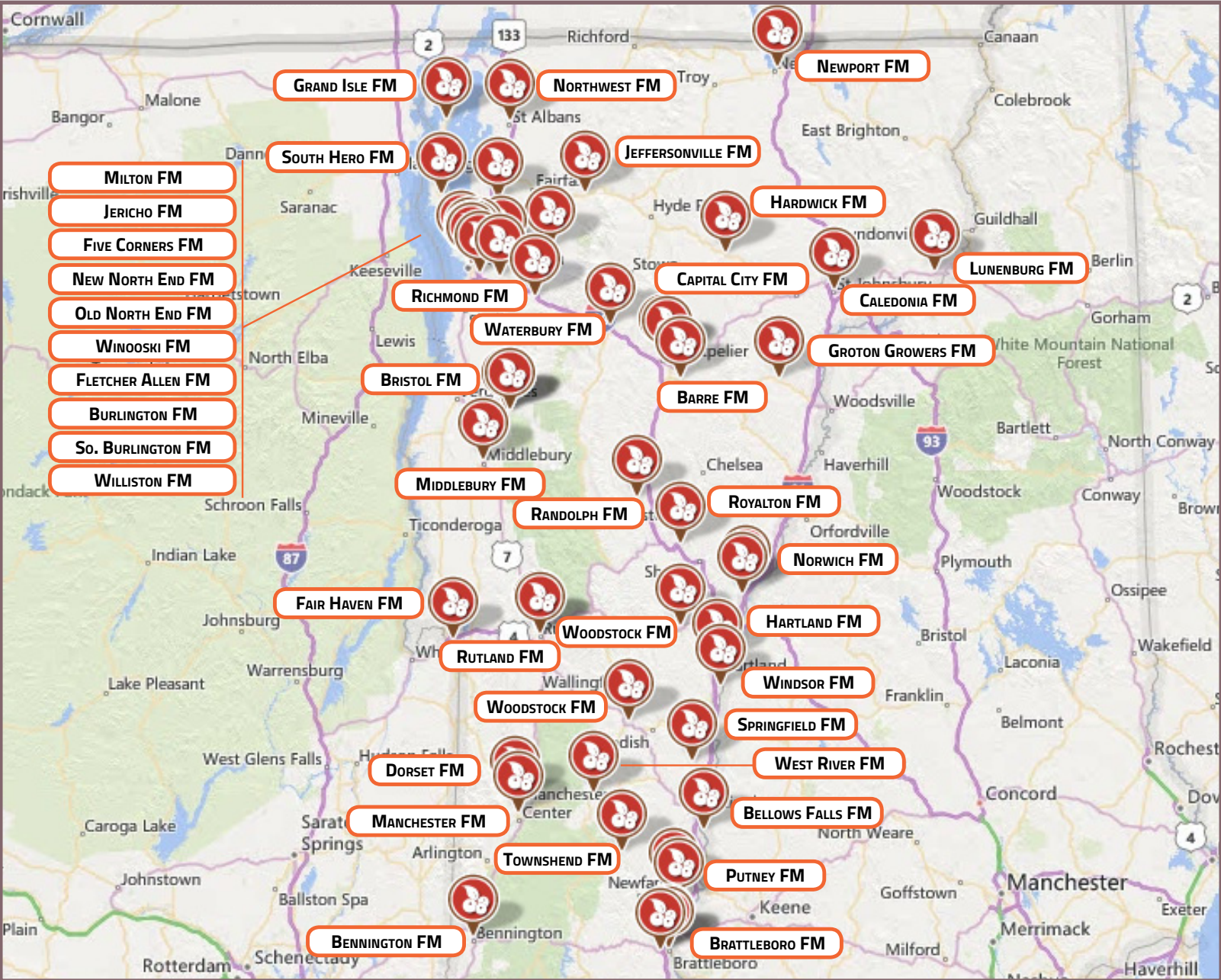


3SquaresVT tokens and EBT Machine at the Brattleboro Farmers' Markets.

PHOTO CREDIT: NOFA Vermont

In 2007, the [Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont \(NOFA Vermont\)](http://www.nofa-vermont.org) and several partners, including DCF, [Hunger Free Vermont](http://www.hungerfreevermont.org), and the [Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets](http://www.vermontagencyofagriculturefoodandmarkets.org) (VAAFAM), initiated a grant program to help farmers' markets set up single card readers. The [Electronic Benefits Transfer Project](http://www.3squaresvt.org) helps all farmers' markets in Vermont (including those in counties with farmers' markets that do not currently participate) take advantage of the opportunity to use this technology. This has been done by subsidizing the cost of the card readers (which can cost between \$900-\$1,200), providing technical support for market managers, and helping with a promotion campaign for the market. 3SquaresVT recipients (and users of traditional debit cards) can swipe their cards at the farmers' market information booth and receive wooden coins to redeem with market vendors. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of Vermont farmers' markets using this technology: In 2007, when the program was initiated, 3 markets accepted EBT. In 2014, 41 out of 77 summer markets accept EBT and 17 of 22 winter markets accept EBT. Figure 4.1.5 shows those markets in Vermont that currently accept EBT/Debit cards.

Figure 4.1.5: Farmers' Markets That Accept EBT, 2014



Source: Vermont Farm to Plate website: www.vtfarmtoplate.com, with data from Hunger Free Vermont and NOFA Vermont.

In addition to the 3SquaresVT debit card, the *Harvest Health Coupon Project* (HHCP) was piloted in Vermont in 2008. At participating markets, 3SquaresVT recipients were able to increase their purchasing power by \$10 every week. This project, administered by *NOFA Vermont*, was initially funded by the *Ben and Jerry's Foundation* and the *Wholesome Wave Foundation*. Farmers' markets in Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington D.C., and California also took part in the pilot.¹⁴ The HHCP continues in Vermont and in 2014 has 40 markets participating with the support of a diverse group of funders. In the U.S., 25 states and the District of Columbia now have markets participating in similar programs. In the 2014 Farm Bill the *Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program* was introduced, providing \$100 Million in grants for programs like HHCP over the five year life of the Farm Bill.

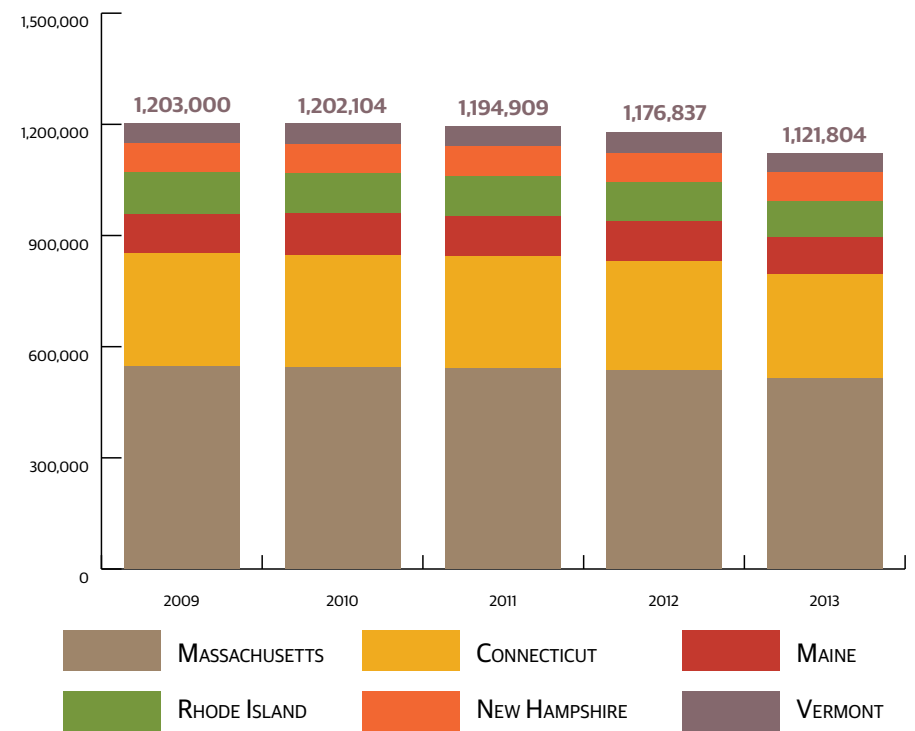
🔑 Child Nutrition Programs

The federal Child Nutrition Programs are important food security safety nets for children in Vermont. They are administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service at the national level and by the *Vermont Agency of Education* at the state level. The programs include the *National School Lunch Program* (NSLP), the *School Breakfast Program*, the *Child and Adult Food Care Program* (which includes programs to provide meals in childcare and in afterschool programs), the *After School Snack Program*, and the *Summer Food Service Program*. Some of these programs, such as the NSLP, are among the oldest federal food assistance programs in the United States. These programs provide subsidies to public and nonprofit private schools, childcare centers and day care homes, and residential child care institutions. These subsidies help provide breakfasts, lunches, snacks, and afterschool meals to qualifying students for free or at reduced-cost. To receive reimbursement for meals provided, participating institutions must serve meals that meet federal nutrition guidelines to qualified recipients. These institutions must submit claims monthly, demonstrating the number of meals served to qualified children and adults. Levels of cash reimbursement depend on the type of institution, the number of meals served, and a yearly adjustment based on the *consumer price index*.

Under current federal legislation, students can qualify for either free or reduced-cost school meals. In 2008, the Vermont Legislature passed legislation that requires the state to provide extra funds to the School Breakfast Program to supplement the

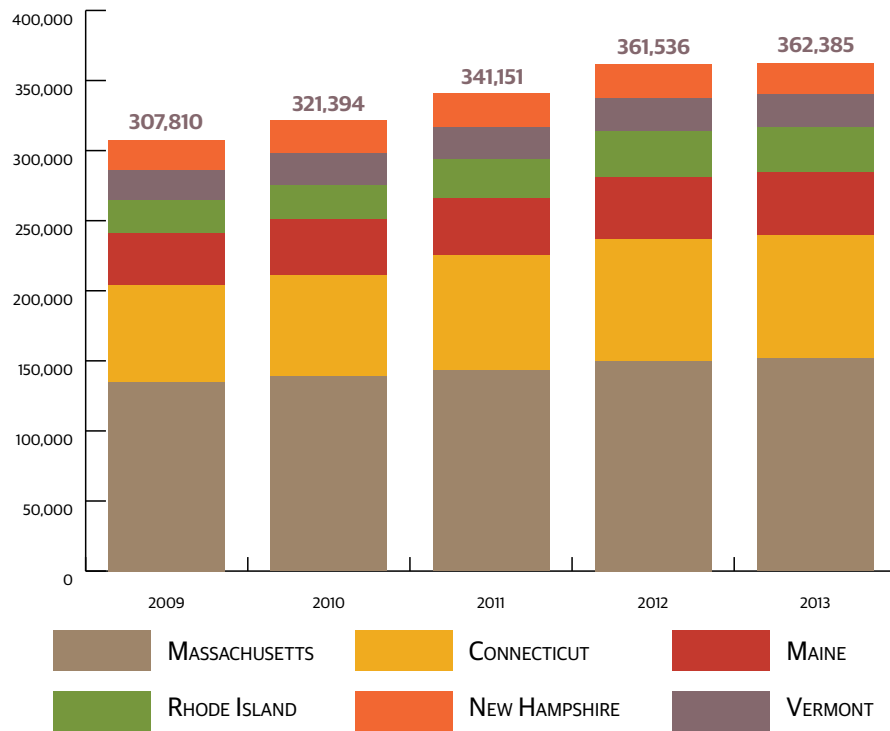
federal funds. **This adjustment allows all students who previously qualified only for reduced-cost school breakfast to access these meals for free. In 2013 the Vermont Legislature passed a similar bill for the National School Lunch Program. In the 2013-14 school year, Vermont became the first state in the nation to eliminate the reduced-price category for families and students. As a result, all low-income Vermont students who qualify and who are enrolled in their school's meal program receive free breakfast and lunch.** In Vermont, students receive free school meals if their family's income is at or below 185% of the federal poverty line, or \$43,568 a year for a family of four in school year 2013-14. Because eligibility for free school meals and 3SquaresVT are based on the same income limit, children in families who participate in 3SquaresVT are automatically enrolled in free school meals. Ninety-eight percent of Vermont's public schools offer at least one school meal per day (breakfast or lunch), and 97% provide both.¹⁵

Figure 4.1.6: School Lunch Participation in New England, 2009-2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Child Nutrition Program, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables.

Figure 4.1.7: School Breakfast Participation in New England, 2009-2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Child Nutrition Program, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables.

Total participation in the National School Lunch Program averaged 26.3 million children from 1969 to 2012. Program participation averaged over 31 million students in the 2000s before reaching an all-time high of 31.8 million in 2010-2011. Program participation then declined by 1.2 million students from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2012-2013 school year. It would appear to be the case that the recent decline in national participation in the NSLP reflects a decline in the number of students paying full price, from 11.9 million in 2000 to 9.2 million in 2013. During that time, the number of students receiving free lunch increased from 13 million in 2000 to 18.9 million in 2013.

School Breakfast Program participation in New England increased 17.7%, from 307,810 students in 2009, to 362,385 in 2013 (Figure 4.1.7). School Breakfast Program participation has historically been much lower than NSLP participation. The recent

increase may reflect more schools offering breakfast. Participation in Vermont increased 7%, from 21,409 students in 2009, to 22,926 in 2013.

Increasing school participation in the *Community Eligibility Provision* (CEP) has been prioritized by organizations such as *Hunger Free Vermont*. The CEP provides an alternative approach for offering school meals that reduces administrative work by pre-qualifying schools where 40% of the students already participate in SNAP or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.



Pre-schooler enrolled in the Special Milk Program.

Universal eligibility is seen as a key strategy for increasing enrollment in school meal programs, and increased enrollment is thought to be the most effective approach to reducing hunger and food insecurity experienced by children. Not all schools will qualify for CEPs, however, and boosting participation in school meal programs must be achieved using all approaches. According to Hunger Free Vermont, schools with higher levels of meal program enrollment have the additional effects of increasing the quality of food served and improvement of overall meal program finances. Increasing the number of school staff who eat at school is also seen as a way to increase the overall quality of school meal programs, thereby increasing enrollment.

Vermont State Law requires that all schools participate in both the school breakfast and school lunch programs unless they are exempted by the Commissioner of Education. These exemptions must be reapplied for on a yearly basis, and the application must be reviewed by the school board prior to submission.¹⁶ In addition, school boards must hold public votes each year if they wish *not* to run the School Breakfast Program. Communities must opt out of the program annually. There are

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

currently nine Vermont public schools that do not provide breakfast, and six Vermont public schools that do not provide lunch. Barriers to participation for these final few Vermont schools include a lack of food preparation space or facilities, a lack of cafeteria space, the belief that feeding children is solely the responsibility of the family, a resistance to being required to comply with new federal nutritional guidelines, and perceptions that meal programs are not cost effective.

Child care centers, outside-of-school-hours care centers, family day care homes, some adult day care centers, emergency shelters, and afterschool care programs, may be eligible for enrollment in the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP). CACFP provides reimbursement for meals and snacks served in these settings. The Afterschool Meal Program, a component of CACFP, allows any educational enrichment program in an eligible area (an area in the school attendance area of a school where more than 50% of the children qualify for free and reduced lunch) to serve meals and/or snacks to children free of charge. These meals are automatically reimbursed at the maximum reimbursement rate. **Currently about 24% of childcare centers and 53% of day care homes use the CACFP to provide meals and snacks to the children in their care.**

The USDA Foods Program (formerly known as commodity food) provides additional resources for school meal programs in the form of an allotment of funds that schools and other organizations caring for children can use to “purchase” from a list of foods made available by USDA. For example, in the 2013-14 school year, school meal programs received about 25 cents worth of USDA Foods for each reimbursable school lunch they served. About 10% of this food is agricultural surplus, and about 90% is purchased from U.S. farmers at market rates by USDA. Recent advocacy efforts in Vermont have succeeded in dramatically improving the functioning of the USDA Foods Program and [Department of Defense \(DoD\) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#) in Vermont. These programs are now administered by a dedicated staff person under the [Child Nutrition Programs](#) at the Agency of Education, and schools have much greater freedom to select their own foods from the annual list issued by USDA. Some Vermont-grown produce is now being made available through the DoD Fresh program, but continuing efforts are still needed to increase the amount of local food used in Vermont schools.

🍴 Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Farm to Family Program, and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)

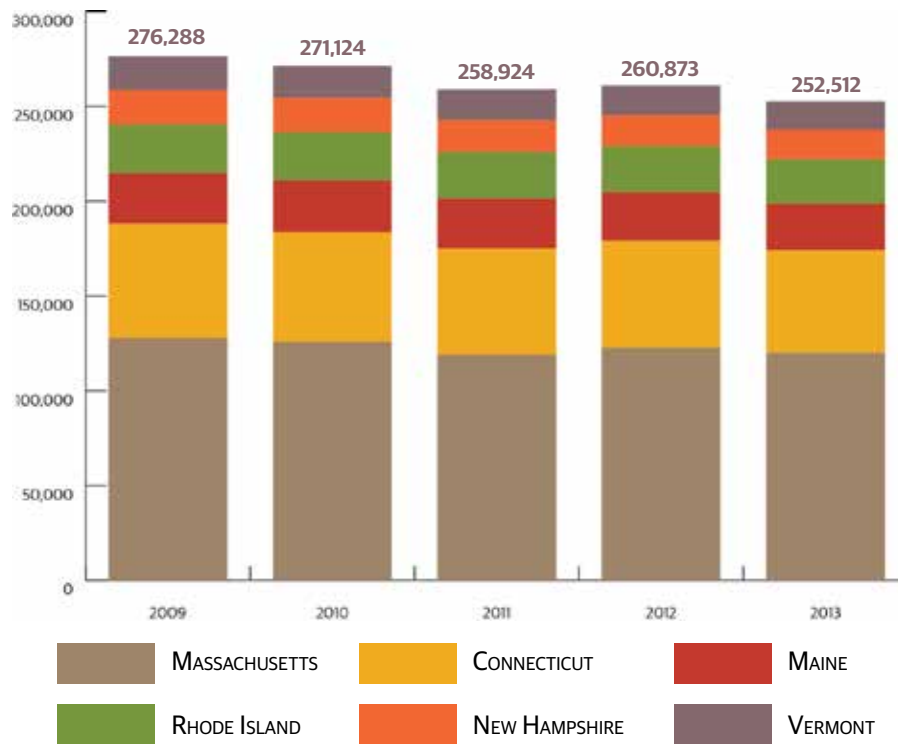
The [Vermont Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children](#) (WIC) is a federal program run by the [Vermont Department of Health](#). It is designed to improve the health status of low income, nutritionally at-risk Vermonters. Although the program is not primarily a food access program, ensuring adequate nutrition among its recipients is key to WIC's efforts to increase the health and well-being of vulnerable individuals and families. Specifically, the program enrolls:

- 🍎 pregnant women (up to six weeks after birth or after pregnancy ends),
- 🍎 breastfeeding women (up to infant's first birthday),
- 🍎 non-breastfeeding postpartum women (up to six months after the birth of an infant or after pregnancy ends),
- 🍎 infants (up to their first birthday), and
- 🍎 children under the age of five.

About 13.5 million Americans are eligible for WIC. About 64% (8.6 million, including about 4.6 million children, 2.0 million infants, and 2.0 million women) of eligible people participated in the program in 2013. National WIC participation has levelled off recently and a few theories have been offered: declining birth rates; a perception that it is easier to acquire SNAP benefits; more generous SNAP benefits compared to WIC; and a declining schedule of benefits for children as they age.¹⁷ WIC participation in New England decreased 8.6% (-23,776) from 2009 to 2013, and Vermont had the highest percentage decrease (-15.2%, -2,660 participants) of any New England state (Figure 4.1.8).

WIC serves 55% of all infants and 40% of children under five in the Vermont.¹⁸ As with eligibility for 3SquaresVT and free school meals, individuals or families are eligible if they have a household income at or below 185% of the federal poverty limit or if they are participating in assisted health programs such as Medicaid or [Dr. Dynasaur](#) (regardless of income). The 2014 income limits were \$2,426 a month for a two-person household or \$3,677 for a family of four.¹⁹ While Vermont's participation rate is much higher than the national average, there is still room for greater rates of participation in the state.

Figure 4.1.8: WIC Participation in New England, 2009-2013



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, WIC Program, www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program.

WIC delivers food benefits through several means. First, the program delivers food two times per month to participants’ residences. Foods included in the deliveries include whole grain bread, peanut butter, canned beans, baby foods, cheeses, eggs, juice, cereal and milk. Some families choose brown rice, soy beverages or tofu options as substitutes for bread, milk, or cheese. These goods are purchased by independent delivery contractors and most approved WIC products are sourced from outside of Vermont. However, some products are sourced from Vermont producers including bread. [La Panciata Bakery](#) in Northfield has created a loaf that meets WIC nutritional criteria and provides this bread to all WIC recipients who receive food deliveries. [Thomas Dairy](#) in Rutland is the largest milk contractor for Vermont WIC, all cheddar cheese is sourced from [Cabot](#), and tofu is sourced from [Vermont Soy](#).

Vermont is the last state in the nation to offer home delivery through WIC.

Currently, Vermont WIC is transitioning toward an electronic card benefit delivery system by the end of 2016. **Since 2009, participants in the WIC program have also received WIC Cash Value Voucher cards that allow them to purchase fruits and vegetables.** The WIC branded card is produced in collaboration with 3SquaresVT, and can be used to purchase fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables at authorized grocery stores and co-ops. Federal law allows farmers market vendors to be authorized to accept these benefits. However, there are significant challenges to doing so, including a federal requirement to authorize and report sales by individual farmers (which necessitates that all farmers have access to their own wireless card readers and support software). Additionally, the allowed food list is not identical to the items allowed by other programs such as the [Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program](#) (FMNP), making the process confusing and onerous for participants and vendors alike. The fruit and vegetable benefits are limited to \$8 for WIC child participants and \$10 for women per month.

Since 1987, low income Vermonters have been getting farmers market produce coupons from the [Vermont Farm to Family Program](#), administered by the [Department for Children and Families](#) (DCF). *Farm To Family* is supported primarily with federal funds. The federal [Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program](#) grant to DCF funds coupons that the Department of Health distributes to WIC participants age six months or older. The Department of Health also provides the coupons to some participants in its [Ladies First Program](#). A separate federal [Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program](#) (SFMNP) supports coupon benefits to Vermonters age 60 or older. [Vermont Community Action Agencies](#) distribute the SFMNP coupons to elderly households, as well as a smaller set of state-funded coupons to low income households ineligible for the federal coupons, such as families whose children are too old for WIC or single adults who are unemployed or have disabilities. All *Farm To Family* coupons are redeemable only for fresh fruits or vegetables sold at participating farmers’ markets.

Farm To Family coupons increase access to locally grown produce for recipients and are an important tool for developing a larger and more diverse group of farmers’ market customers. **In 2013, 17% of the coupon recipients said they had never visited a farmers’ market before, and 71% said they returned to the market to shop after they ran out of coupons.** Because of federal limits on FMNP benefits, recipients get

\$30 in Farm to Family coupons per year. That amount reflects the program's intent not to supplement incomes but rather to provide a catalyst to motivate nutritionally at-risk individuals to "buy local" at farmers' markets and increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Seventy-seven percent of the coupon recipients surveyed by DCF in 2013 reported that the coupons prompted them to eat more fruits and vegetables than usual, and 47% bought a kind of produce they had never tried before.²⁰

According to the most recent DCF report on this program, **2013 Farm to Family coupon redemptions generated \$123,075 in produce sales for 322 participating growers selling at 69 farmers market sites in Vermont. The coupons benefited about 12,500 Vermonters in 4,815 households – 2,114 families that included 2,686 WIC participants, plus 200 Ladies First Program participants, plus 1,498 elderly households and 1,003 other low income households that received state-funded coupons.**²¹ Nationally, \$40 million in federal WIC and Senior FMNP funds were allocated to states in 2013. This was about \$3 million less than in 2009 due to federal funding reductions of recent years. More than 20,000 farmers and 3,000 farmers' markets participated in one or both FMNPs in 2014, and the coupon benefits went to 2.4 million WIC participants and seniors.

Seniors face specific challenges related to food access, including stigma, pride, burdensome applications, and limited mobility. The federal [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program](#) (SFMNP) is administered in Vermont by the [Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living](#) (DAIL), in partnership with DCF, NOFA Vermont, and the [University of Vermont Extension](#). The SFMNP was established as a national pilot in 2001, twelve years after the WIC FMNP began. According to the [National Association of State Departments of Agriculture](#) (NASDA), the SFMNP was "designed to increase the consumption of agriculture commodities by expanding or aiding the development of farmers' markets and by providing fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables, and herbs to low income seniors."²² Over \$21 million in SFMNP funds were awarded to states in 2013, of which Vermont received \$88,476.²³

In Vermont, SFMNP funds pay for the senior *Farm to Family* coupons distributed by Community Action Agencies. They also fund the [Senior Farm Share Program](#), whereby *NOFA Vermont* pairs community supported agriculture (CSA) farms with participating senior housing sites to allow residents of those sites to receive \$50 worth of fresh produce from the farm over a period of up to 10 weeks. **The 2013 SFMNP enabled 870 low income seniors to receive \$43,500 worth of fresh produce grown by 21 CSA farmers. This was 60 fewer "senior shares" than were provided in 2012 due to reductions in federal SFMNP funding.** The 49 senior housing sites were chosen based on the number of eligible residents wanting to participate in this senior farm share program, access to transportation, and proximity to a CSA farm. Arrangements are made to ensure that seniors receive their weekly share of produce varied among sites—seniors traveled to some sites, and others delivered produce to the housing sites. **Vermont, Maine and New Mexico were the only states whose SFMNP included a CSA component.**

Older Americans Act Nutrition Services (OAA Title IIIC)

Established in 1965, the Older Americans Act is the primary vehicle for the delivery of social and nutritional services to Americans aged 60 and older and their caregivers. The program targets this population using two programs: (1) [Congregate Nutrition Services](#) (commonly known as **Senior Meals**) and (2) [Home Delivered Nutrition Services](#) (commonly known as **Meals on Wheels**). Both of these programs provide meals and nutritional services to seniors in a variety of settings, including senior centers, restaurants, and in their homes. Figure 4.1.9 indicates the distribution of these meal sites. In addition to providing meals, both programs include nutrition screening, education, and counseling as appropriate. Through Title III, grants for *Congregate Nutrition Services* and *Home Delivered Nutrition Services* are allocated to individual states and territories by a formula based on their share of the population aged 60 and over. In Vermont, the DAIL distributes these funds to the five [Area Agencies on Aging](#) (AAAs), which in turn contract with various food service providers to prepare and serve or deliver meals within their regions.²⁴

DAIL has included the objectives of (1) expanding the use of locally sourced foods in the Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs and (2) establishing a baseline measure of the use of locally sourced foods in the nutrition programs in their State

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

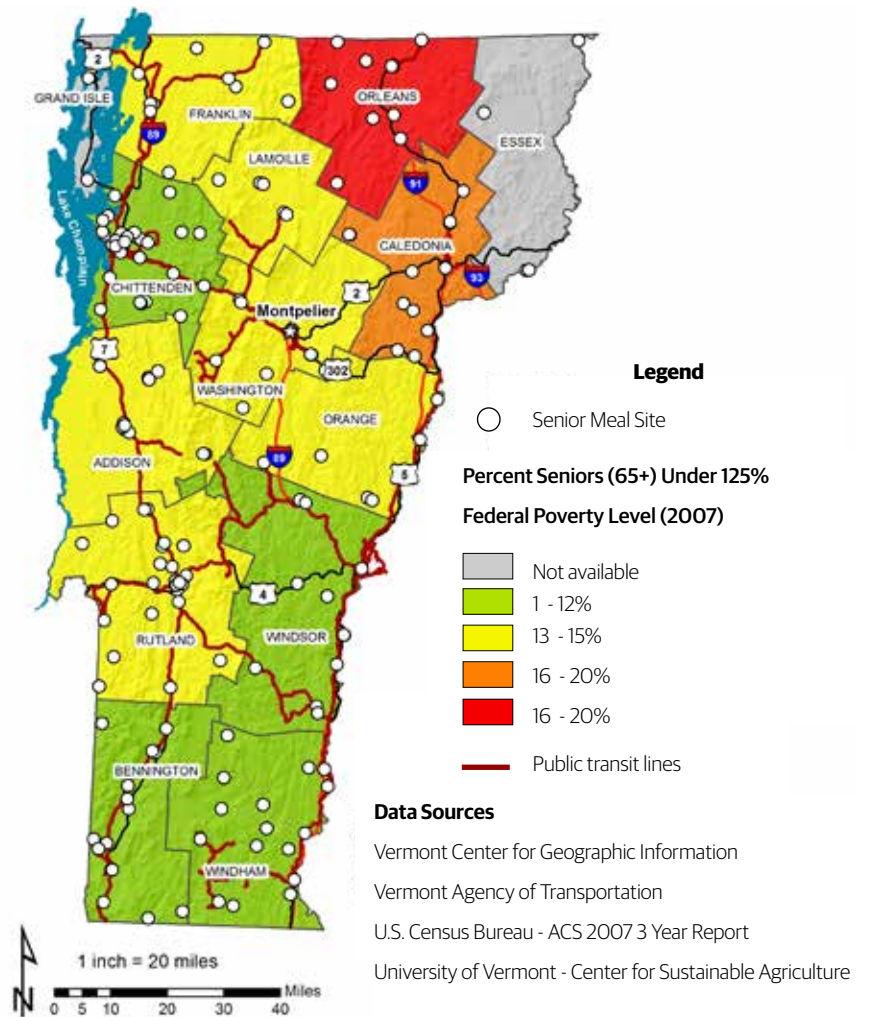


Breakfast at a Senior Meal site.

Plan on Aging for fiscal year 2011-2014. Some agencies, such as the [Champlain Valley Agency on Aging](#), already incorporate a great deal of local food into their services as a result of their partnership with the [Burlington School Food Service](#). The [Northeastern Vermont Area Agency on Aging](#) and the [Central Vermont Council on Aging](#) have been able to successfully integrate local foods into their programs by partnering with local nonprofits such as [Green Mountain Farm-to-School](#), and [UVM Extension](#). Other agencies are just beginning the work to establish new relationships with producers and caterers throughout the state.

Barriers to increasing local foods in senior nutrition programs include: difficulty accessing ordering systems or brokers to help with sourcing local food, lack of meal provider skills in preparing unprocessed or lightly processed local foods, lack of time, high cost, and lack of storage. These barriers are also common in other institutional food settings and in farm to school efforts.

Figure 4.1.9: Food Access – Senior Charitable Meal Sites



☛ Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#) is a drop site delivery service administered by the Vermont Foodbank that distributes nutrition information and 31 pounds of food (such as cereal, juice, and cheese) to eligible participants. This program does not aim to provide all essential foods to participants, but rather, to specifically offer foods that are lacking in the diets of its target population. To enroll in the program, a person must be 60 years old or older and income eligible. In 2014, the income requirements for seniors were \$1,265 per month or less (for one person) or \$1,705 or less (for two people in a household.) Individuals enrolled in SNAP, Medicaid, or the [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) (TANF) program are immediately eligible for CSFP. **Currently, approximately 3,165 people are enrolled in the Vermont CSFP, and the program is seeking new applicants.**²⁵ The program is specifically designed to supplement SNAP benefits, helping recipients access essential nutritious foods that they could not otherwise afford. According to Feeding America, “CSFP is a safety net for specifically targeted populations who fall through the cracks in other food assistance programs.”²⁶ The program also serves as an outlet for commodity agricultural products acquired by the U.S. government. However, services are not available nationwide. Even states that do receive funding may not be able to provide statewide delivery services. In an effort to curb spending and better target seniors though CSFP, the 2014 Farm Bill changed CSFP from a program that served women, children and seniors to a senior’s only program. Still, uncertain funding has been cited as a significant threat to this program.²⁷

☛ The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

The [Emergency Food Assistance Program](#) (TEFAP) is administered by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service, and is targeted to individuals and families that meet state-designated poverty levels. Commodity and other foods are purchased by the USDA, which then typically processes and packages the food before delivering it to state agencies to deliver to families, serve as meals, or otherwise distribute. In Vermont, the [Vermont Foodbank](#) distributes TEFAP food to approved food shelves. The federal program requires that TEFAP food be distributed to income eligible individuals. In Vermont, the program is administered by Child Nutrition Programs at the Vermont Agency of Education.

Table 4.1.3: Federal Food Programs

Program	Eligibility	Description
<p>Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP) www.fns.usda.gov/snap</p> <p>3SquaresVT http://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/3SquaresVT</p>	<p>The program is eligible people of all ages and abilities. The amount of benefits that participants receive varies based on household income and number of dependents. To qualify in 2014, a family of three with a gross income less than \$3,012 per month and net income less than \$1,628 after deductions for costs like housing, utilities, or child care.</p>	<p>Formerly known as Food Stamps, the <i>Supplemental Nutrition Access Program</i> (SNAP), or <i>3SquaresVT</i>, is administered by DCF. Recipients can access support and sign up for the program at one of twelve Economic Services District Offices around the state to receive monthly benefits that can be used to buy a variety of food items.</p>
<p>Child Nutrition Programs www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs</p>	<p>Varies by program, but may include public and nonprofit private schools, residential child care institutions, and emergency shelters.</p>	<p>The list of child nutrition programs in the United States includes the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP), the After School Snack Program, the Special Milk Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. In Vermont, these programs are administered by the Vermont Agency of Education. The National School Lunch and the School Breakfast Programs provide subsidies to public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. These subsidies help the school provide breakfast and lunch to qualifying students for free or at reduced cost. The <i>Special Milk Program</i> provides subsidies for milk and snack purchases to schools (public and qualifying private) and residential child care institutions, provided students are not also enrolled in either the National School Lunch or School Breakfast program. When the school year ends, the <i>Summer Food Service Program for Children (SFSP)</i> is available for those children under 18 who qualify for free or reduced-cost school meals. This program has been in effect since 1968, and is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. Child care centers, outside-of-school-hours care centers, family day care homes, some adult day care centers, emergency shelters, and afterschool care programs, may be eligible for enrollment in CACFP. CACFP provides reimbursement for meals and snacks served in these settings. The Afterschool Meal Program, a component of CACFP, allows any educational enrichment program in an eligible area (an area in the school attendance area of a school where more than 50% of the children qualify for free and reduced lunch) to serve meals and/or snacks to children free of charge. These meals are automatically reimbursed at the maximum reimbursement rate.</p>
<p>Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp</p> <p>Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) www.fns.usda.gov/sfmnp</p>	<p>WIC participants, elderly, and other low income Vermonters qualify for farmers' market produce coupons from the <i>Vermont Farm to Family Program</i>, supported primarily with federal <i>Farmers' Market Nutrition Program</i> (FMNP) funds.</p>	<p>The <i>Vermont Farm to Family</i>, which provides farmers' market coupons, is administered by the Department for Children and Families (DCF). The Department of Health distributes coupons earmarked for WIC participants, and Community Action Agencies distribute the federal senior coupons, plus a smaller set of state-funded coupons available to other low-income households, such as families whose children are too old for WIC or single adults who are unemployed or have disabilities. All <i>Farm to Family</i> coupons are redeemable only for fresh fruits or vegetables sold at participating farmers' markets. The Senior Farm Share Program also pairs CSAs with participating senior housing sites to allow residents of those sites to receive \$50 worth of fresh produce from the farm over a period of up to 10 weeks.</p>

Program	Eligibility	Description
<p>Older Americans Act Nutrition Services (OAA Title III C) www.aoa.gov/AoA_programs/HCLTC/Nutrition_Services</p>	<p>Americans aged 60 and older and their caregivers.</p>	<p>This population is targeted using two programs: (1) <i>Congregate Nutrition Services</i> (commonly known as Senior Meals) and (2) <i>Home Delivered Nutrition Services</i> (commonly known as Meals on Wheels). Both of these programs provide meals and nutritional services to seniors in a variety of settings, including senior centers, restaurants, as well as in their homes. In Vermont, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) distributes these funds to the five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which in turn contract with various food service providers to prepare and serve or deliver meals within their regions.</p>
<p>Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) www.fns.usda.gov/wic</p>	<p>The program enrolls pregnant women (up to six weeks after birth or after pregnancy ends), breastfeeding women (up to infant's first birthday), non-breastfeeding postpartum women (up to six months after the birth of an infant or after pregnancy ends), infants (up to the first birthday), and children under the age of five.</p>	<p>A federal program run by the Vermont Department of Health, WIC is designed to improve the health status of low income, nutritionally at-risk Vermonters. The program provides food supplements by delivering food two times per month to participants' residences. Foods included in the deliveries include whole grain bread, peanut butter, canned beans, baby foods, cheeses, eggs, juice, cereal, and milk. Participants in the WIC program also receive WIC Cash Value Voucher cards that allow them to purchase fruits and vegetables. This card looks like a credit or debit card, and can be used to purchase fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables at authorized grocery stores and co-ops.</p>
<p>Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csfp/</p>	<p>Eligible participants must either be 60 years old or older. Individuals are not allowed to be enrolled in CSFP and WIC simultaneously. Individuals enrolled in SNAP, Medicaid, or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program are immediately eligible for CSFP.</p>	<p>A drop site delivery service administered by the Vermont Foodbank, this program distributes nutrition information and 31 pounds of food (such as cereal, juice, and cheese) to eligible participants. The program is specifically designed to supplement SNAP benefits, helping recipients access essential nutritious foods that they could not otherwise afford.</p>
<p>Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/tefap/</p>	<p>Individuals and families that meet state-designated poverty levels.</p>	<p>Administered by the <i>USDA's Food and Nutrition Service</i>, this program processes and packages food before delivering it to state agencies to deliver to families, serve as meals, or otherwise distribute. In Vermont, the Vermont Foodbank distributes food through TEFAP to food shelves rather than to homes. The federal program requires that food packages delivered through TEFAP be based on income eligibility. Meals prepared and served at food shelves and other meal sites are not based on income eligibility. By eliminating home delivery in Vermont, the <i>Foodbank</i> reduces administrative costs associated with keeping track of recipients' levels of need. In Vermont, the program is administered by the Agency of Human Services, Child Development Division/Donated Food Section.</p>

🍷 Vermont's Charitable Food System

This section presents an overview of the emergency and charitable programs in Vermont. It outlines how food is sourced and distributed through the system, and identifies opportunities for increasing the sourcing and distribution of locally produced foods.

The emergency and charitable food system is primarily composed of private nonprofit organizations. In Vermont, these organizations include the *Vermont Foodbank*, food rescue organizations such as *Willing Hands*, food pantries (also called food shelves), soup kitchens, shelters, communal meal sites, and other organizations that provide free or low-cost food to the public.

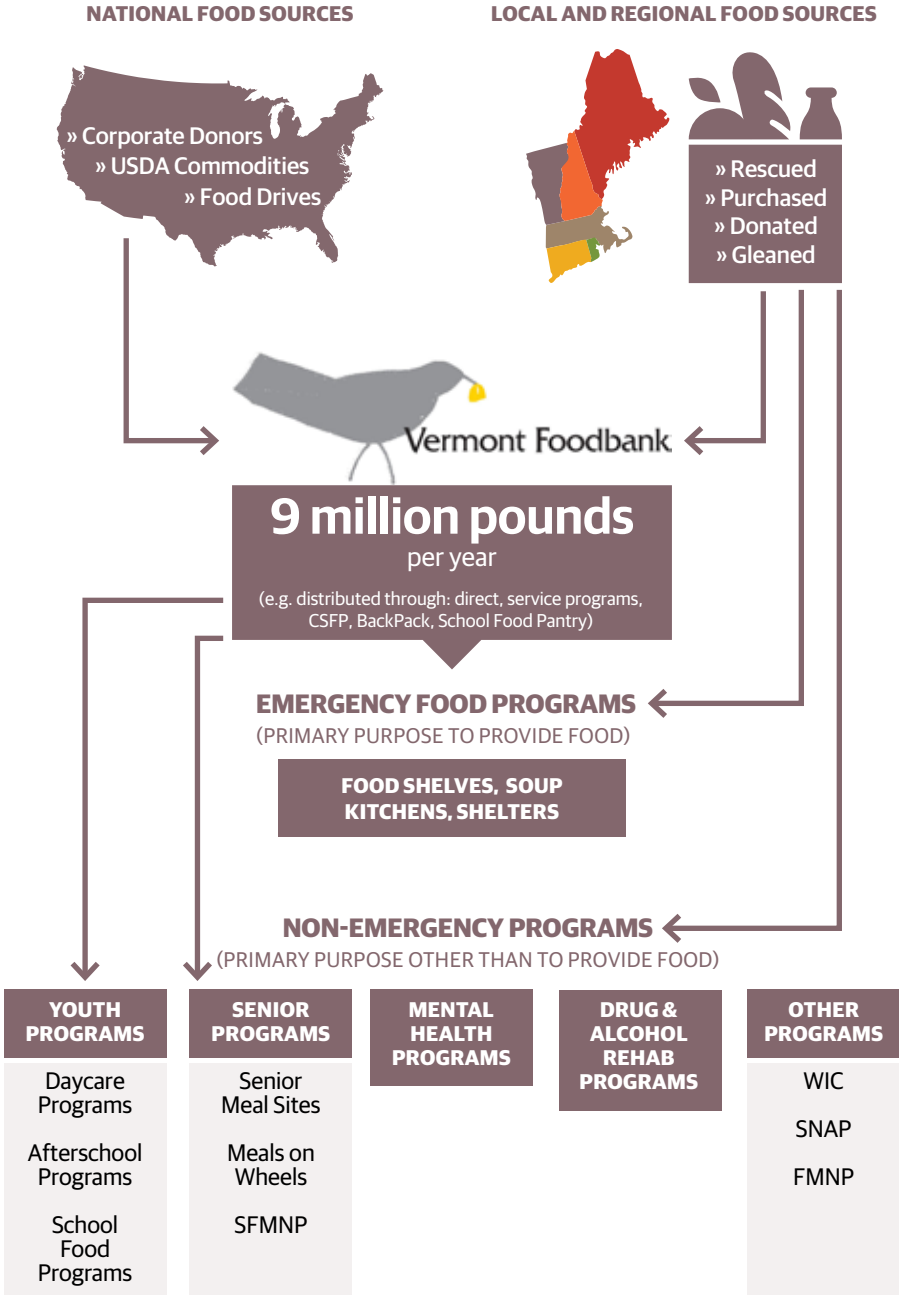
Figure 4.110 illustrates how food flows through this system in Vermont. It distinguishes between charitable food sites that are part of the "emergency" food system (i.e., sites that were specifically intended to provide short-term assistance to people in crises) and nonemergency programs that provide food at low or no cost as part of an on-going program. We have placed quotations around the word *emergency* because, unfortunately,



PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

Volunteers distribute food to needy Vermonters at food pantries across the state.

Figure 4.110: How Food Flows through the Charitable Food System: Sources and Distributors of Free and Reduced Cost Food²⁸



many families and individuals rely on food pantries and community meal sites to meet their daily needs on an ongoing basis.

The Vermont Foodbank

Food banks are charitable organizations that collect and inventory donated, government and purchased food. They then distribute this food to social service organizations that provide the food directly to people in need. The *Vermont Foodbank* is part of the *Feeding America* network, the nation’s largest network of food banks. As part of this network, the Vermont Foodbank sources food from national manufacturers, the USDA, local retailers, grocers, restaurants, bakeries, cafeterias, and farms and distributes it to their 225 partner organizations within Vermont.

The 2014 *Hunger in America* study estimates that approximately 18,700 Vermonters access food from the charitable food system in a typical week and 153,000 people are served annually.²⁹ The data shows that many of the of the people assisted by the *Vermont Foodbank* and partners often live on the edge of their financial resources. This means that people often have to make the terrible choice between eating and meeting other basic needs such as heating their homes or keeping a roof over their heads. Findings include:

- Seventy-six percent of Foodbank clients are estimated to be food insecure (i.e., either low food security or very low food security), while 24% are food secure, according to the federal definition (Table 4.1.4).

Table 4.1.4: Food Security Status of Vermont Foodbank Clients

Food Security	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Food Secure	5,777	24.3%	3.5%
Food Insecure	18,030	75.7%	3.5%
Total (excludes nonresponse)	23,807	100%	

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 75.

- Forty percent have annual incomes of \$1 to \$10,000, and 33 percent have annual incomes of \$10,001 to \$20,000 (Table 4.1.5). Taking into consideration household size, 57% (11,953 households) of client households have incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty level.

Table 4.1.5: Household Annual Income

Annual Income	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
\$0	404	1.9%	1.4%
\$1–\$10,000	8,297	39.9%	11.1%
\$10,001–\$20,000	6,876	33.0%	6.1%
\$20,001–\$30,000	3,207	15.4%	9.2%
More than \$30,000	2,022	9.7%	5.2%
Total (excludes nonresponse)	20,805	100%	

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 74.

- An estimated 63% of households reported that they had to choose between paying for food and utilities in the past 12 months, and 58% of households chose between paying for food and transportation in the past 12 months (Table 4.1.6).

Table 4.1.6: Spending Tradeoffs

Expenses	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Utilities	14,336	63.3%	7.0%
Transportation	13,837	58.4%	4.4%
Medicine/medical care	13,071	55.6%	10.0%
Housing	11,813	52.3%	6.2%
Education	4,790	20.4%	5.1%

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 75.

- 🍏 An estimated 71% of households reported using two or more strategies for getting enough food in the past 12 months, including purchasing cheaper, unhealthy food, eating food past its expiration date, growing food in a garden, pawning or selling personal property, and watering down food or drinks (Table 4.1.7).

Table 4.1.7: Coping Strategies

Strategy	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Purchased inexpensive, unhealthy food	16,425	71.8%	3.5%
Purchased food in dented or damaged packages	12,947	57.7%	4.8%
Received help from family or friends	12,495	53.4%	4.8%
Eaten food past expiration date	12,451	52.6%	8.4%
Grew food in garden	8,590	36.4%	11.8%
Watered down food or drinks	7,265	31.0%	11.6%
Sold or pawned personal property	5,884	25.3%	3.9%

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 77.

- 🍏 Many Foodbank clients suffer from health problems or have a hard time paying medical bills. Statistics for Vermont tend to be lower than the national average. For example, *Feeding America* reports that nationally 58% of households have a member with high blood pressure and 33% have a member with diabetes, whereas Vermont data shows that about 46% of client households have a member with high blood pressure and 23% have a member with diabetes. However, health problems with Foodbank clients may be more pronounced than for the general Vermont population. For example, the number of Vermonters with diabetes (55,000) is equal to 8.8% of Vermont’s population. In comparison, 23% of Foodbank clients had a household member with diabetes (Table 4.1.8, Table 4.1.9).

Table 4.1.8: Health Status of Respondent

Status	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Excellent	3,554	15.4%	6.2%
Very Good	4,096	17.8%	5.1%
Good	6,746	29.3%	7.3%
Fair	5,185	22.5%	5.9%
Poor	3,437	14.9%	5.3%

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 73.

Table 4.1.9: Health Status of Household

Status	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Household member in poor health	4,003	18.1%	5.6%
Household member with diabetes	5,378	23.0%	8.1%
Household member with high blood pressure	10,466	45.7%	17.5%
Household: no member has health insurance	2,443	10.1%	3.7%
Household with unpaid medical bills	12,344	52.2%	11.8%

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 73.

- 🍏 Foodbank clients identified fresh fruits and vegetables as the top product category that they wanted but were currently unable to receive at their program location, followed by dairy products and proteins (Table 4.1.10).³⁰

Table 4.1.10: Top Products Desired by Clients but Not Currently Receiving at Program

Strategy	Count	Estimate	Margin of Error
Fresh fruits and vegetables	14,781	64.8%	6.6%
Dairy products such as milk, cheese, or yogurt	11,067	48.5%	9.1%
Protein food items like meat	10,223	44.8%	7.1%
Non-food items like shampoo, soap, or diapers	4,050	17.8%	3.2%
Other foods or products	2,918	12.8%	1.7%
Beverages such as water or juice	2,773	12.2%	6.2%
Grains such as bread or pasta	2,528	11.1%	4.7%
Nothing	2,262	9.9%	2.4%
This is my first time coming to this program	1,888	8.3%	1.8%

Source: Feeding America, Hunger in America 2014: Vermont, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 77.

The Vermont Foodbank’s 225 partners include food shelves and food pantries, community meal sites, youth programs and shelters. The Foodbank also distributes food for seniors through the [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#) (CSFP) to specific drop-off sites. Twenty-four Vermont schools also participate in the Foodbank’s [Backpack Program](#), through which teachers place nonperishable food in backpacks for participating children to take home to ensure that they have food over the weekend.

In 2014, the Vermont Foodbank distributed nearly 9 million pounds of food through these and other various programs.³¹

The *Vermont Foodbank* currently has three programs that specifically focus on getting locally produced food to people in need.

- 🍏 The [Gleaning Program](#) coordinates gleaning efforts in two regions of the state. **In 2014, the Foodbank gleaning program distributed**



Young people preparing meals for the Vermont Foodbank.

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

320,000 pounds of fresh produce gleaned or donated from 80 farms to charitable food sites throughout the state.

- 🍏 [Pick For Your Neighbor](#) is a collaborative program between the Vermont Foodbank, Woodchuck Hard Cider and U-pick apple orchards around the state, where customers at participating orchards are encouraged to pick and purchase extra apples to be integrated into the Vermont Foodbank inventory and distribution network.
- 🍏 [VT Fresh](#) is a nutrition education program run at Foodbank network partner food shelves aimed at increasing access and improving availability of fresh fruits and vegetables at community food shelves. In 2014, the Vermont Foodbank piloted this program at 11 food shelves. In 2015, it will expand to 15 sites total.

In addition, the Foodbank’s [Community Kitchen Academy](#) (CKA) program prepares underemployed and unemployed Vermonters for a career in the food service industry and lifelong learning through an intensive program of culinary skills development, career readiness, and job placement. Students actively develop and apply new skills by creating wholesome meals for those at risk of hunger using food that has been gathered from

within our communities that may otherwise go to waste. In addition to the training, CKA performs another important function: rescuing produce, meat, and other foods that would otherwise be wasted from grocery stores, restaurants, local farms, and food service companies. Students work with instructors to transform this “rescued” food and create meals that are then vacuum sealed, frozen, and distributed through food shelves. These nutritious, easy to prepare meals bring important and highly desirable food groups like protein, dairy, and vegetables into food shelves. CKA has been in operation since 2009, first in partnership with the *Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf* in Burlington and now also with *Capstone Community Action* (formerly CVCAC) in Barre.

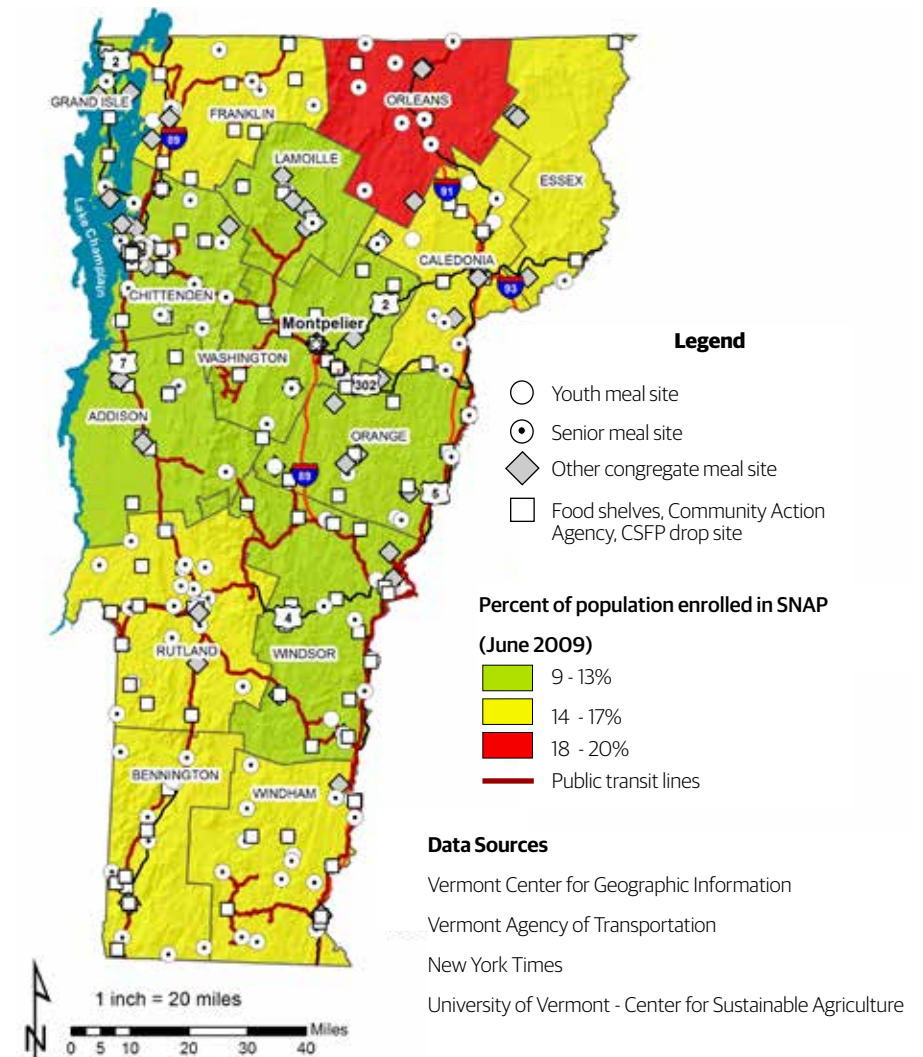
Because the Foodbank is the primary supplier of food to Vermont’s charitable food system, where the Foodbank chooses to source its food has a significant impact on the access and availability of local foods for food-insecure families and individuals in Vermont. By establishing the preceding programs, the Foodbank has made a commitment to increase the amount of locally produced foods it provides to its network partners and the Vermonters in need of food help.

Emergency and Public Charitable Food Distribution Sites: Food Shelves, Soup Kitchens and Community Meal Sites

Charitable food distribution sites can be divided into two categories. The first category, **food shelves** (also called **food pantries**), provide groceries for people to take and consume at home. The second category, **soup kitchens** and other types of **community meal sites**, provide prepared meals for people to eat in group settings on site. These charitable food distribution sites are usually community-based programs funded through a variety of mechanisms, often run by volunteers through faith-based organizations. Because community meal sites can also provide a place for people to be in the company of others, some people may use these sites to socialize or for reasons other than food insecurity. However, such community meal sites still play an important role in providing food to many people in need. This is especially true for seniors. In 2008, more than 20% of the meals served at community meal sites (as defined here) in Vermont went to people aged 65 or older.³²

Vermont Foodbank partners with 225 agencies, many of which are listed on their website: www.vtfoodbank.org/FindFoodShelf/AgencyLocator.aspx.³³

Figure 4.1.11: Food Access - Charitable Food Sites



About 27% of agencies are faith-based organizations, other hosts include community action agencies, local community groups, town clerks, and family centers or similar organizations.³⁴ Although these organizations vary widely in terms of their missions, structure and capacity, all charitable food sites rely heavily on volunteers and donations of goods and in-kind services from the surrounding community. The diversity among

Table 4.1.11: Sources of Food Distributed by Charitable Food Sites, 2009

Sources of Food	Foodshelves	Community Meal Sites
Average percentage of food from Foodbank	70.4%	36.8%
Median percentage of food from Foodbank	80.0%	30.0%
Percentage of programs receiving food from:		
Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)	34.7%	27.3%
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP/EFAP)	56.8%	25.0%
Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)	0.9%	3.2%
Church or religious organizations	80.0%	57.1%
Local merchant of farmer donations	73.8%	74.3%
Local food drives	75.5%	25.7%
Food purchased by agency	68.6%	77.1%
Other	18.2%	31.4%
Sample Size	131	40

the charitable sites and their reliance on volunteer staff is reflected in their eligibility requirements and their schedules. Some sites have a policy of serving anyone who walks through their doors, whereas other sites serve only people who live within their community. Some sites are open five days per week; others are open only once a month. Figure 4.1.11 shows the location of community meals sites, food shelves, and CSFP drop sites for each county in relation to the percentage of the population enrolled in the SNAP program. Food pantries and community meal sites provide food and/or a place to eat for a significant portion of Vermont’s population. In 2008, approximately 31,000 people or 5% of Vermont’s population visited a food shelf or community meal site in a typical month. That same year, the total value of food provided through food pantries and community meal sites in Vermont amounted to approximately \$11 million dollars (based on \$9.5 million for the total value provided through food shelves and \$1.7 million through community meal sites).³⁵

Table 4.1.12: Agency Obstacles to Distribution of Healthier Food

Obstacles	Count	Percent
Too expensive to purchase healthier food	180	70.8%
Client reasons (unwillingness to eat, inability to store, etc.)	147	58.9%
Inability to obtain healthier foods from other donors/food sources	115	44.7%
Inability to store/handle healthier foods	57	23.6%
Healthier food not a priority	17	7.0%
Lack of knowledge about healthier foods	2	0.8%

Source: Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014: Vermont*, www.vtfoodbank.org/About/AboutHunger, page 77.

The majority of the charitable food sites in Vermont belong to the *Vermont Foodbank* network and source the bulk of the food they serve from the Foodbank: **70.4% of the food provided by pantries, and 36.8% of the food served by community kitchens comes from the Vermont Foodbank** (Table 4.1.11).³⁶ However, in addition to procuring food from the Foodbank, charitable food sites in Vermont also use a number of other sources, including purchasing food directly. Of *Vermont Foodbank* partners that participated in the *Hunger in America 2014* survey, a significant percentage (over 68% of the food pantries surveyed, and over 77% of the community meal sites) make direct purchases of food in addition to receiving food from the Foodbank), and donors. Much of the food that these organizations purchase tends to be produce, dairy products, and meats – items that are also produced by Vermont farmers and could be sourced in Vermont. In a 2010 survey of *Vermont Foodbank* partners, 77.1% of the community meal sites purchased fresh fruits and vegetables; 47.3% of the pantries and 80.0% of the meal sites purchased beef, pork, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts; and 6.7% of the pantries and 88.6% of the meal sites purchased milk, yogurt, and cheese.³⁷

Many charitable sites wish to receive more of these products. Specifically, 45.4% of the pantries and 44.7% of the meal sites in the Feeding America survey reported needing more fresh fruits and vegetables; 63.8% of the pantries and 38.1% of the meal sites needed more milk, yogurt, and cheese.³⁸ Both are categories of food that are produced in abundance by Vermont farmers. These data were corroborated in a survey conducted by the *Vermont Foodbank* to assess interest in locally sourced foods. Responding partners of the *Vermont Foodbank* indicated an urgent need for all nutrient-dense foods, with 65% of the respondents stating that their greatest need is for protein (i.e., meat, dairy products, eggs). The greatest demand in general is for meat. The majority (84%) of the responding food sites were interested in increasing the amount of meat they receive from the Foodbank. Sites were asked to rank their interest in various types of meat (i.e., beef, chicken, pork, wild game and lamb or goat). Of these types of meat, sites showed the greatest interest in obtaining more chicken and beef and were willing to pay more for beef than for chicken.

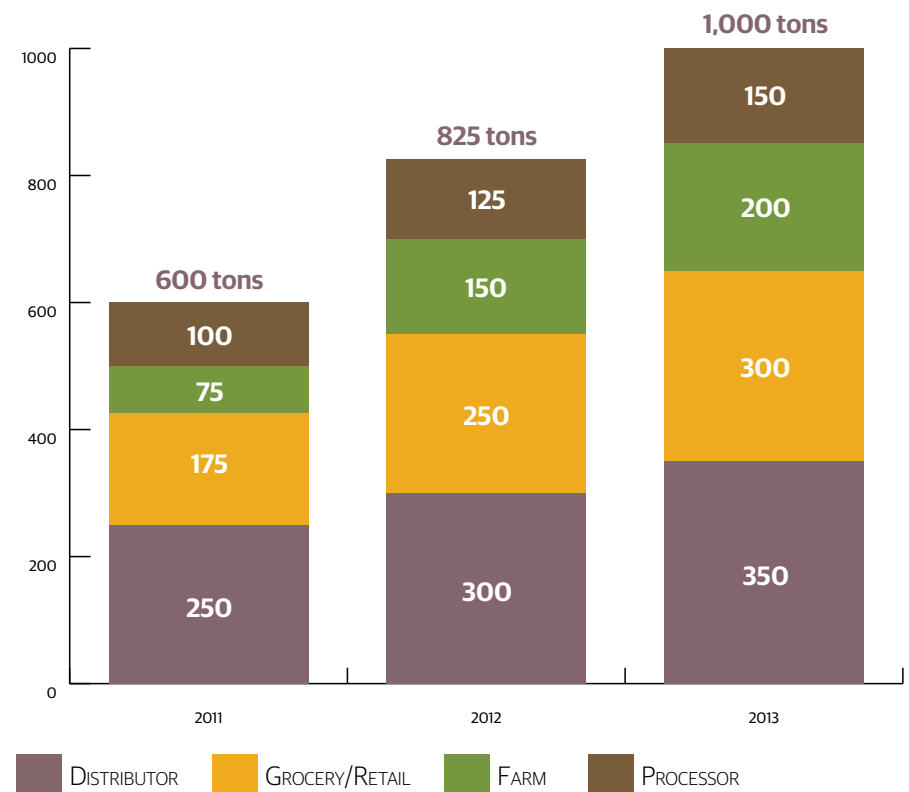
The fact that charitable food sites purchase some of the food they provide, along with their desire to source more fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy products presents an opportunity for introducing more locally produced nutrient-dense food into the charitable food system. Direct from farm purchases would probably have to be subsidized in some manner to be affordable for most charitable sites. As such, these sales cannot be relied on by any individual farm for the bulk of their profit, but they may provide a reliable market, especially for beginning farmers. A supplemental food source created by farm surplus management programs (i.e., gleaning programs and *Salvation Farms'* [Vermont Commodity Program](#)) could alleviate the financial obstacle for these sites.

However, to increase distribution of fresh produce and meat at charitable food sites in Vermont, more on-site storage capacity is needed because **many charitable food sites lack sufficient cold storage space.** Many food shelves and community meal sites are open only once a week or less, yet few have the capacity to store fresh food. This lack of cold storage capacity can prevent those who manage these sites from accepting fresh perishable foods from gleaning programs and other donations. Half the respondents to the *Vermont Foodbank* survey do not have access to a refrigerator or freezer, and 69% of the respondents identified cold storage as the greatest barrier to providing more fresh meat and produce to their clients. The remedy this challenge,

the Foodbank is doing more direct distribution and "just-in-time" deliveries. *Salvation Farms'* Vermont Commodity Program is exploring other means to make surplus farm foods shelf stable so that perishability and freezer capacity can be reduced as an obstacle.

Even relatively small investments in storage and processing infrastructure can make a significant difference in an organization's ability to provide local food. The Vermont Foodbank provides mini-grants to network partners to purchase refrigerators or processing equipment so that they are better able to handle and distribute fresh foods.

Figure 4.1.12: Food Rescue from Vermont Sources, 2011-2013



Source: Vermont Foodbank; depicted as a population indicator under Goal 14: www.vtfoodatlas.com/getting-to-2020/14-nutrient-management.

Table 4.113: Vermont’s Charitable Food System

Program	Eligibility	Description
<p>Vermont Foodbank</p>	<p><i>Vermont Foodbank</i> partners, including food shelves and food pantries, community meal sites, after-school programs, shelters, and rehabilitation centers.</p>	<p>The <i>Vermont Foodbank</i> sources food from national manufacturers, the U.S. commodity program, local retailers, grocers, restaurants, bakeries, cafeterias, and farms and distributes it to their 280 partner organizations within Vermont. The <i>Foodbank</i> also distributes food for seniors and other special populations to specific drop-off sites, and to communities that are limited or lacking in charitable distribution sites directly. 24 Vermont schools also participate in the Backpack Program, through which teachers place nonperishable food in backpacks for children to take home to ensure that they have food over the weekend. The <i>Vermont Foodbank</i> currently has three programs that specifically focus on getting locally produced food to people in need — namely the Gleaning Program, Pick For Your Neighbor, and VT Fresh.</p>
<p>Emergency and Public Charitable Food Distribution Sites: Food Shelves, Soup Kitchens, and Community Meal Sites</p>	<p>Food insecure Vermonters.</p>	<p>Charitable food distribution sites are divided into two categories. The first category, food shelves (also called food pantries), provide groceries for people to take and consume at home. The second category, soup kitchens and other types of community meal sites, provide prepared meals for people to eat in group settings on site. These charitable food distribution sites are usually community-based programs funded through a variety of mechanisms, often run by volunteers through faith-based organizations. Vermont has at least 135 food shelves and 35 community food sites, or 170 charitable distribution sites that are free, locally organized, and open to the public. Many of these (27%) are operated by faith-based organizations. Other hosts include local agencies, town clerks, and family centers or similar organizations.</p>
<p>Food Rescue (multiple organizations)</p>	<p>Food insecure Vermonters.</p>	<p>Food rescue is the act of retrieving safe, edible food that would otherwise go to waste.²⁴ It may include food that has passed its “sell by” date, food that has been over-ordered by restaurants, or produce with cosmetic imperfections. Businesses that donate food to food rescue programs may receive tax credits for their donations, and they are protected from liability lawsuits as a result of the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.</p>

Many organizations, including the *Vermont Foodbank* and the [Vermont Farm to School Network](#) looking at and engaging in the creative and shared use of community/regional infrastructure assets through hiring, renting, and partnerships. An inventory and assessment still needs to be conducted to determine which of these sites would be appropriate partners for charitable food providers or farm to school programs.

Food Rescue Programs

Food rescue is the act of retrieving safe, edible food that would otherwise go to waste.³⁹ It may include food that has passed its “sell by” date, food that has been over-ordered by restaurants, or edible produce that remains unmarketed. Businesses that make food available to food rescue programs may receive tax credits for their donations, and they are protected from liability lawsuits as a result of the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.⁴⁰ The Vermont Foodbank estimates that it rescued 600 tons of close-to-code, perishable, and shelf-stable food from Vermont farms, restaurants, stores, bakeries, cafeterias, food manufacturers, and distributors in 2011; 825 tons in 2012; and 1,000 tons in 2013 (Figure 4.1.12).

[Willing Hands](#) is a nonprofit charitable organization that rescues and distributes food throughout the Upper Valley Region of Vermont and New Hampshire. It was founded in 2004 by an employee of the [Hanover Coop Food Store](#) who was dismayed by the amount of good quality produce that was being thrown into the dumpster. Working in conjunction with the Coop, he began a program to recover this food and distribute it to people in need.

Since then, *Willing Hands* has developed an efficient and effective system for the recovery and delivery of surplus healthy food throughout our region. The [Coop Food Stores](#) have also developed an impressive sustainability program that includes separating culled food suitable for human consumption from scraps to be used by pig farmers and composters.

These days *Willing Hands* collects food from over 30 donors including retail and wholesale grocers, local farms and bakers. They distribute 3-4 tons of produce every week, free of charge and year ‘round to about 55 nonprofit organizations serving neighbors in need in the Upper Valley.

Willing Hands Farm Project—their one-acre organic garden gleaning program—is run by teams of volunteers. In 2013, this program alone brought in 35,000 pounds of farm-fresh produce. *Willing Hands* also provides opportunities for food recipients to learn ways to prepare the fruit and vegetables that they receive, through simple recipes, taste-testings and cooking workshops.

Ninety-five percent of the food that *Willing Hands* distributes is unprocessed fruits and vegetables. In 2013, they delivered approximately 189 tons of fruit, vegetables, bread, milk, and frozen ground meat to its network of charitable food sites. Of this, 35.4 tons were donated by local farms. *Willing Hands* also picked up and distributed 454 trays of surplus prepared food donated by the kitchen at a local retirement community.

With a budget of about \$120,000 and a full time equivalent staff of two people including four part-time drivers, *Willing Hands* relies on the dedication and hard work of its volunteers. Their model of food recovery and distribution with a local/regional focus could be replicated by others throughout New England and beyond.⁴¹

It is important to note that both the Vermont Foodbank and Willing Hands rely on rescued foods from local grocers, wholesalers, processors, and restaurants, for the majority of the food that they distribute to people in need in the state.

Although not all of these foods may have been raised by Vermont farmers, they are coming from Vermont businesses, and they represent a year-round supply of food that would otherwise go to waste.

🍷 Community Food Security Programs

This section presents an overview of the food security programs that strengthen a community's capacity to meet their own food needs. It highlights efforts that work to build the capacity of Vermont communities to grow, access, and utilize food for themselves.

Although there will always be a need for the social safety net provided by supplemental assistance programs and the charitable food system, the long-term goal of a truly secure food system in Vermont is to maximize the ability of all of our residents to purchase or cultivate food for themselves whenever possible. Community food security is defined as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.”⁴² **To address hunger and malnutrition, the community food security framework uses a whole systems approach and emphasizes building a community's resources to meet its own food needs.**⁴³

In contrast to the charitable system's necessary approach of providing free and low-cost food to people in need, community food security programs seek to build capacity and infrastructure to enable individuals and communities to grow, access, and prepare fresh, nutritious foods for themselves in a long-term sustainable manner. Using local resources, leadership, and volunteers, community food security stresses collaboration and partnership across often disconnected sectors. For example, public health employees, grassroots organizations, farmers' market organizations and youth programs can work together on common projects related to increasing food access.

🍷 Gleaning Programs

Gleaning refers specifically to the act of gathering produce that is left over from farmers' fields after the commercial harvest, capturing culls from wash/pack-houses and storage facilities year round, and from farmers markets or CSA distribution leftovers. Gleaning is defined broadly to encompass all food that is harvested, rescued, or donated directly from Vermont farms, orchards, farmers' markets, home gardens, and “Grow a Row” projects or similar programs for the purpose of providing fresh, wholesome, locally produced food options to sites service food- and/or nutritionally-insecure individuals.

Gleaning in Vermont

Gleaning, the act of harvesting leftover produce from farm fields, has a rich history going back to the Old Testament, which advised leaving the corners of fields for the poor and needy to harvest. Today, volunteers salvage excess, un-marketed produce for donation to food- and nutritionally-insecure Vermonters at food shelves/pantries, retirement communities, pre-schools and after school programs, senior meals, and shelters.



Volunteers harvesting potatoes for the Vermont Foodbank Gleaning Program.

The first gleaning program in Vermont started at the *Intervale Center* as part of the Healthy Cities Program that engaged at-risk-youth in production farming, marketing, and some gleaning. Shortly after (2004), *Salvation Farms* was born out of a project at *Pete's Greens* to serve the Lamoille Valley area under the fiscal umbrella of *NOFA Vermont*.

In 2008, *Salvation Farms* founder Theresa Snow joined the *Vermont Foodbank* to integrate their gleaning program into Vermont's statewide emergency food organization. This integration was successful and was followed by the development of an additional gleaning initiative to serve the Brattleboro area.

In 2011, *Salvation Farms* became an independent organization once again to support the development and scaling up of regionally-based gleaning programs by spreading their replicable gleaning model to bring fresh produce to any array of food sites in Vermont. Rather than let slightly blemished, but perfectly edible food rot in the field, gleaners across the state ensure that food insecure Vermonters have access to nutritionally dense, farm-fresh foods.

Although numerous farmers and backyard and community gardeners donate extra produce to food access sites around Vermont directly on an informal basis, seven organizations (the *Intervale Center*, *Salvation Farms*, *Rutland Area Farm and Food Link* (RAFFL), *Willing Hands*, the *Vermont Foodbank*, *Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects* (HOPE), and *Community Harvest of Central Vermont*) coordinate gleaning in Vermont at varying levels. Combined, these organizations gleaned and donated over 307 tons of fresh produce to 247 food pantries, communal meal sites, senior centers, after-school programs, group homes, and shelters in 2009.^{44, 45} **In 2013, just less than 400,000 pounds (200 tons) of Vermont grown crops were gleaned from farms in seven regions around the state with the help of more than 1,000 volunteers.**

The *Vermont Gleaning Collective*, launched in 2013 by *Salvation Farms*, is currently made up of the five organizations that organize regionally-based gleaning activities. *Salvation Farms* and the Collective have established best practices for the gleaning, collection, and distribution of unmarketed farm-raised crops. As envisioned, the Collective will act as a collective impact network offering statewide coverage of connected but independently organized, regionally-based, and professionally coordinated gleaning services. *Salvation Farms* has created an online platform that has

streamlined and standardized volunteer registration process, gleaning coordination and communication, and data tracking. They have also created an operational manual and are providing direct technical assistance and trainings to members of the Vermont Gleaning Collective.

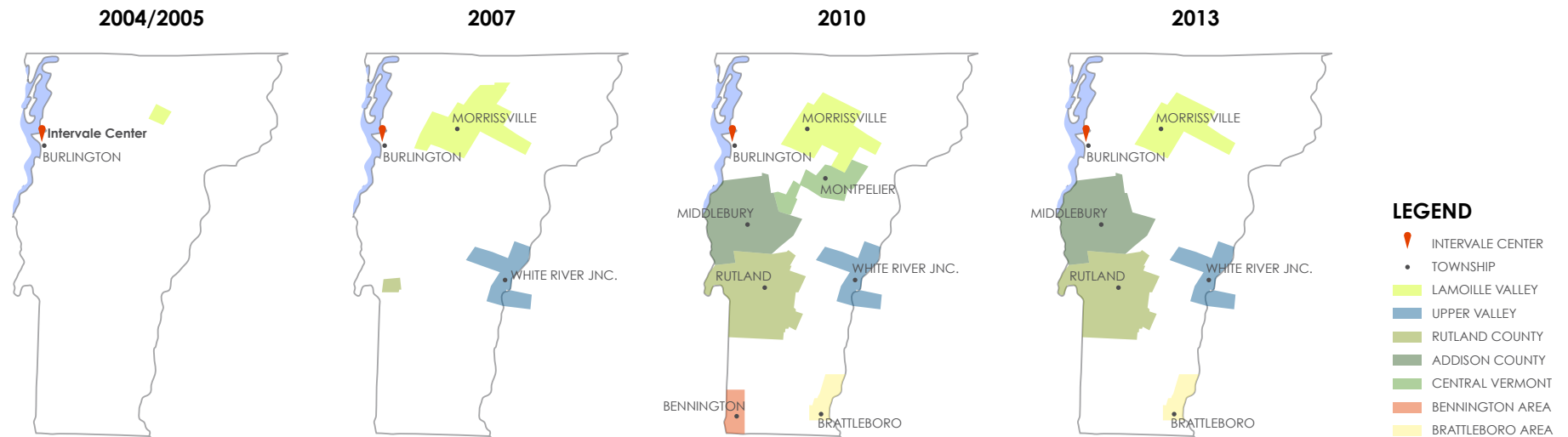
The Lamoille Valley, Central Vermont/Washington County, the Greater Brattleboro area, Chittenden County, the Upper Valley, and Rutland and Addison Counties all have professionally coordinated gleaning programs (Figure 4.13). **There are currently no coordinated programs in Bennington, Essex, or parts of Orange County.** Franklin and Grand Isle counties will begin



Gleaned lettuce labeled with the farm where it came from.

PHOTO CREDIT: Salvation Farms

Figure 4.13: The Growth of Gleaning Programs in Vermont



Source: Salvation Farms.

gleaning with the support of Salvation Farms and the Vermont Gleaning Collective in 2015. In addition to supporting Collective members, Salvation Farms offers gleaning coordination in areas of Vermont where gleaning gaps currently exist.

Gaps in professional gleaning programs is often due to a lack of funding for coordinators and regionally-based lead organizations to house gleaning programs, and not to a lack of interest on the part of either farmers or charitable distribution sites, or to a lack of need on the part of residents. Because gleaning efforts involve extensive and challenging scheduling, logistical management, and organizing of volunteers to ensure that good-quality produce makes it to its destination while it is fresh, gleaning programs are best managed by paid staff. **To expand gleaning in Vermont, gleaning leaders efforts strongly believe that regional coordinator positions need to be valued and funded throughout the state.**

Farm to School Programs

Farm to school programs (FTS) strengthen communities' capacity to feed themselves by (1) building direct relationships between schools and farms and (2) educating children about where food comes from, how to prepare fresh whole foods, and how to make healthy choices. Since all public school children and youth have access to school meals, integrating local food into these meals is an excellent opportunity to increase local food consumption among food-insecure children in Vermont while providing an additional commercial market for farmers. In 2006, Vermont's legislature passed the Rozo McLaughlin Farm-to-School Act (Act 145). This program provides grants and technical assistance for schools to purchase food from neighboring farms and incorporate education about agriculture and nutrition into their curricula. Since the passing of Act 145, the VAAFM's Farm to School grant program has provided \$380,000 to schools and school districts to plan or implement Farm-to-School programs and \$60,000 to [Vermont Food Education Every Day](#) (Vermont FEED) and other organizations to provide technical assistance to schools. To date, 44 schools and school districts have received funding through this program. Currently, at least 16 of the 44 schools receiving Farm to School grants have 50% or more of their students receiving free or reduced-price school meals. There is also a limited amount of funding available for equipment through the Vermont Agency of Education.

Regional and district-level FTS programs have emerged to support all levels of FTS activities in schools. Regional programs include:

- 🍏 [Green Mountain Farm-to-School](#) (serving 21 schools in the Northeast Kingdom);
- 🍏 [Upper Valley Farm to School](#) (serving Windsor, Orange, and Grafton Counties);
- 🍏 [Rutland Area Farm and Food Link](#) (RAFFL, Rutland County, Addison County);
- 🍏 [Addison Country Relocalization Network](#) (ACORN);
- 🍏 [Mad River Localvores](#) (Washington County);
- 🍏 [Food Connects](#) (in Windom County).

Vermont FEED has been able to provide professional development for teachers and school nutrition staff and support for Farm to School initiatives to more than 75 schools throughout the state. There are also a few independent Farm to School projects that are not affiliated with any of the preceding programs. Over 100 FTS projects are either in planning or implementation stages in Vermont's schools.

Data from the recently available [Farm to School Census](#) shows that the six New England states rank in the top ten for school districts that offer farm to school activities.

In New England, the most commonly mentioned farm to school activities were serving local food, promoting local foods in general, and holding taste tests of products from school gardens. Vermont had a higher percentage of school districts that had edible gardens or orchards and served food from these gardens or orchards than the rest of New England. Farmer visits and farm to school activities integrated into school curriculum had lower responses.

Table 4.1.14: Percentage of School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities (2011-2012)

State	Percent of Responding Districts That Had Farm to School Activities in SY 2011-2012	National Rank
Rhode Island	97.1%	2
Vermont	91.0%	5
Maine	78.0%	6
New Hampshire	74.4%	7
Massachusetts	71.3%	8
Connecticut	71.3%	10

Source: Vermont Food Atlas, Goal 10, www.vtfoodatlas.com/getting-to-2020/10-food-literacy.

The Farm to School Census counted the number of school districts that reported buying local food products in the 2011-2012 school year. For the 6 New England states, local fruits and vegetables were the most commonly purchased items. Respondents were also asked to identify food categories they “Would like to buy.” Meat, grains/flour, and beans/seeds/nuts were commonly mentioned.

The Farm to School Census also provides a national dataset for estimating local food purchases at K-12 schools in the 2011-12 school year. Based on this source, Vermont schools spent 16.2% of their food budgets on local foods. This ranks Vermont 11th in the country and the highest ranking state in New England.

As with the charitable food system, limited food storage and processing capacity present challenges for schools that want to integrate local food into their menus. Contemporary school kitchens are not designed to cook large amounts of whole foods; rather they have been designed to warm and serve processed and prepared foods. Many Farm to School grant recipients have needed to invest in new equipment to process and store local products. When these investments have been possible, they have resulted in improved diet-related behavior among students. For example, [Woodstock Union High and Middle Schools](#) reported an increase in lunch participation from 50% to 65% of students.⁴⁶ Adding salad bars,

in particular, has been an effective way to get students to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and it is relatively easy to integrate local food into salads.

Table 4.1.15: Local Food Purchases as a Percentage of Total Food Purchases for New England K-12 Schools, 2011-2012

State	Local Food Purchases as a Percentage of Total Food Purchases	National Rank
Vermont	\$1,380,280 / \$8,518,232 = 16.2%	11
Massachusetts	\$8,894,786 / \$55,894,581 = 15.9%	12
Rhode Island	\$1,260,614 / \$11,656,730 = 10.8%	29
Connecticut	\$3,352,522 / \$32,015,039 = 10.5%	32
Maine	\$1,530,225 / \$27,125,683 = 5.6%	43
New Hampshire	\$995,630 / \$57,406,404 = 1.7%	48

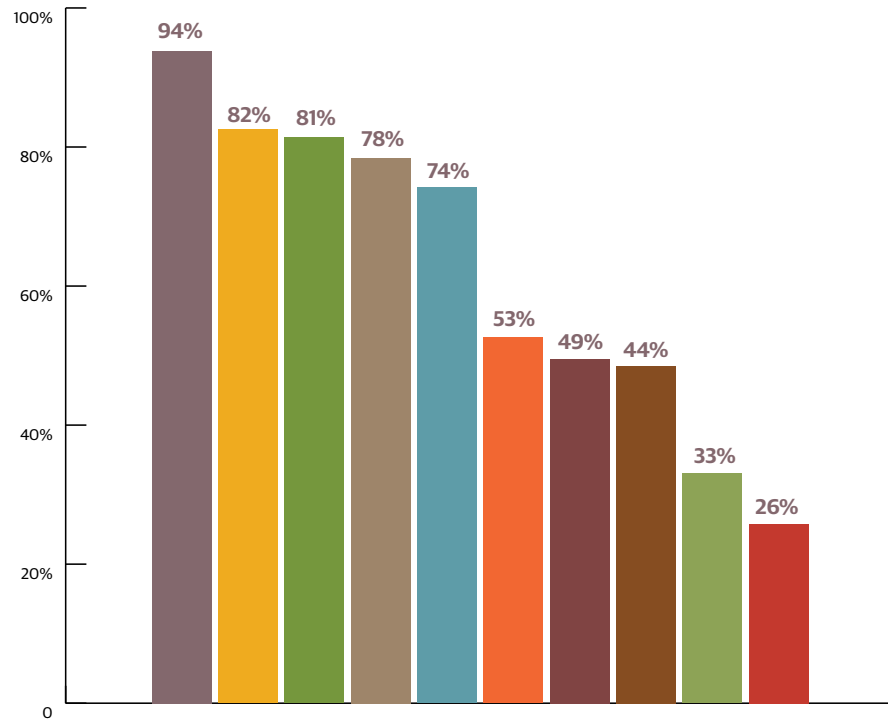
Source: Vermont Food Atlas, Goal 2, www.vtfoodatlas.com/getting-to-2020/2-institutional-consumption.

Vermont FEED conducted a pilot study to create opportunities for Vermont growers and processors by lightly processing and freezing Vermont vegetables and fruits for use later in the school year.⁴⁷ While pricing was challenging for schools and their farm suppliers, food processing for schools (vegetables, fruits, and ground beef) continues to be pursued as a means to get more local food into schools in the form and price points they need. By transitioning away from products that Vermont producers cannot produce to those they can, such as lightly processed vegetables or ground beef, school food services can effectively increase the market potential for Vermont farmers.⁴⁸

Although there is potential to increase food access and the use of local products in Vermont schools, and simultaneously grow the market for local food producers, processors and distributors, the cost of programs like those mentioned is a significant barrier. Funding is needed to complete assessments of school infrastructure, provide school kitchens with appropriate equipment to process perishable food, deliver information about resources to food service directors, conduct trainings for food service directors and staff, and reward schools for making efforts toward local food purchases. This funding is extremely difficult to secure using current revenue streams. Supplemental funding would help schools make the first steps toward securing food

(cont. on pg 36)

Figure 4.1.14: Percentage of Vermont School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity, 2011-2012



- SERVED LOCAL FOOD
- SERVED FOOD FROM GARDEN
- HAD GARDEN
- HELD TASTE TESTS
- PROMOTED LOCAL FOOD
- FIELD TRIPS TO FARMS
- CAFETERIA COACHES
- CELEBRATED FARM TO SCHOOL
- INTEGRATED CURRICULUM
- FARMERS VISIT

Source: Vermont Food Atlas, Goal 10, www.vtfoodatlas.com/getting-to-2020/10-food-literacy.

LEGEND REFERS TO FIGURES 4.1.14 THROUGH 4.1.19.

Figure 4.1.15: Percentage of Connecticut School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity, 2011-2012

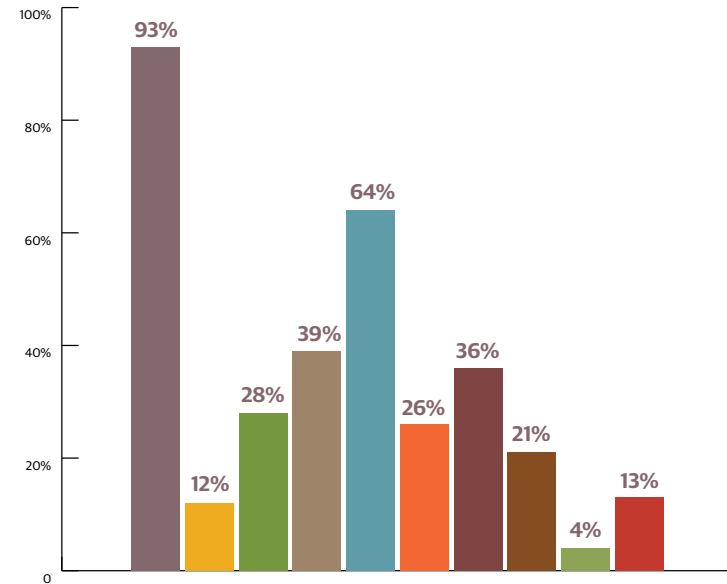


Figure 4.1.16: Percentage of Maine School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity, 2011-2012

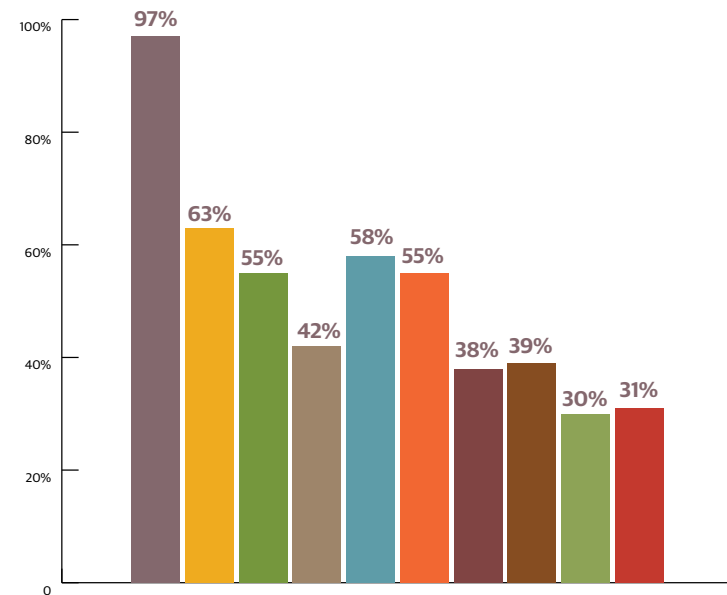


Figure 4.1.17: Percentage of Massachusetts School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity, 2011-2012

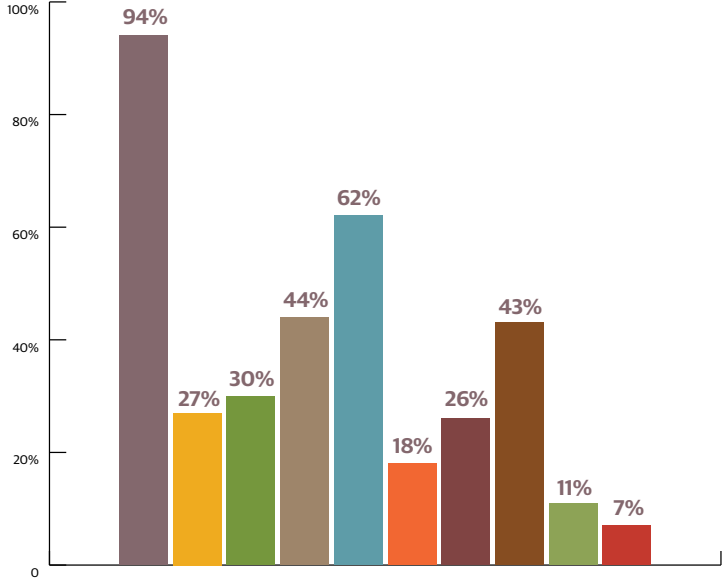


Figure 4.1.19: Percentage of Rhode Island School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity (2011-2012)

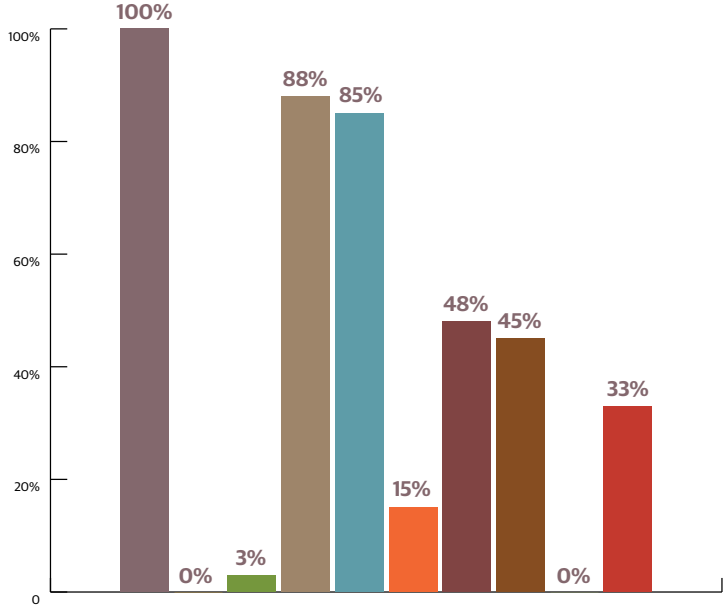
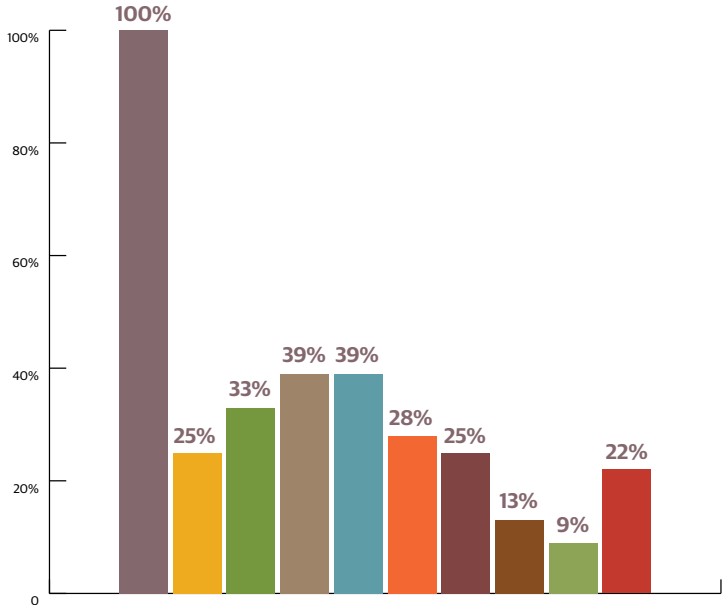


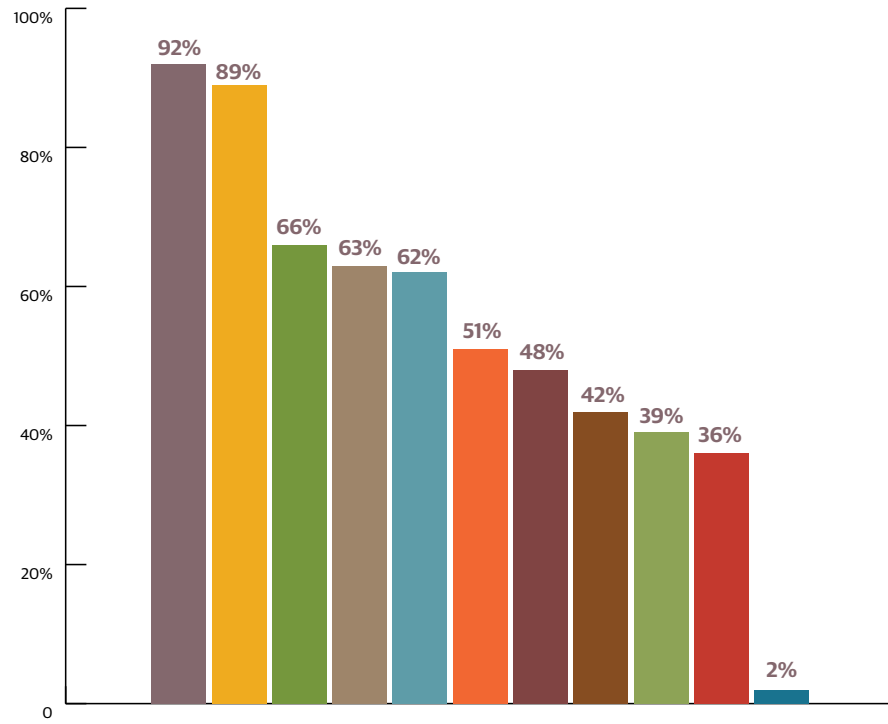
Figure 4.1.18: Percentage of New Hampshire School Districts Offering Farm to School Activities, by Activity, 2011-2012



Garden at the Underhill School.

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Community Garden Network

Figure 4.1.20: Percent of Vermont School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)



- LOCAL VEGETABLES
- LOCAL FRUITS
- LOCAL EGGS
- LOCAL HERBS
- LOCAL OTHER DAIRY
- LOCAL MILK
- LOCAL MEAT
- LOCAL PLANT PROTEIN
- LOCAL GRAINS
- LOCAL BAKED GOODS
- LOCAL SEAFOOD

Source: Vermont Food Atlas, Goal 2, www.vtfoodatlas.com/getting-to-2020/2-institutional-consumption.

LEGEND REFERS TO FIGURES 4.1.20 THROUGH 4.1.25.

Figure 4.1.21: Percent of Connecticut School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)

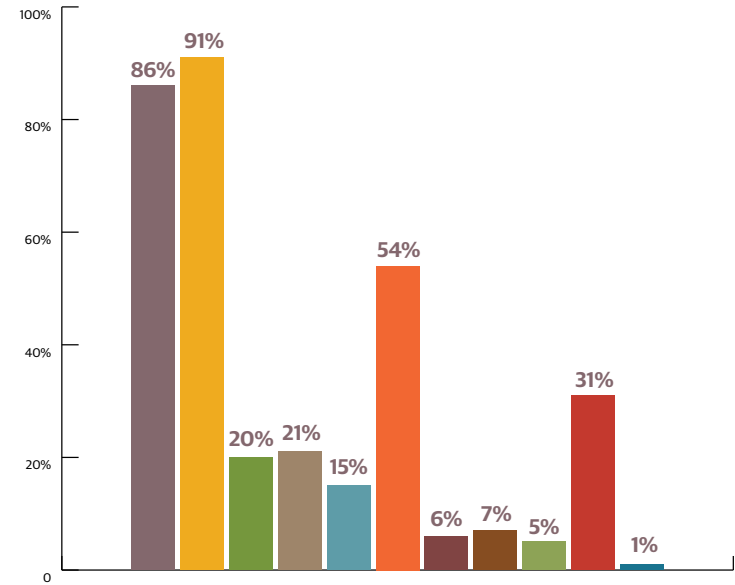


Figure 4.1.22: Percent of Maine School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)

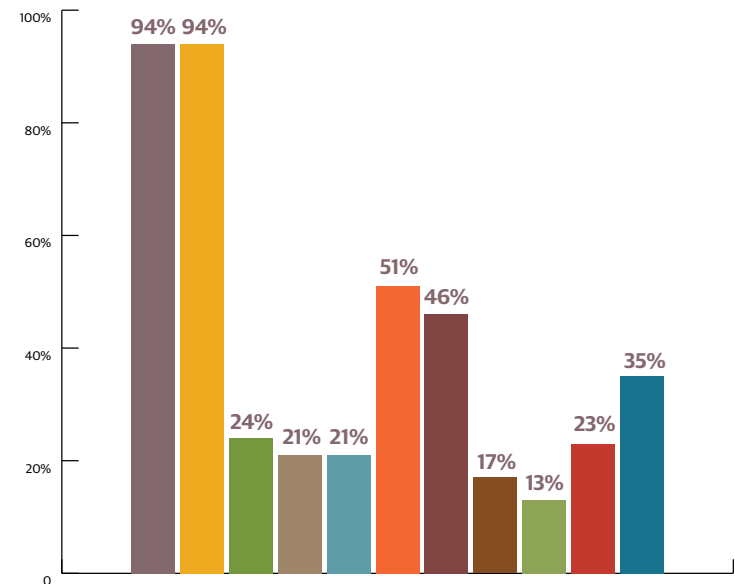


Figure 4.1.23: Percent of Massachusetts School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)

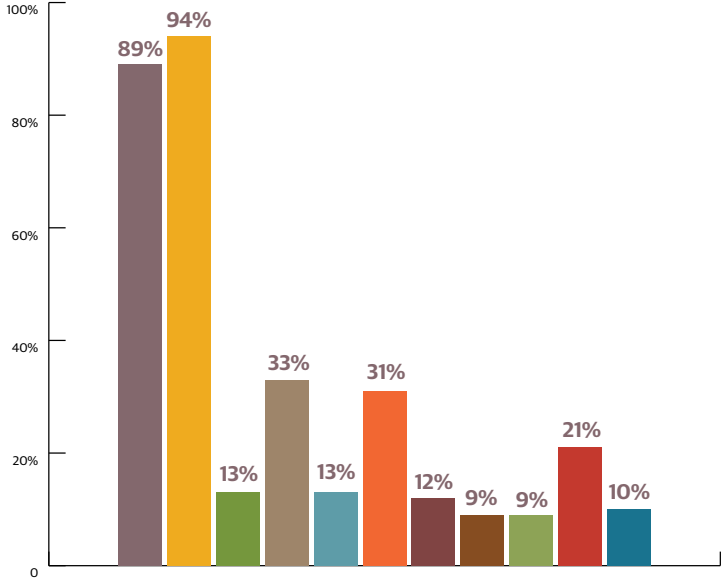


Figure 4.1.25: Percent of Rhode Island School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)

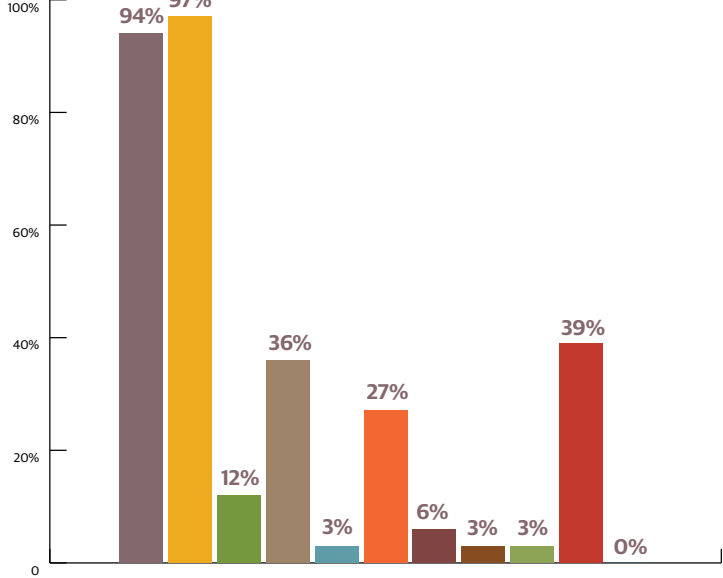
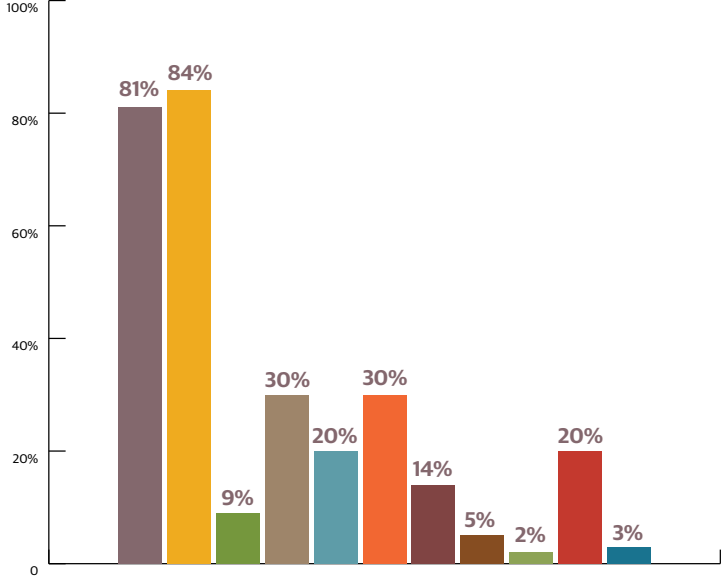


Figure 4.1.24: Percent of New Hampshire School Districts that Purchased Local Food by Category (2011-12)



access for all students and increasing the use of local foods, but long-term funding is dependent on changing administrative expectations of school food service.

🍴 Community Gardens

Community gardens promote community well-being by providing land, tools, and educational opportunities for people to grow food for themselves and others.

Vermont has more than 370 community gardens. This number includes school and teaching gardens, neighborhood gardens, and allotment gardens. Many of these gardens serve low to moderate income households.⁴⁹ In Burlington alone, over 2,000 people participate in community gardens or benefit from other types of group gardens. Chittenden County has the highest number of allotment-style community gardens with more than 25 for the county. In addition to providing Vermonters with fresh food, community gardens provide a number of other social benefits, including improved diet, exercise, education, and a sense of connection to nature and other people.

According to the 2013 UVM Center for Rural Studies Vermonter Poll, 16% of respondents get some food from a community garden. Although it is difficult to quantify what percentage of food consumption is grown in the state's community gardens, there is evidence that the act of growing food at these sites has a positive impact on health and purchasing decisions. Gardening is correlated with increased awareness and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and greater physical activity among children,⁵⁰ urban adults,⁵¹ and seniors.⁵² Additionally, behaviors related to food knowledge (gardening) significantly increase the probability of buying local food.⁵³

The [Vermont Community Garden Network](#) (VCGN) is the main support and education organization for community-based gardens in the state. VCGN supports the state's network of nearly 400 community and school gardens through technical assistance to start and grow gardens and garden education programs, training for garden leaders, and connecting garden groups to each other. VCGN has funded over 300 garden projects around the state in neighborhoods, schools, housing sites, and workplaces.⁵⁴ In the Burlington area, the collaborative efforts of VCGN, Burlington Parks, Recreation & Waterfront, and [New Farms for New Americans/ Association of Africans Living in Vermont](#) have resulted in increased access to garden space for New Americans and other underserved populations.



Hinesburg Community Garden.

According to VCGN's 2012 Needs Assessment survey, 63% of respondents said that their gardens had food security goals and 75% had food justice goals. In a survey conducted of members of the Vermont Community Garden Network for the F2P Strategic Plan, 43% of respondents felt that most of the gardeners at their site do not grow enough produce to meet their household needs. However, one third of respondents (36.8%) grow just enough to meet their households needs, and nearly 20% felt that most of the gardeners at their site grow more than enough to meet household needs. A significant amount of respondents (62%) share surplus produce with friends, family, and neighbors, while 24.5% stated that most gardeners at their site bring surplus produce to a local food shelf, and 4.7% said that gardeners grew extra produce for a Grow an Extra Row project. Approximately one quarter, or 24.1% of respondents gave away or donated between 10 and 30 pounds of produce in 2009.

Community gardens and related programs are increasing in number throughout Vermont, but there are challenges to ensuring the continued success of these gardens. Although funding is available to start new community garden projects, obtaining funding to maintain or improve established programs and support gardens leaders is

often difficult. Continued funding, technical assistance, and training are needed to help established community and school gardens reach even more households in limited income communities. Specifically, funding is needed to (1) compensate for sliding scale/reduced to free fees to encourage more participation of low income households; (2) install infrastructure improvements including greenhouses, raised beds, and water hook-ups; (3) improve publicity and outreach especially to novice gardeners and non-English speakers; (4) establish gardens within walking distance of low income neighborhoods; and (5) increase professional development and networking opportunities for garden leaders, who are often volunteers.

Regional Food Hubs

According to the USDA and the Winrock Foundation, a *Regional Food Hub* is “is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.”⁵⁵ In Vermont, there are several groups whose work influences the movement of local food. For the purpose of this report, we have grouped them into groups that (A) physically manage food according the USDA’s definition of a Food Hub, and (B) those that facilitate value chain functions (i.e., work that relates to the movement of food but that doesn’t not physically involved the food).

Of course, many existing organizations, such as *NOFA Vermont* and the *Vermont Agency of Agriculture*, have worked to expand the market for local food for decades, blurring these distinctions. And new organizations that may not usually be thought of as food hubs perform the same functions. For example, *Salvation Farms* aggregates, cleans, processes, and packs surplus farm-fresh foods so it can be consumed at a later date, thereby increasing the amount of food that can be rescued and accessed by institutions serving Vermont’s most vulnerable. *Salvation Farms’ Vermont Commodity Program* (VCP) is meant to act as a supplement to traditional food-sourcing avenues for institutions that serve vulnerable populations. Products resulting from this program are not intended to compete with the for-profit marketplace but rather compliment it, requiring recipient sites to source additional local foods with the dollars saved from the VCP product.

Organizations that physically handle food:

Vermont is home to several exceptional groups that seek innovative ways to bring local food to an ever expanding group of customers. For example, the [Intervale Center’s Food Hub](#), based in Burlington, coordinates a group of 45 farmers and food producers who provide a diverse array of products including vegetables, breads, cheeses, and meats. The group meets at the beginning of each growing season and submits crop estimates to Food Hub buyers. The buyers then coordinate a large CSA that is delivered to workplaces in the greater Chittenden County area. The Food Hub has experienced increases in both sales and volume every year, moved into new and improved packing and storage facilities, hired additional staff, and increased the market for local food. The Food Hub also has free CSA shares for low-income consumers and has partnered with *Hunger Free Vermont* on cooking education to come hand-in-hand with the CSA share. Likewise, [Windham Food and Farm](#) (WFF) is an aggregation and distribution service that provides local food to the Windham County Region. WFF coordinates purchasing between 28 food producers and 55 buyers, with a focus on institutions, including schools. The low-overhead service was started with support from UVM Extension in 2009 and is now a program of [Food Connects](#) (FC). As a part of physically moving food, FC is active in market development by providing support for school communities to increase farm to school programming and capacity, working with distributors to coordinate local food buying clubs, and enhancing connections between local producers and large institutional purchasers. These market development activities are a critical component of work shared by many organizations across the state.

Organizations that coordinate local food market expansion, but do not physically handle food:

Many organizations work to coordinate increasing access to and availability of local food for all Vermonters through a wide variety of approaches. These groups are related through similar missions and values, though their specific activities may vary. For example, the [Rutland Area Farm and Food Link](#) (RAFFL), produces a regional local food guide, connects area farmers with mentors, and coordinates gleaning opportunities. The group has been working since 2004 to expand availability and access to locally produced foods, bolster the greater Rutland region’s agricultural economy, and increase community appreciation and understanding of the positive impact of farms

and farmers on the Rutland region. Likewise, the [Addison County Relocalization Network](#) (ACORN) facilitates matchmaking events between food purchasers and producers, produces a regional guide to locally produced food, and promotes farm to school connections in Addison County. Several other organizations, such as the [Center for an Agricultural Economy](#) (in the greater Hardwick area) and [Vital Communities Valley Food and Farm](#) (in the Upper Valley) have regional foci. In addition to the regional organizations described, statewide groups also serve this function.

Regional food hubs can potentially play an important role in improving the access, availability, stability and use of fresh and local foods for all Vermonters by addressing food system development. Some of the regional food centers' programming currently addresses food storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure within their regions. A number of the regional food centers explicitly include food security as a critical part of their mission and run innovative projects to improve food security in their areas. Some of the strategies that hold particular potential for improving community food security that some regional food centers are pursuing include (1) providing infrastructure for limited-income or beginning food entrepreneurs; and (2) creating economies of scale by aggregating product for distribution by charitable food sites.

Vermont's local food landscape is constantly changing as many communities embrace the mission of strengthening their local food systems. It is critical to consider the role that regional food centers and food hubs can play in addressing food insecurity in Vermont and more organizations invest in additional programming and infrastructure. Recent work between food banks and food hubs in other regions of the United States can serve as an inspiration related to the goals of education and food provision, as in Foodlink in New York and the Food Bank of North Alabama.⁵⁶

New Farms for New Americans

Refugee resettlement has significantly increased cultural and racial diversity over the past 20 years, especially in Chittenden County, where many families have been placed due to the availability of social services. Since 1989, approximately 5,000 refugees have been resettled in Vermont, with the largest populations coming from Vietnam, Bosnia, Somalia, and Bhutan. Refugee resettlement in Chittenden County continues at a rate of about 350 people per year. Originating from several countries in Africa and Asia, these individuals are hereafter referred to as New Americans.

In their country of origin or in refugee camps, New Americans often practiced small scale agriculture including vegetable and crop production. Many were farmers or produced food for their families in gardens before their displacement due to war or ethnic conflicts. These individuals and their families may have spent up to 20 years in refugee camps before coming to the United States. These New Americans often come to the U.S. with limited language skills and (in many cases) little formal education. They receive some support from the U.S. government, but are expected to become self-sufficient within their first 6-8 months in the U.S., at which time their resettlement allowances end. Most find work in the minimum-wage economy, but many remain vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity as they struggle to support elderly parents and large families. This puts them at high risk for food insecurity.

An estimated 1,250 individuals immigrate to Vermont every year according to US Immigration Support, an organization that provides informational resources to those seeking to come to the United States.⁵⁷ This group estimates that, as of 2006, 3.8% of Vermont's population, or approximately 27,525 individuals, were immigrants or refugees. This number accounts for a significant percentage (52.2%) of Vermont's population increase. Vermont is often described as a homogeneous, culturally white state. However, the increase in immigration and therefore cultural and racial diversity is dramatic. According to the US Immigration Support, between 1990 and 2000 Vermont experienced a 32.5% increase in the number of foreign born residents. The rate of increase in this population is much faster than the population increase of U.S. born individuals (a 7.4% increase during this same time period.) According to the US Citizen and Immigration Service, refugee status or asylum may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Those who come to the United States under these conditions often face poverty and food insecurity. In 2008, the Governor's Hunger Task Force identified refugees as a population that is particularly vulnerable to experiencing hunger, a finding supported in the literature.⁵⁸ Studies show that access to services significantly impacts rates of food insecurity among new American households.⁵⁹ One study found that 53% of households of recent refugees from West Africa were classified as food insecure in Michigan, and that improvement in their status was significantly impacted by employment status, income, and participation in the SNAP.⁶⁰

Table 4.1.16: Vermont's Community Food Security Activities

Program	Eligibility	Description
Gleaning Programs (multiple organizations)	Food- and nutritionally-insecure individuals or institutions.	Gleaning refers to the act of gathering produce that is left over from farmers' fields after the commercial harvest and encompasses all food that is harvested, rescued, or donated directly from Vermont farms, orchards, farmers' markets, home gardens, and growing for donation, or similar programs for provision to the charitable and institutional food system. The Vermont Gleaning Collective is an effort to build statewide coverage of autonomous gleaning initiatives through organizational partnerships. Vermont Gleaning Collective Member Organizations receive technical assistance, staff training and support through the development and management of their gleaning programs. In 2015 eight regions in Vermont will have community-based gleaning programs.
Farm to School Programs	Schools in Vermont.	Farm to school programs build direct relationships between schools and farms, as well as educate children about where food comes from, how to prepare fresh whole foods, and how to have a healthy diet. Green Mountain Farm-to-School coordinates efforts at schools in the Northeast Kingdom, Upper Valley Farm to School works with schools in the Upper Valley Region of Vermont and New Hampshire, and Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT-FEED) has been able to bring Farm to School initiatives to more than 75 schools throughout the state. There are also a few independent Farm to School projects that are not affiliated with any of the preceding programs.
Community Gardens	Farm to school programs and community gardens.	Community gardens promote community well-being by providing land, tools, and educational opportunities for people to grow food for themselves and others. Vermont has more than 370 community-based gardens (including school, food shelf, senior center, prison, workplace, etc.). This number includes school and teaching gardens, neighborhood gardens, and allotment gardens. Many of these gardens serve low- to moderate-income households.
Regional Food Hubs		Organizations that physically manage food include the Intervale Center and Windham Farm and Food. Organizations that coordinate market expansion but do not physically handle food include ACORN, Food Connects, the Center for an Agricultural Economy, RAFFL, and Valley Farm and Food.

Table 4.1.16: Vermont's Community Food Security Activities

Program	Eligibility	Description
New Farms For New Americans	Recent immigrant or refugees, individuals and households.	The program currently helps over 90 New American households produce their own fresh, local, and culturally appropriate foods, which theoretically decreases the rate of food insecurity in the Chittenden County new American community. These households can be categorized as either (A) those who access community gardens and gardening resources, (B) those who learn about farming for a profit while co-locating at the AALV/Intervale sites, or (C) those who start a farm business elsewhere. The majority of participants in the NFNA program fall into the first category, those of "home gardeners." Few participants involved in commercial production have moved off of the AALV/Intervale site.
Vermont Farm Share Program	Low income families, children, and seniors.	The program solicits funding via an annual fundraising event (<i>Share the Harvest</i>), online donations, gift cards, farmer fundraising, and store checkout donations to subsidize CSA shares for low income families, children, and seniors. The program asks participating farms to raise 25% of the cost of a CSA share, NOFA Vermont contributes 25%, and participants are asked to contribute at least 50% of the cost of the share.

The [Association for Africans Living in Vermont](#) (AALV) is a nonprofit organization based in Burlington that serves immigrants and refugees from many different countries in African and Asia. The [New Farms for New Americans Program](#) (NFNA) is collaboratively run by AALV and the Intervale Center. University of Vermont Extension also provides significant programmatic support for New Americans enrolled in this program. The program currently helps over 90 New American households produce their own fresh, local, and culturally appropriate foods, which theoretically decreases the rate of food insecurity in the New American community in Chittenden County. These households can be categorized as either (A) those who access community gardens and gardening resources, (B) those who learn about farming for a profit while co-locating at the AALV/Intervale sites, or (C) those who start a farm business elsewhere. The majority of participants in the NFNA program fall into the first category, "home gardeners." Few participants involved in commercial production have moved off of the AALV/Intervale site. There are many programs similar to NFNA in the United States including Nuestras

Raices Tierra de Oportunidades (since 2004 in Massachusetts), the New Americans Sustainable Agriculture Project (field based trainings in Maine), the Health and Human Services Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (national, US Department for Children and Families), Mercy Corps Northwest (Oregon and Washington State), and many more.

An assessment of food insecurity among participants of the NFNA was conducted in 2014. Participants included New Americans who self-identified as Bhutanese, Burundian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Burmese. Most participants were women, with 5% reporting that they were over the age of 65. They reported that they saved money through their participation in NFNA, which they were able to use on household expenses, supplemental food purchases, contributions to savings, or donations. Any food that participants produced that exceeded household needs was given to friends and family, with a smaller amount preserved for household use. Some participants reported that there was no excess food produced, or that they donated surplus to

a community center or food shelf. When asked to report on their experiences with food insecurity, only three participants reported skipping meals because there was not enough food in their household or running out of money to purchase food on a regular basis. Interestingly, these participants were engaged in commercial farming at a small scale, while most participants were engaged with NFNA at a home garden scale. While this is a small percentage of program participants, the evaluation notes that this is a low-income, vulnerable group that takes advantage of social services such as SNAP, WIC, or other assistance programs. There is also great variation in cultural norms and attitudes among participants, and outreach and programing that addresses food security or economic development needs to take into consideration the nuances of each cultural group.

Vermont Farm Share Program

NOFA Vermont's [Farm Share Program](#) is unique model for providing assistance that solicits funding via an annual fundraising event ([Share the Harvest](#)), online donations, gift cards, farmer fundraising, and store checkout donations to subsidize CSA shares for low income families, children, and seniors. The program asks participating farms to raise 25% of the cost of a CSA share, NOFA Vermont contributes 25%, and participants are asked to contribute at least 50% of the cost of the share. In 2014, NOFA Vermont's Farm Share Program helped over 1,400 people with shares from 50 Vermont farms.

ANALYSIS

Access, Availability, Utilization, and Stability

To conceptualize how programs in Vermont can address food security, we have used an internationally recognized framework that divides food security efforts into four categories: access, availability, utilization, and stability.



FOOD ACCESS refers to the way people obtain available food. Normally, food is accessed through a combination of home production, stocks, purchase, barter, gifts, borrowing, and food aid. Food access is ensured when communities and households and all individuals within them have adequate resources, such as money and transportation, to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Access depends on income, and on the price of food. It also depends on market, social and institutional entitlement/rights to which individuals have access.



FOOD AVAILABILITY in a country, region, or local area means that food is physically present because it has been grown, manufactured, imported, or transported there. For example, food is available because it can be found in markets; because it is produced on local farms, on local land, or in home gardens; or because it arrives as aid.



FOOD UTILIZATION refers to the way people use food and is dependent on the quality of the food, its preparation and storage method, nutritional and cooking knowledge, as well as on the health status of the individual consuming the food.



FOOD STABILITY refers to the consistency with which access, availability and utilization are achieved. Periodic fluctuations in any of these three conditions can increase the risk of malnutrition and hunger. Weather conditions, natural disasters, and economic changes such as food price increases and unemployment can all effect food stability.

The objectives and strategies identified in *Chapter 4, Section 1: Food Security in Vermont*, are drawn from the insights and experiences of many individuals and organizations as well as from reports and online resources. We have highlighted those strategies that we believe create the greatest opportunity for increasing food

access and integration of local food into Vermont's emergency and supplemental food systems. Strategies vary in both cost and duration of implementation. We have attempted to present a range of options. Some can be achieved in a short time period, while some will take many years to put in place. Some come with a high price tag while some are relatively inexpensive. Some are policy changes that will require collaboration with the state, while some can be implemented at the grassroots level.



Access: All Vermonters will have access to fresh, nutritionally balanced food that they can afford.

Opportunities at the Federal Level

On a national level, federal support for increasing access to healthy food in U.S. schools seems to be increasing. Specifically, First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* campaign was initiated in 2010 and focused on increasing education about healthy food choices for families, supporting school meal programs, promoting physical education and activity, and addressing food deserts in the United States. The Let's Move campaign has been criticized for locating the causes of obesity and malnutrition solely with the individual, failing to address the systemic inequalities (i.e., poverty, racism, and others) that contribute to poor health outcomes.⁶¹ However, the initiative has led to positive policy outcomes, including the Obama administration's efforts towards a strong reauthorization of the child and nutrition Act and the release of \$400 million as part of its Healthy food financing initiative. The goal of this initiative is to eliminate food deserts by bringing retailers that stock healthy food to underserved regions in the country. This initiative is a collaborative effort on the part of the Departments of Treasury, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services.⁶² These efforts will be moved forward by offering tax credits to stores that open in distressed and economically disadvantaged areas, and through additional support to community development financial institutions. The USDA will make additional loans and grants available for projects that increase access to healthy food for low income Americans. Community development organizations will also have access to increased funding to support retailers, farmers' markets, and other markets that increase the accessibility of fresh, healthy food.⁶³

There is also increasing support for local food systems coming from the USDA. The *Know Your Farmer. Know Your Food* initiative's goal is to create new economic opportunities for American farmers. Part of this initiative is increased funding for Community Food Projects, which seek to meet the needs of low income Americans in underserved areas. According to the USDA, "The primary goals of the Community Food Projects program are to (1) meet the food needs of low-income individuals; (2) increase the food self-reliance of low-income communities; (3) promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm and nutrition issues; and (4) meet specific state, local or neighborhood food and agricultural needs, including needs relating to infrastructure improvement and development, planning for long-term solutions and the creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers."⁶⁴

Opportunities in the Charitable Food System

A number of food advocacy organizations in Vermont are pioneering new models for providing fresh, locally grown food to the charitable food system. In addition, other states have modeled innovative new tax structures and programs that enhance agricultural viability and food access efforts. This section highlights a few of the most notable efforts.

Proposed Donated Crops Tax Credit for Vermont Farmers

Currently, farmers who donate produce to the charitable food system are told that they can write off the donation on their taxes, but in most cases they are not able to do so. This is because taxpayers can deduct an expense only once, and since most farmers write off seeds as a business expense they cannot also deduct the cost of a mature plant as a charitable donation.⁶⁵

A number of states, including Oregon, Arizona, Colorado and California, have tax policies that allow farms to deduct charitable donations of agricultural products. The Vermont Foodbank and Salvation Farms have considered proposing a tax credit for farmers based on these programs. If Vermont passed a state refundable tax credit to Vermont farmers who donate agricultural products to 501(c)(3) nonprofits that have an ongoing purpose to distribute food to Vermonters in need at no cost, it

would encourage more farmers to donate food that might otherwise go to waste to the charitable food system. The tax credit would apply to all farm products including produce, dairy products, and meat.

Instituting a state refundable tax credit for a percentage of the value of all donated food would reimburse farmers for making donations to gleaning programs and encourage more farmers to participate in gleaning programs.

The tax credit would allow Vermont farmers to apply for a credit equaling 25% of the market value of the donated goods at the time of donation. Donations would be receipted by the receiving organization, and the market value would be determined by the donor. As an example of the impact of such a tax credit, a 25% credit would have cost the state approximately \$121,000 in 2010 based on the \$483,379 value of the produce gleaned by the *Vermont Foodbank*. The dollars would go directly to the farmers. The *Vermont Foodbank* presented a proposal for such a tax credit for farmers during the 2010 legislative session, based on a similar statute passed in Oregon in 2001.

— Fork Donated Dairy Beef

The current Federal USDA School Lunch policy states that schools can only use meat from USDA inspected slaughterhouses, yet in many ways, state inspection is the equivalent of USDA inspections. A pilot program should also explore the potential of using state inspected slaughterhouses to provide meat to schools.

Currently, dairy beef cows are shipped to packing companies out of state, where the beef is then distributed to restaurants and chain supermarkets. A 2006 study conducted by the VAAFM estimated that between 19,000 and 30,000 dairy cows are culled in the state every year.

However, as discussed earlier, many receiving organizations lack the storage and processing capacity to handle much perishable or temperature-sensitive food. This issue will need to be addressed before launching a large-scale rescue and distribution program for locally-raised meat.

— Fork Job Training Programs

The *Vermont Foodbank* partners with the *Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf* in Burlington and *Capstone Community Action* in Barre to run the *Community Kitchen Academy* (CKA). The CKA program prepares underemployed and unemployed Vermonters for a career in the food service industry and lifelong learning through an intensive program of culinary skills development, career readiness, and job placement. Students in the program intern at *Sodexo Corporation* sites in Burlington and Northfield, including at *UVM Sodexo Campus Services*. During 2014, the CKA graduated 43 students and produced 106,000 servings of food for Vermonters in need. Other food banks around the country have instituted similar job training programs to help food bank clients develop skills and become fully employed.⁶⁶

Fresh Food, an enterprise of *Vermont Works for Women*, offers a 13-week culinary training program for underemployed women. The program teaches basic workplace and food service skills, including food safety and sanitation fundamentals, knife skills, kitchen math and measuring, and operation of food service equipment. The program prepares 300 meals a day for childcare centers and sells Peanut Butter Cranberry Bars at several local retailers. As a member of the *Vermont Fresh Network*, *Fresh Food* uses ingredients from 20 local and regional vendors.

Cornucopia, a program of *Umbrella*—a support organization for women based in St. Johnsbury—is modeled after *Fresh Food*. The program offers a 4-week job readiness program followed by a 13-week culinary program for women transitioning from unsafe or unsustainable living conditions. The program prepares meals for local community meal sites.



Making a community meal in a commercial kitchen.

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

Additionally, the *Vermont Gleaning Collective* is developing a Job Placement and Training Program to provide opportunities for “individuals in-transition,” particularly Veterans transitioning from military-careers into civilian-careers and the ex-incarcerated, specifically those who have worked with *Salvation Farms* at the *Southeast State Correctional Facility*, to participate in a training program to develop competent, professional gleaning coordinators and obtain formal certification trainings in both safe food handling and workplace safety, which are transferable to many farm and food based jobs.

🍴 Healthy Food Access at Co-ops

The [Neighboring Food Co-op Association](#) has created a [Healthy Food Access Project](#) in partnership with Hunger Free Vermont and the [New England Farmers Union](#), with funding from the [Cooperative Fund of New England](#) and Jane’s Trust. The project has five types of programs.

1. **Needs-based Discount Programs:** participating co-ops offer 10% discounts, usually under a heading of “Food for All” (e.g., [City Market](#)) or “Co-op Cares” (e.g., [Hunger Mountain Co-op](#)), on everything except beer and wine for customers that receive 3SquaresVT, WIC, Supplemental Security Income, or Social Security Disability assistance.
2. **Co-op Basics Programs:** participating co-ops offer some essential items (e.g., milk, flour, produce, bulk dried beans) at low prices for all customers.
3. **In-store Educational Programs:** many co-ops offer educational programs. For example, [City Market](#) offers the “Pennywise Pantry” program to teach people about how to shop for long-lasting, healthy food in the Produce and Bulk sections, while their “Frugal Fridge” program focuses on the grocery aisles and perishable coolers.
4. **Access to Member-ownership:** participating co-ops have opportunities for making member-ownership accessible to everyone by offering long-term payment plans and using patronage refunds to pay off membership.
5. **Collaboration with Local Food Security Organizations:** many co-ops also work with local food shelves and advocacy groups like *Hunger Free Vermont*.

While the programs do not specifically focus on local food, co-ops generally sell a higher percentage of local food than traditional grocery stores. By institutionalizing and expanding healthy food programs at regional co-ops these market outlets may be more accessible to low income people and, consequently, local/regional food can become more attainable.

🍷 Opportunities in Community Food Security

Vermont has a number of projects that work to build the capacity of Vermont communities to grow, access, and use food for themselves. One of the most successful district-led farm to school efforts in Vermont is the *Burlington School Food Project* (BSFP), a collaboration of many partners including [Shelburne Farms](#), *NOFA Vermont*, *Burlington School Food Service*, *Vermont Community Garden Network*, *VT FEED* (a collaboration between *Shelburne Farms* and *NOFA Vermont*), and [City Market/Onion River Co-op](#). The group has made significant progress in shifting the food culture in Chittenden County by addressing access, availability, and utilization of local food in several key ways: (1) The Burlington School district provides a livable wage (\$15.23 in 2010) for food service employees; (2) school employees work with local producers to provide food or develop new products that are affordable for local schools and manageable for food service employees; and (3) the program works to increase food access while simultaneously reducing the stigma experienced by students who receive assistance for school food.

In addition to its work addressing cultural changes around food and food service in schools, BSFP has dramatically increased access to local food and fresh fruits and vegetables (from any source) for students in the [Burlington School District](#). In 2003, the dollar value of fresh fruits and vegetables purchased by the *Burlington School District* totaled \$5,000. This increased to \$120,000 in 2009. The value of local food (primarily sourced directly from farmers) in 2009 was \$90,000. Key to the success of this effort is the work of the *Vermont Food Service Directors Association*, a group of 135 schools that work together to negotiate contracts and make local food more accessible for schools. A critical change made by the Burlington School District that has helped the BSFP make great strides in their food procurement strategies is the creation of a farm to school coordinator position. The coordinator is responsible for working with food

service employees to create new menu options that incorporate locally available food, as well as act as a liaison between local farms and the school district.

← Gleaning Coordinators

Shortly after the turn of the century gleaning got its start in Vermont capturing more than 1.5 million pounds of excess farm crops making these nutritious foods available to communities across our State (The estimated value of gleaned crops is averaged to roughly a \$1 per pound). This has been achieved by small regionally-focused, often underfunded, community driven initiatives with limited infrastructure and capacity.

With more gleaning initiatives staffed with professional coordinators and support infrastructure, Vermont's current and aspiring community-based gleaning initiatives could rescue a much greater quantity of food that might otherwise go to waste.

The need exists for 10 to 14 regional coordinators throughout the state contributing an average of 30 hours per week year-round. Regional coordinators could be affiliated with the *Vermont Gleaning Collective* and existing food-focused,

regionally based organizations and agencies to best engage and serve the needs of their community (i.e., regional food centers, Transition Town groups, Community Action Agencies, or drop-in/family centers). Food could be stored at regional food center facilities once established, at a willing farm, or within an already existing storage *Vermont Foodbank* distribution centers, food processing centers).

Food collected through these programs can be distributed through established networks or utilized by community groups. For example, *Post Oil Solutions* in Windham County has collaborated with



Gleaning corn in the seed production fields at High Mowing Organic Seeds.

the *Foodbank* in the past to use gleaned produce for onsite cooking demonstrations, community meals, and canning demonstrations. Funding for coordinators should include monies for programmatic and operational needs (i.e., storage for field supplies, field vehicles, and administrative supports such as phones and laptops, as well as salaries). Gleaning initiatives should be established first in regions where there is great potential for success coupled with need, such as the Lake Champlain Islands, the Northeast Kingdom, and Bennington County, two new gleaning initiatives could be added to the *Vermont Gleaning Collective* and supported by *Salvation Farms* per year.⁶⁷

← Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets Beef to Schools Program

Both the Vermont Foodbank and the VAAFM in partnership with *Vermont FEED* are exploring options for providing local ground beef to the charitable food system and Vermont schools, respectively. While the *Foodbank* is proposing a program through which farmers would receive a tax credit for donating dairy beef cows to the charitable system, the VAAFM and *Vermont FEED* are proposing that schools would purchase beef from cattle farmers at a fair market price.⁶⁸ A pilot program on ground beef would identify the logistical, infrastructure, and policy issues; determine the costs associated with operating each proposal; determine where economies of scale can be used by aggregating product; and determine the potential economic benefits for farmers, processors, and distributors selling beef through the VAAFM program.

In October 2008, the VAAFM surveyed 250 food service providers throughout the state to assess their interest in introducing locally produced ground beef into school meal programs. Of the 44 food service directors that responded to the survey, most were amenable. They indicated that they would purchase frozen patties of local beef if they were of "consistently high quality" and "competitively priced." Sixty-four percent were willing to purchase local frozen ground beef at a cost of "10% more than what they are currently paying." At the time, respondents paid distributors an average of \$2.41 per pound for bulk ground beef or beef patties. The following year, food service staffs in 10 schools were asked to try local ground beef from market dairy cows. Schools paid \$2.05 per pound for local ground beef and \$2.50 per pound for local beef patties. Again, the response was favorable. The author of the report concluded that if VAAFM or another organization, such as a farm to school program or a regional food

center, were able to make the price of locally sourced beef competitive by creating economies of scale, a beef to schools program could increase the amount of local protein in Vermont schools, as well as providing Vermont farmers with a predictable market.⁶⁹

Some schools around the state, including the [Doty School](#) in Worcester, [Sharon Elementary School](#) and [Randolph Elementary School](#) are buying local beef directly from the processor such as [Royal Butcher](#) in Randolph, but as of yet there is no consistent affordable option through a wholesale distributor. The *Doty School* was able to reduce the cost of the meat by purchasing entire sides of beef with a neighboring farmer and then arranging for the processing themselves. *Green Mountain Farm-to-School* helps six schools and four senior meal sites purchase local beef from [Brault's Slaughterhouse](#) through its Green Mountain Farm Direct program. *Green Mountain Farm-to-School* is working with *Brault's* to develop a supply chain, storage system, and audit trail so that sites would know exactly which farm the beef came from.⁷⁰

Food Councils and Community Food Assessments

Many communities around Vermont are in the process of creating food plans and implementation policies that will address food security in a systematic manner. Examples include the [Rutland Regional Planning Commission](#) (RAFFL began as a project of the Regional Planning Commission), the [Central Vermont Food Council](#), the [Waterbury-Duxbury Food Council](#), the [Burlington Food Council](#), the [Upper Valley Food Council](#) and ACORN.

Food councils bring together stakeholders from diverse sectors to examine how a food system is working and develop recommendations on how to improve it. Food councils can be particularly effective at integrating food security issues into government policies. Today there are over 200 food policy councils in the United States.⁷¹ Founded in 2003, the *Burlington Food Council* is one of the oldest in Vermont and has helped launch a number of influential community food security projects in the Burlington area, including the *Burlington School Food Project*, and has conducted a community food assessment.⁷²

A community food assessment is a process for discovering community food needs and assets, with the goal of developing projects and policies that will improve food security for all residents. Assessments may include interviews, focus groups, and surveys,

and can vary in the degree to which they integrate citizens in the process. More participatory community food assessments can be particularly powerful in bringing residents together and building social capital as neighbors learn about one-another and develop projects to address hunger in their communities.^{73,74} [Hunger Free Vermont](#), with support from [Northfield Savings Bank](#), launched the Community Hunger Project in 2006 to address hunger at the local level by creating county-centric Hunger Councils that mobilize community leaders to end hunger in their communities. Hunger Councils were introduced in Washington and Chittenden Counties in 2006, and were replicated in Lamoille Valley in 2010, Windham County in 2011, and Addison County in 2013. The Councils have been instrumental in expanding awareness about hunger in local communities, supporting legislation, and significantly increase participation in nutrition programs. *Hunger Free Vermont* is continuing to expand the Hunger Council model across the state.⁷⁵

In Brattleboro, the Community Food Security Project of *Post Oil Solutions* conducted a rapid community food assessment between December 2008 and April 2009, resulting in the publication of a report in June 2009. The assessment revealed that the barriers to greater food security are often related to structural problems that are not unique to the Brattleboro area, including lack of understanding of community food security, lack of jobs, lack of livable wages, lack of local food system infrastructure, lack of time, convenience as a priority, lack of nutrition education, and an overall societal mentality that values cheap food. In responding to the barriers identified, participants had many ideas about how government, business, and community or civic organizations can and should participate.⁷⁶

Food councils and community food assessment efforts should be supported and expanded throughout Vermont to allow towns to consider how they will include community food security and issues around access, availability, and utilization of food in their town plans — including everything from the use of agricultural lands, to public transportation routes, to providing for citizens during emergencies.

Storage, Processing, Aggregation, and Transportation Infrastructure

Very few food shelves or meal sites have the capacity to store fresh food. This lack of cold storage facilities can prevent those who manage these sites from accepting fresh perishable foods through gleaning and donation. Similarly, although some schools are able to store and process fresh foods on site, many do not have sufficient equipment and other infrastructure to do so, thus hampering their ability to serve fresh, local foods. If central locations could be identified or developed where perishable foods could be kept cool for up to a week, food shelves could then use locally harvested foods on an as-needed basis. If processing centers were available, foods that are highly perishable, such as tomatoes, or slightly compromised, such as winter squashes with some soft spots, could be frozen or processed into shelf-stable products, thus decreasing the loss of fruits and vegetables, and increasing the amount of local produce available to food shelves on a year-round basis.

An inventory should be conducted to identify existing storage and processing facilities that could also be used to store and prepare food for schools and charitable food sites. For example, a portion of the *Vermont Refrigerated Storage* facility in Shoreham could potentially be used to store produce for charitable food sites in Addison County. Programs also could be developed at Vermont Correctional facilities to process locally raised foods for the charitable food system at low cost while simultaneously providing job training in the food service industry for inmates.⁷⁷

Programs such as *Windham Farm and Food* and *Green Mountain Farm-to-School's Farm Direct* program can and are creating economies of scale by aggregating fresh and processed foods for distribution to schools, senior meals sites, hospitals, and restaurants in their regions. Currently, these programs are funded by grants, although the farm to plate model is increasingly moving toward a mechanism whereby higher income members such as *National Life Insurance* subsidize memberships for charitable organizations and low income members. Similar subsidized aggregation models could be implemented to distribute local foods to charitable food sites throughout the state. Or, for example, *Salvation Farms* works with the *Southeast State Correctional Facility*, engages working populations of incarcerated offenders, and hires *Black River Produce* to aggregate, process, store, and transport surplus from farms or gleans to the *Vermont Foodbank* and other food/meal sites.



Vermont Foodbank Warehouse.

PHOTO CREDIT: Vermont Foodbank

Many of Vermont's existing public transit routes already include grocery stores and access to downtown areas where farmers' markets are located. The statewide Elderly and Disabled program also accommodates single trips for essential shopping to anyone who is 60 or older or disabled. However, in preparing for the *Vermont Agency of Transportations'* (VTrans) upcoming five year Public Transit Policy Planning process, Regional Planning Commissions, in collaboration with local transportation providers and the Public Transit Section of VTrans, could broaden access to food by paying special attention to: (1) building grocery store stops into public transit routes that currently lack them; (2) adding farmers' market stops on the days of market operations; (3) ensuring that affordable housing projects and senior centers have reliable public transportation connecting them to food shopping, food shelves, and meal sites; and (4) working with other organizations to advertise all options for reaching food through public transportation.⁷⁸

— Integrate Local Purchasing in Food Assistance Programs

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

In coming years, WIC benefits will be administered exclusively through EBT cards. The first step in this direction is the newly introduced WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers. Currently, the WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers can be used only in locations that have been authorized by WIC, which currently includes grocery stores and some food co-ops.⁷⁹ The card is not currently used in direct market venues such as farmers' markets or CSAs, though other states have used vouchers in order to increase benefit access in direct market venues. To ensure that recipients of WIC benefits are able to access fruits and vegetables that are fresh, nutritious, locally produced, and competitively priced, farmers' markets and other direct markets should be included in planning related to the transition from WIC home delivery to WIC EBT. On a national scale, WIC fruit and vegetable benefits generate a \$500 million dollar annual market for fresh fruits and vegetables. Capturing even a fraction of that market would greatly increase the vitality of the Vermont local food economy.⁸⁰

The *Farm to Family* program is highly successful in providing opportunities for WIC participants, seniors, and other low income Vermonters who experience food insecurity to access fresh, nutritious, locally grown, and competitively priced produce at farmers' markets. Even with the additional federal funds received in 2010, the \$159,000 program budget is sufficient to serve only about 10% of the Vermont households that qualify. Some, perhaps half, of the eligible Vermonters may disregard the program because they are not interested in fresh produce or lack ready access to a farmers' market offering a good selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. To increase access to *Farm to Family* benefits for the other eligible Vermonters, however, the program needs additional financial support until federal allocation procedures are revised to better serve Vermonters. Any significant program expansion would be feasible only if the state and local agencies that distribute the coupons and reimburse farmers' markets for the value of redeemed coupons have the staff and other resources required to manage the expanded operating costs and workload.

3SquaresVT/SNAP

3SquaresVT/SNAP benefits are transferred electronically to recipient EBT cards on a monthly basis. These debit cards can be used at any location that is authorized by USDA Food and Nutrition Services. Before this electronic banking system was implemented in 2002, food stamp recipients were able to use paper food stamps at farmers' markets, farm stands, and other direct market venues. Since the transition to the electronic system, local food advocates in Vermont have been working hard to increase the prevalence of wireless card readers at Vermont farmers' markets.

In 2007, *NOFA Vermont* and several partners (including the *Department for Children and Families*, *Hunger Free Vermont*, the VAAF, and two Vermont resource conservation and development councils) initiated Vermont's first grant program to help farmers' markets set up central card readers to be shared by all vendors of the market. This was done by subsidizing the cost of the card readers (which can cost from \$900 to \$1,200), providing technical support for market managers, and helping with a promotional campaign for the market. Though *NOFA Vermont* and its partners have done (and continue to do) an excellent job of getting card readers to many farmers' markets, this access needs to be expanded to all farmers' markets, as well as to CSAs, farm stands, and other direct marketing venues in Vermont. One way that the State of Vermont could support this is by covering all EBT wireless transaction fees at farmers' markets (\$0.15 per transaction), the monthly cost of running the machine, and the cost of replacement machines. The potential economic impact of capturing federal food assistance in direct markets should not be underestimated: One USDA study estimated that an increase in federal spending for SNAP would raise the budgets of household recipients, stabilize their food consumption and their well-being, and generate increased demand and production in the food system.⁸¹

In a state characterized by its rural landscape, with limited public transportation options in many communities, it is of great importance that all eligible retailers be required to accept EBT cards. This policy change necessitates education geared towards retailers that includes staff training in 3SquaresVT requirements and basic principles of nutrition. In addition, training must include customer service specifically targeted towards decreasing perceived stigmas related to the use of SNAP benefits. To decrease cost and increase efficiency of these trainings, Vermont WIC and the *Department of Children and Families* should collaborate with community partners to

offer trainings that address both WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefit Cards and SNAP EBT cards.

Often, families who do not receive 3SquaresVT financial benefits do not realize that enrolling in the program can qualify their children for child nutrition programs. In the past, the group *End Hunger Connecticut!* provided \$750 mini-grants to Connecticut meal providers to work on increasing participation in federal entitlement programs such as SNAP and child nutrition programs. One round of mini-grants enabled schools and child care institutions to launch informational campaigns that resulted in 400 more children accessing daily meals. Similar efforts should be supported in Vermont to increase enrollment in child nutrition programs. To increase support for local food purchasing, these grants should be awarded to institutions that demonstrate the greatest need and make sustained and proven efforts to source local food when possible. Administrators of the grant must develop criteria that clearly articulates what constitutes “sustained and proven effort” and provide follow-up to ensure that grant recipients use funds for their intended purpose. Additional funding is also needed to support efforts to increase awareness about food insecurity and the availability of public programs. These funds should be used for the development of outreach materials geared toward eligible individuals and families.

The increasing popularity of community supported agriculture (CSA) as a method of direct marketing in the United States has led to a growing diversity of delivery methods of preordered fresh food. These ventures are based on a subscription system. These ventures echo programs geared toward food-insecure individuals and families including the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and WIC home delivery. However, WIC will soon be discontinuing home delivery, and CSFP reaches only a small fraction of those in need. **Providing support for 3SquaresVT recipients to join existing CSAs will expand local markets for Vermont farmers.** Creating opportunities for low income Vermonters to access fresh, local, healthy food in the same way that their financially secure neighbors and community members do will also decrease the perceived prevalence of stereotypes and social stigmas related to the use of federal food benefits. Support of the [NOFA Vermont Farm Share Program](#) is one mechanism for achieving this. Additionally, technical support provided by SNAP offices, *UVM Extension*, or other nonprofit organizations could help farmers navigate the logistical hurdles of accepting CSA members enrolled in 3SquaresVT (including



EBT and debit card access helps to make shopping at local farmers' markets convenient and easy.

transportation and billing issues). Another barrier for CSAs accepting EBT is that consumers can only pay up to 2 weeks in advance, so if they pay for weeks 1 and 2 and then do not show the rest of the season, the farmer is not making those sales for the rest of the season. To ensure that these initiatives meet the needs of the target population, it must be established that there is an unmet demand for CSAs among food-insecure Vermonters and their financial risk must be limited. (This can be done by ensuring that participants are guaranteed the value of the food they are paying for).

School Breakfast Program

In 2008, the Vermont Legislature passed legislation to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program. Under current federal legislation, students can qualify for either free or reduced-price school meals. Students who qualify for reduced-price meals often struggle to pay the reduced fee, making them more vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger than their fellow students. According to the *Hunger Free Vermont*, “families in this income range are most likely to have children that go without

food during the school day or that accrue debts with school food service programs.”⁸² Vermont legislation requires the state to provide extra funds to the School Breakfast Program to supplement the federal funds. The total cost of the expansion in 2009 was \$132,477.⁸³ This adjustment allows all students who previously qualified only for reduced-cost school breakfast to access these meals for free.

U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders is currently working to expand the National School Lunch Program in a similar manner. Until Senator Sanders and other congressional delegates are successful at affecting federal policy in this way, the responsibility for subsidizing the School Lunch Program falls to the state or other funders. Vermont currently has the third highest percentage of eligible students enrolled in the School Breakfast Program. In Vermont, however, there continues to be extensive unmet needs despite federal food assistance programs. Increased access to school meals would help to alleviate the reliance on emergency food, while demonstrating to the rest of the country the importance of providing access to school lunch for all children. This change would cost approximately \$669,455 per year, including both school lunch and breakfast.

Address the Needs of Unserved and Under-Served Vermonters

Community Action Agencies

Currently, Community Action Agencies are restricted in their ability to purchase local food on contract from local growers. To increase purchasing power among Community Action Agencies and establish stronger relationships between these organizations and the farms in their communities, legislative language should be adapted that demonstrates the state's approval of local contracts. Facilitation of these contracts will require an additional staff person at each participating agency, though significant increases in food budgets are not necessarily required.⁸⁴

New Americans

The [New Farms for New Americans](#) program works with recent immigrants and refugees to support new agricultural businesses. This program increases participant access to healthy, fresh food (grown by the participants themselves) and also provides support for farmers to work with food purchasers in the northwestern part of the state. Currently, 50 families are involved in the New Farms for New Americans

program. However, there are significant numbers of recent immigrants and refugees who are vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. Culturally appropriate programming that addresses food access, availability, utilization, and stability for these groups is a great need. Recent evaluation conducted by the University of Vermont suggests that programming in service new Americans must consider the cultural differences among different groups in order to be effective.⁸⁵

Children

Currently, WIC does not cover children over the age of five years old. The CSFP is designed to meet the needs of children who are no longer eligible for WIC. However, CSFP is designed to supplement 3SquaresVT benefits, not to provide for the complete nutritional needs of these children. Often, by the time the parents are able to navigate the system and sign their child up for CSFP, the child is almost six years old. Experts suggest either extending WIC benefits to children up to six years of age, or creating a new WIC service dedicated to children age 5 to 12 that includes milk, vegetables, and protein. Local food should be emphasized in both food delivery and educational material in the expanded program.

Older Vermonters

Elders have been identified as a group in particular need of food assistance, due in part to their limited fixed incomes and often high medical expenses. According to the *Champlain Valley Agency on Aging*, 50% of seniors who are admitted for hospital treatment suffer from malnutrition significant enough to either cause illness or impede recovery.⁸⁶ The *Vermont Area Agencies on Aging* (AAAs) currently contracts with meal program providers and caterers in all regions of the state. The AAAs recognize the opportunities and challenges presented by the taste preferences of an aging population. All AAAs have collectively decided to work together to increase the use of local foods in their community and Meals on Wheels programs. For the AAAs to achieve their goal, stronger ties among agency staff, caterers, and farmers must continue to be developed. The agencies can work together to address some of the barriers such as the increased cost of labor, storage, food costs, and transportation, to name just a few.

Highgate Housing: Good Food-Good Medicine

Originally created by the now retired *Food Works at Two Rivers Center*, the “Good Food-Good Medicine” program is now based out of Highgate Housing in Barre. The program takes a seasonal approach to good health and nutrition at two low-income housing sites in



Shared meal with participants of Good Food, Good Medicine program in Barre.

Barre. In the spring and summer months, residents at Highgate and Green Acres apartments grow their own food in the community garden or in raised container beds, while the fall focuses on harvest, food preservation, and seasonal cooking. A monthly community meal continues through the winter with special attention towards health, wellness, and herbalism.

The program not only increases residents’ food security and independence, but has reintroduced participants to skills that were not passed down in the last few decades. “We’re finding a strong desire by people to relearn new skills,” said Joseph Kiefer, co-founder of the program, “and we realized that to have a long term impact on people’s lives, it took a sustained commitment to relationship building throughout the year.”

Classes include the entire family, with children eager to help cook meals and grow their own food, which leads to exposure to new vegetables, like rutabagas, parsnips and choggia beets. “Part of it includes retraining the tongue to local, healthy foods and withdrawing from high fat, high salt, industrial diets.” Kiefer said. “Meanwhile, the backyard herbalism classes help to address many of the health and wellness issues people are facing, such as weak immune and respiratory systems.” Participants grow their own herbs and learn to make teas, vinegars, and tinctures to support their overall health and wellness.

🍴 Reduce Participation Barriers

A barrier to enrollment in many federal food assistance programs is the time it takes to become and stay enrolled, especially in programs that require household financial reporting (as opposed to automatic eligibility based on regional income trends). Many individuals who are eligible for 3SquaresVT do not apply because they believe the benefits are insignificant compared to the time required, wages lost, and general burden of staying enrolled in the program.⁸⁷ In reality, 9 out of 10 households enrolled in 3SquaresVT receive \$50 per month or more in SNAP assistance, a significant contribution to monthly household expenses.⁸⁸ **To increase enrollment, categorical eligibility between food assistance programs should be implemented widely.** Categorical eligibility is when individuals or families in need who apply and are accepted to one program are immediately listed as eligible for other programs.

Increasing categorical eligibility between programs will increase enrollment rates, which could foster additional opportunities for local purchasing. For example, children who come from households enrolled in 3SquaresVT would automatically be eligible for free school meals. Schools would receive the maximum amount of reimbursement for meals served to these students, whereas they would receive a lower rate of reimbursement if the same students were enrolled for reduced-priced meals through the National School Lunch Program. A greater reimbursement rate gives schools a slightly more flexible budget, increasing the potential for purchasing local products. The transition to categorical eligibility would be difficult. Therefore, a 10-year graduated plan should be developed by the state agencies and organizations that administer current programs.

In 2013, 136 of Vermont’s 318 public schools (43%) qualified for the Area-Eligible Afterschool Meal Program component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (i.e., 50% or more of the families in the community met the income requirement that made their children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals). These meals are automatically reimbursed to service providers at the maximum possible rate. Although areas designated as at-risk benefit from the added support of this program, children who struggle with food insecurity and who live in rural areas remain underserved. Because poverty is more dispersed in rural areas, many service providers are not eligible to participate in the Area-Eligible Afterschool Meal Program. Programs may enroll in traditional CACFP, however they are then required to collect household-

level financial data to determine whether children qualify for one of three levels of reimbursement. The administrative time and cost are significant barriers to these service providers. To enroll more providers to offer nutritious meals to food-insecure children, the federal qualifications for areas to receive these benefits should be adjusted, thereby reducing administrative cost by standardizing the reimbursement rate for meals served and eliminating the need for service providers to collect household-level data. Historically, income requirements for similar programs (the Summer Food Program) have been as low as 33%.⁸⁹ *Hunger Free Vermont* estimates that by lowering the at-risk designation to 40% or more of families in the community meeting the requirement for free school meals, about 44 more towns in the state could take advantage of the Area Eligible Afterschool Meal Program.⁹⁰

Increasing enrollment rates for child nutrition programs is a perennial goal in Vermont. Integrating local food purchasing into strategies to increase enrollment can simultaneously break down social barriers between high and low income Vermonters and increase the use of local foods in schools, child care centers, and child care homes. Incentives for institutions with enrollment in free and reduced-price categories above a pre-determined level could include cash for local food purchases or subsidized CSA shares. Making local food more available to children in need will directly challenge the perception that local food is only for high-income Vermonters.

 **Availability:** Local, fresh food will be more available to people who are food-insecure.

Community Food Security Planning


Vermont state law (VSA Title 24, §4382, Chapter 117) requires that Vermont towns revise their town plans every five years. This statute could be amended to include a requirement that municipalities consider food security in their town planning process.^{91,92}

Town-based food security planning efforts could be modeled on the town energy committees that evolved in response to energy-related concerns such as climate change and peak oil. A network of town-based volunteer organizations receive support from the [Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network](#) (VECAN) and have made good strides in implementing energy plans for Vermont towns and municipalities and engaging citizens in the process.

Although town and regional planning efforts would be driven primarily by citizen volunteers, the Governor's *Hunger Task Force* can support a statewide town-by-town strategic plan to eliminate hunger in Vermont and identify the appropriate types of technical assistance. For example, *UVM Extension* currently provides extensive education and technical support on municipal planning to town officers and citizens. Extension personnel could train town officers in integrating food issues into town plans and provide models for doing so through the Town Officers Education Conference and other venues.⁹³ Regional planning commissions also provide planning assistance to towns and appear to be poised to take a more active role in planning around food and agriculture issues in the state.

Services could include "(1) Sharing best practices for how to conducting a community food assessment and sharing models of best practices for drafting and implementing effective food plans; (2) advising on providing access to food for at-risk or marginally at-risk citizens when planning for emergencies and providing sample materials to towns for how this emergency planning can be done; (3) building and administering a pool of state, federal, and charitable funds that communities can access to support effective planning."⁹⁴

In 2011, Senator Sanders secured a \$120,000 federal grant for the *Vermont Community Garden Network* to create a statewide, school-based summer gardening initiative that teaches Vermont children and youth how to grow fresh produce using land on or adjacent to school campuses, especially in low income communities.^{95,96} The funding was used to establish 40 school community gardens statewide. Additional support will be required to provide technical assistance and mini-grants to sustain the community gardens and expand participation among food-insecure households. Long-term funding for community and school garden programs should continue to come from federal sources such as the Child Nutrition Act to provide access to fresh food and nutrition and gardening education to food-insecure families nationwide.

 **Utilization:** All Vermonters will have a greater understanding of how to obtain, grow, store, and prepare nutritional food.

Nutritional Education and Food Literacy

Currently, there are statewide programs that educate recipients of federal food assistance about food safety, nutrition, budgeting, and other topics. The [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program](#) (EFNEP) at UVM Extension has provided education in these areas for more than 40 years through classes and partnerships with community organizations. From 2009 to 2011, the *Center for Sustainable Agriculture*, EFNEP, and *Hunger Free Vermont* partnered on a classroom pilot project that integrated traditional educational material (related to nutrition and food safety) with a new curriculum that focuses on local food access. If the pilot is successful, this program and others like it should be made available statewide.

The 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act allocated \$15 million in Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program grants to 32 states, three Indian tribal organizations, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C.⁹⁷ Of the funding that Vermont receives on an annual basis to support this program, a portion is directed towards benefits for use at farmers' markets, and a portion is directed toward the Senior Farm Share program. In 2009, the Senior Farm Share program provided a CSA share valued at \$50 per season to 940 eligible Vermonters living in subsidized housing. In contrast, seniors were given \$30 per month to use at farmers' markets. In both cases, benefits are given and recipients are required to receive nutrition education. The nutrition component of the program, however, is not funded. To increase the use of local food and the effectiveness of the Senior Farm Share Program, nutrition education must be supported through additional funding for programs such as EFNEP.

In 2013, 136 of Vermont's 318 public schools (43%) were located in areas in which 50% or more of families with children were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Expanding farm to school programs to all 136 schools with 50% or greater eligibility would help bring food literacy and nutrition education to more food-insecure households and introduce more low income youth to fresh, whole foods. However, many of these schools need funding to purchase processing equipment, improve

cooking facilities, and increase storage capacity for fresh foods, as well as to train staff in the sourcing and preparation of local foods.

The VAAFM and advocacy organizations should push for increased funding for farm to school coordinators, equipment purchases and school infrastructure improvements, and professional development of food service workers, in the next Federal Farm Bill and in the current reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act (and through Senator Leahy's Bill S.3123, the Growing Farm to School programs Act). As demonstrated by the Burlington School Food Project, farm to school coordinators can play a key role in training food service staff and helping to source and distribute local foods throughout school districts.










Stabilization: Vermont's food security agencies and advocates will coordinate efforts to ensure all Vermonters have consistent access to nutritious food.









Results-Based Accountability Evaluation for Food Access Organizations

As presented in this report, many organizations address food insecurity and local food issues in Vermont. Often, these organizations are not required to conduct in-depth evaluations of their efforts, nor do they have the resources to do so. The creation of a modest funding pool dedicated to Results-Based Accountability evaluation—or a requirement from funders to include RBA evaluation—could lead to program improvements and longer-lasting impacts.



GETTING TO 2020: Objectives and Strategies for Expanding Food Access and Developing Vermont’s Food System

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	PATHWAY	CATEGORY
To follow the leadership of those most affected by the lack of food access.	Increase awareness and understanding of how race, class and other socially constructed divisions create additional barriers to food access.	Community	
	Identify and develop plans to address food system job training and entrepreneurship development in immigrant, refugee, and other underserved communities throughout the state.	Community	
To identify and address barriers to enrollment in federal food assistance programs.	Biennially review and assess barriers (e.g., stigma, customer service, verification requirements, technology issues, including websites and apps) to participation in federal food programs and share results with technical assistance and support network, including Food Access Cross-cutting Team. Collaboratively develop plan to overcome these barriers in order to ensure that eligible Vermonters are enrolled in federal food programs. Share summary of barriers broadly.	Federal	
To improve the health and well-being of food insecure Vermonters.	Strengthen partnerships among health and human service organizations to promote food as a health intervention for the under-served (e.g., through workplace wellness initiatives and healthcare incentives).	Federal, Community	
	Review food and nutrition education programming provided by existing federal, state and other organizations, identify areas in need of improvement, codify best practices and distribute widely.	Federal, Charitable, Community	
To integrate local/regional food purchasing with federal food assistance programs.	Identify potential gaps and opportunities related to integrating local/regional food purchasing into federal food programs.	Federal	
To advocate for the needs of Vermonters in all state and federal policies that impact food security.	Align all Vermont food access stakeholders to strategize and coordinate requests to Vermont’s federal delegation and state policy makers relating to federal and state food program policies (e.g., Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, Farm Bill).	Federal, Community	



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	PATHWAY	CATEGORY
To increase the quantity of fresh local/ regional food for food insecure Vermonters at all types of charitable food sites and in innovative food programs throughout the state.	Establish programs and funding to increase availability, demand and utilization of local and regional food products that have been identified by VT Foodbank Network Partners (Table 4.1.10, page 19). Integrate gleaning efforts into procurement of local food.	Charitable	
	Scale up innovative food programs by identifying long-term funding and technical assistance needs. Expand programs to underserved regions of Vermont.	Community	
To establish a Farm to School program in every school in which more than 50% of the students receive free or reduced-price meals.	TBD - After Farm-to-School Strategic Plan has been developed in 2015.	Community	
To increase the amount of produce coming from community-based gardens into food sites.	Inventory and review existing partnerships among all community based gardens and food sites and identify opportunities.	Charitable, Community	
	Identify challenges and opportunities for establishing new relationships throughout the state.	Charitable, Community	
To maximize the use of existing storage, processing and aggregation infrastructure to meet the needs of food sites and institutions.	Inventory existing storage and processing facilities to assess their capacity to store, process or aggregate local/regional fresh food for food site.	Community	
	Identify and promote best practices for replicating existing programs.	Community	
To help all Vermont towns identify actions they can take to address food insecurity and incorporate those actions into their town plans.	Encourage Vermont’s food access advocates to partner with Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) to research and develop language for addressing food security (see Agricultural Land Use Planning Modules).	Community	



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	PATHWAY	CATEGORY
To improve the effectiveness of Vermont's hunger relief/food security organizations.	Develop consistent evaluation efforts and performance measurements and assess program effectiveness.	Federal, Charitable, Community	
To broadly communicate the offerings of all federal food programs, charitable programs, and community food security programs to Vermonters.	Identify opportunities for increasing collaboration among hunger relief/food security organizations and cross-promotion of programs.	Federal, Charitable, Community	

 Access
  Availability
  Utilization
  Stabilization

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CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

Food Security in Vermont

Credits

4.1 Food Security in Vermont was prepared by Rachel Schattman, Virginia Nickerson, and Linda Berlin.

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Maps: Dan Erickson, [Advanced Geospatial Systems, LLC](#)

The information contained in 4.1: Food Security in Vermont maps was derived from a variety of sources. *Advanced Geospatial Systems, LLC* (AGS) compiled these maps, using data considered to be accurate; however, a degree of error is inherent in all maps. While care was taken in the creation of this product, it is provided “as is” without warranties of any kind, either expressed or implied. AGS, the *Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund* or any of the data providers cannot accept any responsibility for errors, omissions, or positional accuracy in the maps or their underlying records. These maps are for informational purposes only.

Layout and Design: Scott Sawyer, and Katie-Marie Rutherford, www.katierutherford.com.

For more information:

Vermont Food System Atlas: www.vtfarmtoplate.com/plan/chapter/4-1-food-security-in-vermont

On the Cover: Woman picking apples: Vermont Foodbank; Underhill garden: Friends of Burlington Gardens; girl with milk: Vermont Foodbank; meal preparation in community kitchen: Vermont Foodbank; Foodbank warehouse: Vermont Foodbank; canning in Middlebury: UVM Special Collections; senior meals: Vermont Foodbank; EBT machine and Brattleboro tokens: NOFA Vermont; gleaned potatoes: Vermont Foodbank.



THE PLAN

THE NETWORK

GETTING TO 2020

THE ATLAS





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VERMONT'S FOOD SYSTEM

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FOOD PROCESSING



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FOOD SECURITY



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RENEWABLE ENERGY



REGULATION



LEADERSHIP

