



**FOOD
CONNECTS**

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





**FOOD
CONNECTS**

OUR TEAM

2021 STAFF

Richard Berkfield
Executive Director

Scott Berzofsky
Warehouse Coordinator

Bob Blackmer
Food Hub Driver

Emma Bliss
Food Hub Operations Coordinator

Tom Brewton
Local Food Institutional Sales Associate

Laura Carbonneau
Marketing & Outreach Manager

Vickie Case
Community & Donor Relations

Elisa Daus
Food Hub Driver

Lissa Harris
Development Director

McKenna Hayes
Food Hub Co-Director

Jesse Howard
Food Hub Driver & Maintenance

Sheila Humphreys
Farm to School Coach

Sadie Hunter
Farm to School Program Manager

Raymond Johnson
Warehouse Specialist

Jenny Kessler
Farm to School Coach

Tracy Lake
Food Hub Driver

Beth Lewand
Food Hub Sales Associate

Nathanael Matthiesen
Fleet & Facilities Specialist

Alex McCullough
Food Hub Co-Director

Ward Ogden
Food Hub Driver

Mark Olbrych
Food Hub Driver

David Paysnick
Food Hub Local Food Procurement Coordinator

David Pontius
Food Hub Driver

Deborah Sadler
Food Hub Operations Manager

Karen Sprague
*Full Charge Bookkeeper
HR Coordinator*

Kristen Thompson
Marketing Coordinator

2021
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul Renouf *President*

Betsy Gentile *Secretary*

Julie Hamilton *Treasurer*

Kevin Brennan

Timm Harris

Bethany LaClair

Andrew Marchev

Francis Sopper

Loss, Growth, and a Pathway Back to Security



You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who hasn't experienced loss in some form or another this past year. Some losses were profound, threatening the safety, security, and basic needs of people worldwide and in our community. Yet, as it often does, the loss provides a need to be filled, an opportunity for people and communities to work together in new and unique ways.

We are still seeing the effect of the pandemic on the global food supply chain with bare or sparse shelves in our supermarket chain stores. We also continue to see a reliance on local food providers to fill those gaps. The regional food supply chain is an obvious necessity, whether through a farmer's market or a local food hub.

At Food Connects, we continue to work toward enhancing a regional food supply chain so that our community has access to source-identified, delicious, and nutritious foods, and this year we grew to meet that need, adding the necessary infrastructure for success.

We added a staff member to our Farm To School program to support educators, food service directors, farmers, and community members in cultivating healthy farm and food connections in classrooms, cafeterias, and communities. We added a Sales Associate to focus on our area schools—getting nutritious, regionally-sourced food into our schools while also boosting sales growth for our small producers.

Along with the Intervale Center, Green Mountain Farm Direct, and the Center for Agricultural Economy, we formed the Vermont Food Hub Collaborative to develop the Vermont Way Foods™ brand. Vermont Way Foods™ will create new market opportunities for Vermont producers supporting a robust and vibrant farm and food economy.

We're excited to partner with the Intervale Center to create more farm support as we launch a small food and farm business technical assistance program to support Vermont producers to grow their businesses, including preparing them for wholesale distribution. And we are growing to support our tri-state neighbors, working to engage schools and farms in the Monadnock area and beyond.

We are so proud of our Food Connects team! Board members and staff alike are committed to growing our network to support a regional food system and have gone above and beyond this year, ensuring our communities have access to nutritious food and our local farms thrive. We'll continue to expand to meet demand with the help of network partners, funders, and wonderful donors.

Paul Renouf
Board President

Richard Berkfield
Executive Director

FARM TO SCHOOL

Spotlight on Westminster School

The Farm to School team at Westminster dedicates itself to the three C's of Farm to School—classrooms, cafeterias, and community—and has been working with Food Connects since 2014 to create a robust and thriving program for their students.

Classrooms

Food justice, intentional investigation of the local food system, and global warming are just a few topics that school Librarian and Farm to School Coordinator, Mandy Walsh, covers with her students. Mandy integrates these topics into her daily lesson plans, instilling in students at a young age the importance of our food system and the roles we play.

And the classrooms at Westminster aren't limited to the walls of the building. The team at Westminster recognizes the importance of outdoor education. Food Connects lent some helping hands in the spring, as students from all classes spent time planting fruit and vegetable seeds in the school's ample garden. The students feed, care for, and collect eggs from the chickens in the school's coop year-round. This past year, the school held its first Farm and Field Day to harvest the fruits of their labor.

PARTNER SCHOOLS

*Springfield School District
Bellows Falls High School
Bellows Falls Middle School
Grafton Elementary School
Saxtons River Elementary
Central Elementary
Westminster Community School
Twin Valley Elementary School
Riverside Middle School*

MEMBER SCHOOLS

*Putney Central School
Brattleboro Union High School
Brattleboro Area Middle School
Academy School
Green Street School
Oak Grove School
Dummerston School
NewBrook Elementary School
Guilford Central School
Leland & Gray Union High School
Townshend Elementary
Winston Prouty Early Learning Center*



The Farm To School team at the Westminster Center School celebrated their first Farm and Field Day.

FARM TO SCHOOL



Cafeterias

The Farm to School Cafe provides all students in the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, to which Westminster belongs, with their daily meals. Melissa Bacon and Sarah Allaire, the school nutrition team, work with Food Connects to ensure that a portion of those meals includes Vermont food for Vermont kids. The team sent school break meal boxes to families that included apples and blueberries from Green Mountain Orchards, cheeses from Grafton Village Cheese, yogurt from Green Mountain Creamery, milk from Miller Farm, and carrots, sweet corn, lettuce, broccoli from Harlow Farm. Not only did these meal boxes provide food for all families, but they also included recipes so families could cook together. Food Connects believes that people deserve to choose the food they want regardless of their income and that families should have the tools they need to grow and prepare healthy food. Programs like this improve access to local foods and help create a more just food system and keep tiny bellies fed.

Communities

Learning isn't limited to the students. Mandy Walsh continues to grow her capacity as a Farm to School coordinator as part of the Food Connects Garden Coordinators Community of Practice. Educators gather quarterly to share experiences, education, and learning opportunities to ensure all school gardens thrive in our region. Last year, Mandy joined us for our Mushroom Cultivation workshop and our Cross-Pollination for Garden Coordinators event to bring new ideas and projects back to her school and her students.

It's been exciting to work side by side with Westminster Center School as their Farm to School program grows. Their Farm and Field Day and other gardening activities and events continue to build community among their students and staff.

“ I think that in the big picture, the best student learning happens when students get to be outside, working together, trying new things.

- Mandy Walsh,
Westminster Center School

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A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

More than just a farm, Scott Farm is a piece of Vermont history. The farm, nestled in the woods of Dummerston, Vermont, boasts a 231-year history of innovative agriculture and social responsibility. It's not unusual to see tourists and Vermonters picking peaches in the summer or apples in the fall from their orchard — some planted in the early 20th century, with over 130 heirloom varieties. Like so many farms, Scott Farm was hit hard by the pandemic, shutting down many public offerings like educational and informational workshops and Pick-Your-Own services. And like many farms, Scott Farm relied on agritourism to keep the farm operating, but folks weren't coming out as before.

When Food Connects, The Intervale Center, Green Mountain Farm Direct, and The Center for Agricultural Economy formed the Vermont Food Hub Collaborative (VFHC), they thought of businesses like Scott Farm. In 2020 VFHC created Vermont Way Foods™ (VWF), a unique brand based on Vermont values. VWF will create new market opportunities for Vermont producers, supporting a robust and vibrant farm and food economy with the goal to break even and generate \$12 Million each year in new sales for Food Hub members, farmers, and partners by 2025.

We sat down with Matt Landi, Director of Brand and Business Development for Vermont Way Foods™, to talk about the history of this unique collaboration. And to learn how VWF will support Scott Farm and many other Vermont small food and farm businesses while building a regional food system that reflects Vermont values and returns wealth to Vermont's rural communities.



“ By localizing the supply chain and diving into retail merchandising strategy in a more structured, cohesive fashion, you're offering small farms the opportunity to participate in merchandising and promotional programs typically offered primarily by national distributors.

-Matt Landi,
Vermont Way Foods

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A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Food Connects: Thanks much for talking with us, Matt. Can you tell us a little bit about the work you've been doing with the Vermont Food Hub Collaborative and Vermont Way Foods?

Matt Landi: Yeah, of course! Thanks for this opportunity to talk about Vermont Way Foods. It's a project I'm really excited to be involved with, especially right now.

For decades, the four organizations that comprise the VFHC have worked in Vermont, supporting farm viability and food access and creating experiences for people to engage in the food system. In 2020, the four food hubs saw \$6 million in cumulative local food sales. By working together, sharing infrastructure, connections, and decades of expertise, VFHC will have an exponentially more significant impact on Vermont's food system—carving out opportunities for Vermont producers who are poised to grow their businesses and meet the regional need for local, sustainably produced food. Trying to compete as a small producer is tough. Of the many challenges, effective logistics, overall capacity, and a competitive cost structure are key areas of focus as the business scales. The cost is probably much higher if you are selling 20 lb boxes compared to 40 lb boxes because you have a specialty product, and it costs more to get it where it's going. The VFHC is essential in supporting our logistical service proposition, vital to survival, growth, and differentiation.

Food Connects: Can you tell us a little bit about Vermont Ways Foods' impact on small businesses like Scott Farm?

Matt Landi: Scott Farm is a perfect example of a unique branding opportunity. No one else grows what they grow. They are dealing with antique varieties, it's a multi-generational eating experience, and that's a compelling story to tell the conscious consumer. If they had a big marketing department and a lot of money to invest, they could plaster marketing on a huge level. But they are a small operation, focusing on growing their heirloom apples, among other produce, as they should. Many are also rare because they are an outright challenge to grow. It's very difficult to predict the crop's appearance year to year in a micro/variety by variety level.

The orchard is a living organism.

Heirloom apples aren't uniquely Vermont, but they fit the mold of Vermont Way Foods. The VFHC is on a mission to help regional consumers find the foods and experiences they crave while helping to build a more just and sustainable food economy for Vermont. A food economy where our lands are working, ecological resources are sustainably managed, rural economies are flourishing, and our state's food and farm culture continues to perform as a great economic multiplier for our tourism economy, small towns, and quality of life. VWF is the sustainable alternative to a global food market that incentivizes bigger, faster, cheaper, and easier.



THE FOOD HUB

Spotlight on Miller Farm

In 2021, Miller Farm became Food Connects' first fluid milk supplier. But before the pandemic struck, this connection would have been quite unlikely.

When the pandemic hit and national supply chains wavered, Pete Miller of Miller Farm in Vernon, VT, saw an opportunity to serve his community better. Starting that year, Miller Farm reserved 100 gallons of the milk they produced for local sales.

As of today, what started as a localized effort to provide high-quality, Certified Organic milk to their neighbors has evolved into something much more significant.

From chocolate and maple to the simple classic whole milk. While Miller Farm continues to sell the majority of its milk to Stonyfield, Pete is eager to grow his local sales. "We can control our sale price," says Pete. "For generations of milk producers, the price has been set by external factors, which invariably lag the cost of production; therefore, most farmers just 'work harder, longer.' We are pleased to be in control so that we can set a reasonable price based on our cost."

One of the foundational intentions of our Food Hub program is to deliver delicious, regionally sourced, and source-identified foods to schools in our communities. Produce, specifically apples, yogurt, and beef, are common items students in our neighboring schools see on their trays. The opportunity to include local dairy was nothing short of thrilling.

Pete was eager to connect with local schools and wanted to ensure that he would have a market if he purchased special bottling equipment. That's where Food Connects stepped in. With our established relationships, we were able to solidify consistent and reliable buyers for the milk and sales to schools who could purchase less frequently due to budget constraints. This partnership made the investment worthwhile for Pete, and many schools were thrilled to purchase local milk.



THE FOOD HUB

Dublin Christian Academy, located in Dublin, NH, has had an overwhelmingly positive student response. The younger students are thrilled to see chocolate and maple flavors on the menu. A group of older students took a farm tour, met the farmers and cows, and truly saw where their milk comes from. They even helped tape up the boxes of milk heading to their school!

"Our values align with 'community,'" says Bethany Paquin, Director of Development. "And we love to source our food from farms and local producers... The (older) students are at a point where they are thinking more about where their food comes from and how it is produced. The students said they had a lot of fun and enjoyed learning about the milk bottling process and seeing all the animals, especially the cows that produce the milk."



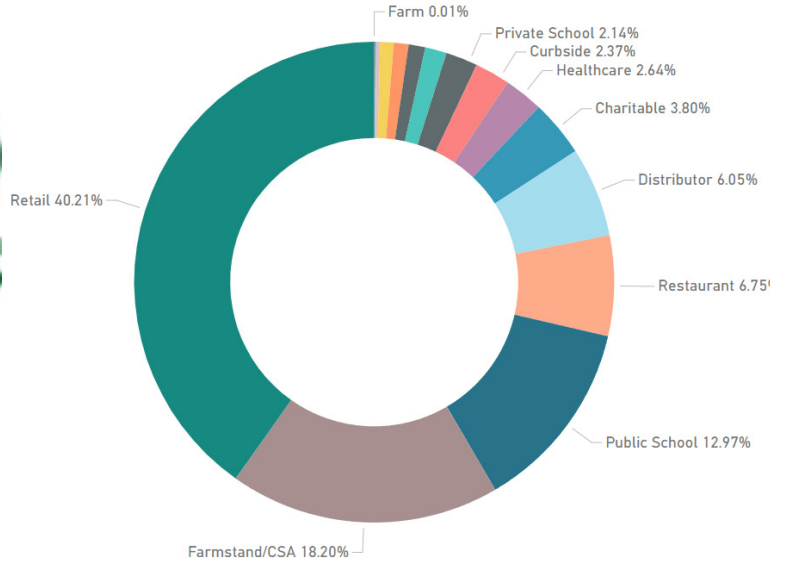
Students at Dublin Christian Academy learn about local food and how it's produced at Miller Farm.

"For generations of milk producers, the price has been set by external factors, which invariably lag the cost of production; therefore, most farmers just work harder, longer. We are pleased to be in control such that we can set a reasonable price based on our cost."

**-Pete Miller
Owner, Miller Farm**



FINANCIAL DASHBOARD



Nutritional Facts

Food Connects

2021

Serving size

Account Actual

Calories

Income

Food Hub Revenue 1,578,735.00

Unrestricted Revenue 140,323.36

Grants 585,077.79

Education Services 56,562.00

Total Income 2,360,698.15

Cost of Goods Sold

TOTAL Cost of Goods Sold 1,317,770.00

Gross Profit 1,042,928.15

Operating Expenses

Payroll 669,716.45

Fixed Expenses 61,317.10

Operating Expenses 108,007.62

General & Admin 114,378.00

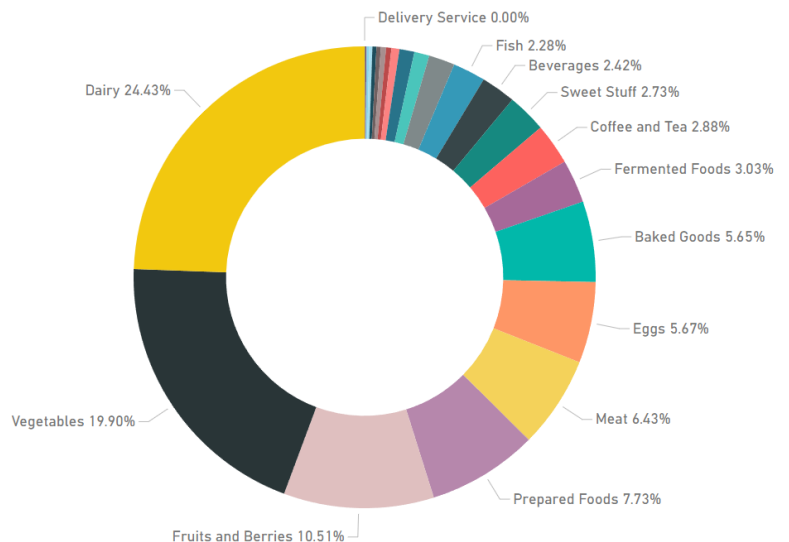
Total Operating Expenses 953,419.17

Operating Income 89,508.98

**115
Food
Producers**

**244
Customers**

**\$1,244,800
back to
farmers**



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

Scott's Clean Sweep

Thank you!



Hired 7 New Employees!

Provided \$3,661 in food donations

Gave away 790 sprouting kits to schools!

All Souls U.U. Church
C&S Wholesale Grocers
Darn Tough Socks
Capital One
Barrows & Fisher Oil
Brattleboro Subaru
Dead River Company
4 Columns Inn
Brattleboro Savings & Loan
Edward Jones
Emerson's Furniture

Farnum Insulators
Frabjous Fibers & Wonderful Yarns
Frisky Cow Gelato
Great Eastern Radio
GS Precision
Guilford Country Store
HomeLight
Josh Bernbaum Glass
Keene Family YMCA
Landmark Trust

Orchard Hill Breadworks
Roll'en Homes
Savings Bank of Walpole
Scott Farm Orchard
The Richards Group
The Simple Nest
Vermont Innovation Box
Vermont Salumi
Westminster Center School
WW Building Supply



FOOD CONNECTS

22 Browne Ct Unit 103
Brattleboro, VT 05301

Postage



NAME
ADDRESS
STATE & ZIP

SCAN CODE

PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT | SHERPA FOODS

Food Connects is delighted to introduce one of our newest producers, Sherpa Foods. Founded in 2015 with the mission of bringing traditional Nepalese delicacies to its customers, Sherpa Foods provides delicious flavors you won't want to miss. Sherpa Foods uses local, fresh, and natural ingredients in their prepared foods, showing their commitment to quality. We were able to chat with Nurbu Sherpa about the company and their outstanding products.

"When we came here to look around, we saw an opportunity in the food supply industry. There were not a lot of ethnic food options in stores like in big cities in NYC, Dallas, etc. There was just one Nepalese restaurant but nothing in retail stores. Most people usually think about opening a restaurant, but I wanted to try something different. So, I thought maybe we can combine my family's delicious cooking and my business background and start a Nepalese food supply startup. There were no businesses that supplied Nepalese food to retail stores, so we became the first company to do so in the U.S.

Nepal has a very diverse culture, tradition, and food. Nepal's national foods are rice and lentils, but the unofficial and most popular food is momo. Food Connects is a tremendous help in expanding our market and introducing our products to stores and that would have been impossible for us to do on our own."

