



2013 - 2023

Celebrating 10 Years

**FOOD CONNECTS**

22 Browne Ct Unit 103  
Brattleboro, VT 05301



## Producer Spotlight | Shri Bark Snacks

Food Connects recently onboarded producer, Shri Bark, that makes muffins and rounds specifically designed for schools. During the first week of sales, we distributed more than 40 cases to our school partners. This means that over 2,000 kids received a healthy nutritious muffin or round just in the first week of Food Connects distributing this product.

Producers like Shri Bark are the reason we've expanded our infrastructure to meet demand. The frozen muffins and rounds meet USDA requirements for school food and are available at a price point that matches school budgets. This was a priority for owner Alison Bologna and her partner Dave Mongeau.

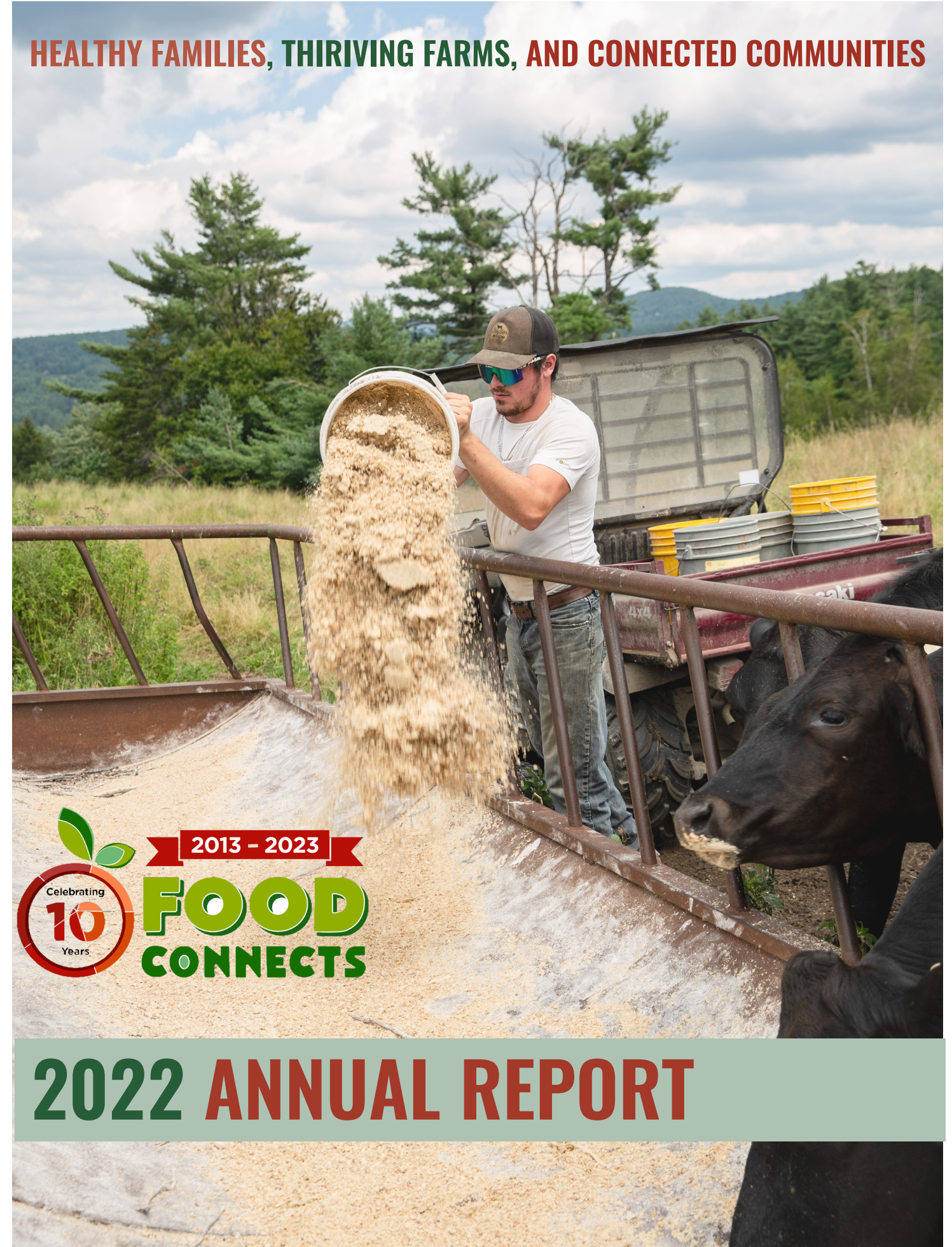
All year long, a portion of Shri Bark sales allows them to operate skilled yoga outreach programs for free in schools, centers for veterans, shelters, hospitals, recovery centers, social service agencies for adults with disabilities, senior centers, and more!

To date, Shri is serving more than 8,500 students every year with more than 40 certified teachers helping students reduce toxic stress and build healthier and more balanced communities thanks to sales from the country's only "KARMA-PACKED SNACK!"

Food Connects | 2022



HEALTHY FAMILIES, THRIVING FARMS, AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES



2022 ANNUAL REPORT



# OUR TEAM

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<b>Bob Blackmer</b> <i>Food Hub Driver</i>	<b>Nathanael Matthiesen</b> <i>Fleet &amp; Facilities Specialist</i>
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<b>Vickie Case</b> <i>Community &amp; Donor Relations</i>	<b>Kris Nelson</b> <i>Farm to School Program Manager</i>
<b>Katie Endicott</b> <i>Food Hub Procurement Coordinator</i>	<b>David Paysnick</b> <i>Food Hub Local Food Procurement Specialist</i>
<b>Lee Halpern</b> <i>Business Manager</i>	<b>David Pontius</b> <i>Food Hub Driver</i>
<b>Lissa Harris</b> <i>Development Director</i>	<b>Deborah Sadler</b> <i>Food Hub Operations Manager</i>
<b>McKenna Hayes</b> <i>Food Hub Co-Director</i>	<b>Ramelle Schepp</b> <i>Food Hub Inside Sales Associate</i>
<b>Jesse Howard</b> <i>Food Hub Driver &amp; Maintenance</i>	<b>Nick Spaeth</b> <i>Food Hub Warehouse Coordinator</i>
<b>Sheila Humphreys</b> <i>Farm to School Coach</i>	<b>Karen Sprague</b> <i>Full Charge Bookkeeper HR Coordinator</i>
<b>Raymond Johnson</b> <i>Warehouse Specialist</i>	<b>Kristen Thompson</b> <i>Marketing Coordinator</i>

## The Healthy Connection

Have you ever thought about the intersection of food distribution and child nutrition programs?

That intersection drives our work at Food Connects—two complicated issues with a powerful, often overlooked connection. When we began distributing food in 2008, it was easier for our local public school to purchase apples from across the country than from the farm less than two miles up the road. No one was available to facilitate the sale, so we decided to do it!

**FUN FACT: Since 2010, we have sold almost a half million dollars worth of apples to regional schools, and we aspire that every apple in a Vermont school is a Vermont-grown apple.**

Food Connects partners with local and regional food producers and wholesale customers committed to strengthening the connection between local food and resilient food systems. We connect farmers and food producers to larger wholesale markets and prepare them to serve those markets with technical assistance, sales representation, and marketing services. And equally important, our aggregation and distribution services make it easy for wholesale customers to purchase from many food producers simultaneously, with one order, one delivery, and one invoice.

Over many years, our Farm to School team developed critical connections within our schools' communities, cafeterias, and classrooms, facilitating a culture of curiosity around new foods to build lifelong healthy eating habits for students and their families. We have seen a dramatic shift in understanding the value of school meals as the most important (and often the only) meals for many students. **With two out of every five people in Vermont currently experiencing hunger, the highest quality school meals are essential.**

During the 2021-2022 school year, we delivered nearly \$213,000 in regionally sourced foods from sixty-one farms and food producers to sixteen School Districts throughout VT. The Food Hub launched new delivery routes in 2022 focused on serving more schools, often underserved with limited purchasing options, and continuing to show up at the intersection of food distribution and child nutrition programs.

Our centralized infrastructure allows us to efficiently buy bulk from food producers, keeping prices down for schools and others with limited budgets and storage capacity. As a community-based "middle-person," we can leverage our trucks, coolers, people, and systems to ensure affordable school prices while maximizing the return to farmers.

The connections we make are vital to a thriving, resilient food system, but there are challenges ahead, including keeping up with the demand from our community. In 2022 our five refrigerated vehicles traveled over 100,000 miles, many of them on dirt roads, bringing food to our warehouse, sorting it into orders, and sending it back out for delivery to schools and other wholesale customers. More schools than ever are demanding local food, and we're doing everything possible to meet those needs. We're busting at the seams and recently leased another 10,000 square feet that we are outfitting with larger coolers and freezers. To increase our capacity to serve our communities, we're seeking funds from federal and state sources, but we also need the help of supporters like you.

Please contact us to learn how you can be a part of this vital connection.



Paul Renouf  
Board President



Richard Berkfield  
Executive Director

# Farm To School

## An Inspiring Year at Central Elementary

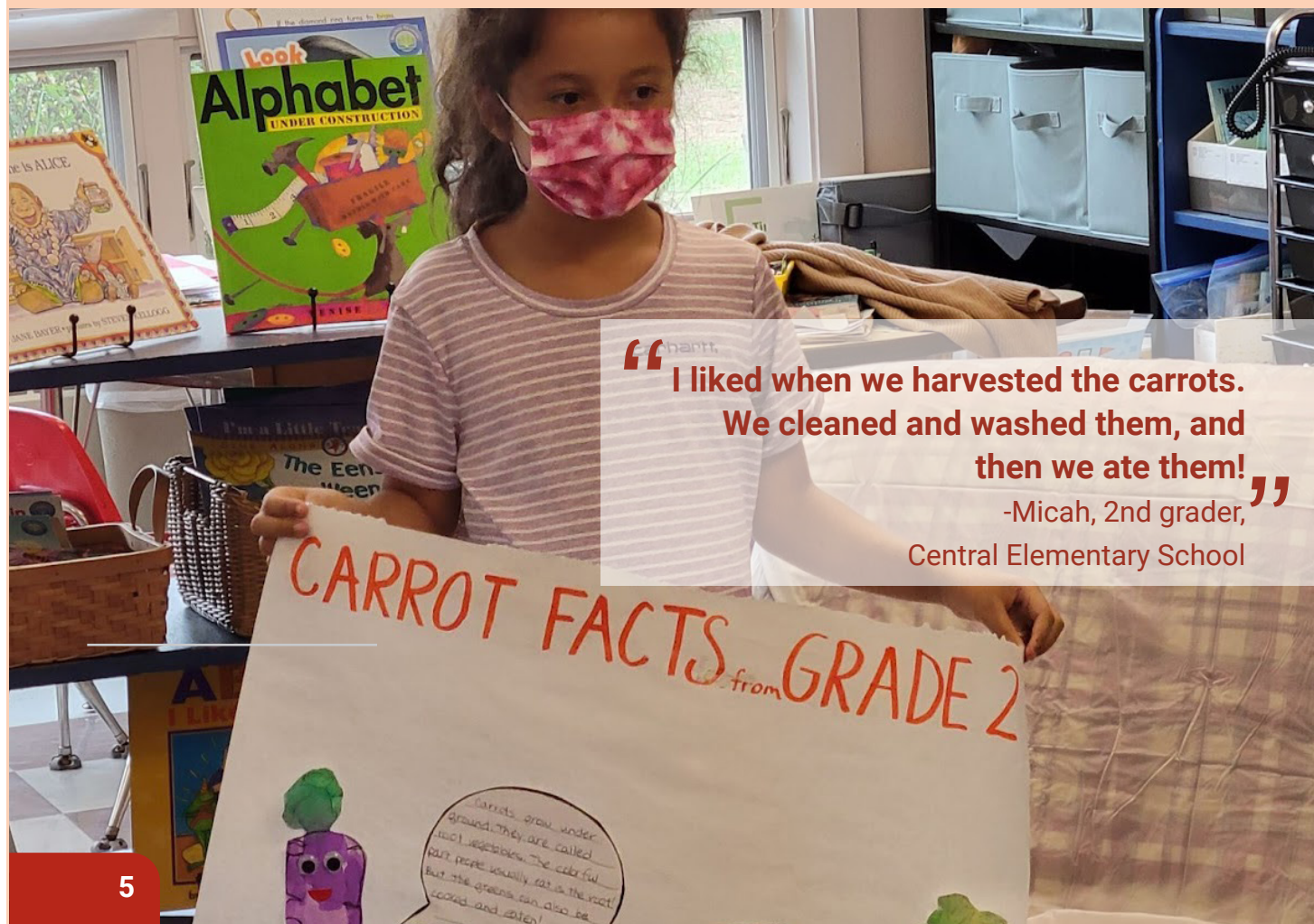
Central Elementary School (CES) had a phenomenal year of Farm to School (FTS) programming in 2022, wrapping up 12 months of work dedicated to advancing food education at the Bellows Falls area school.

Selected as a participant school for the 2021-2022 Shelburne Farms Northeast Farm to School Institute, CES won a \$5,000 grant to jumpstart their FTS programming. While the school already had a garden and dedicated food service staff, the funding and coaching provided by the Institute helped to formalize the FTS program and integrate it more fully into the school culture and environment.

A thriving Farm to School program usually involves three key components: **the classroom, the cafeteria, and the community**. Often, it takes years for a school to be active in these areas, but Central's team has grown its program from the beginning and has a comprehensive program that reaches into each of these areas.

In the classroom, Farm to School came alive in the 2nd-grade classrooms. Teachers Kate Kane and Judy Verespy worked closely with librarian Jody Hauser to devise monthly programming that included everything from art projects and read-alouds to food preparation and tastings.

In October, students harvested carrots from the garden, painted carrots with watercolors, and made informational posters about carrots before teaching other classrooms what they'd learned. Food Service Director/Garden Coordinator Erica Frank baked delicious carrot muffins for the entire school. In January, students painted with beet juice and made beet hummus in the classroom. Erica, again tying in the cafeteria, made nutritious and delicious beet brownies for the school food program.



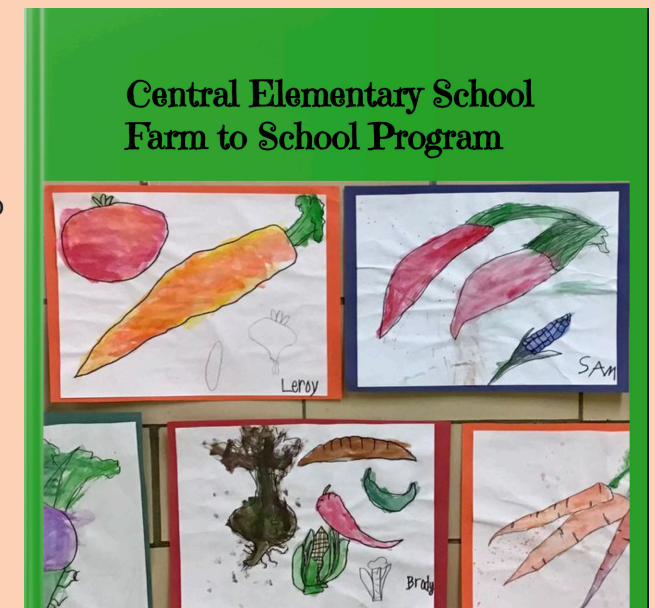
“ I liked when we harvested the carrots. We cleaned and washed them, and then we ate them! ”  
-Micah, 2nd grader,  
Central Elementary School

# Farm To School

The third “C” of successful FTS programs is community, and Central Elementary was able to connect with its community in impressive and innovative ways. In March, when the Harvest of the Month was maple syrup, the students visited a neighborhood home that ran a sugaring operation! They also tasted some “sugar on snow” made by a local (teacher’s!) family. In the spring, local farmers John and Teresa Janiszyn of Pete’s Farm Stand in Walpole, NH, visited the classroom. The farmers taught students about soil and composting, and students planted cucumber seeds. Weeks later, they transplanted these same cucumbers into the fields at Pete’s!

What an amazing circular connection between students and the farmers in their communities. It has been a mutually beneficial relationship between the community and Central Elementary this school year, with each gaining and giving benefits to the other. The Rotary Club of Bellows Falls came to help with a Garden Volunteer Day and donated garden supplies. Students received gift cards to buy something at Pete’s, funded by the FTS budget.

Central’s story is one of success, but it’s only the beginning of their journey, and it has been possible through many dedicated staff members and community support. The Institute helped the team shape an action plan for their program. Principal Kerry Kenedy has supported FTS from the beginning and plans to integrate the program more deeply into the school culture over the years. One step in this process is that next year, the third grade will join the second grade in receiving monthly programming. Physical Education teacher Peter Lawry was integral in planning, building, and maintaining the garden. And Erica Frank has worked to connect the summer school program to the FTS activities throughout the summer.



Librarian Jody Hauser and the students made a book to record all the amazing things the CES FTS program achieved in 2022!

## Member Schools

- Leland and Gray Union High School
- Townshend Elementary School
- Newbrook Elementary School
- Westminster Community School
- Central Elementary School
- Grafton-Athens Elementary School
- Jamaica Village School
- Dummerston School
- Green Street School
- Academy School
- Oak Grove School
- Putney Central School
- Brattleboro Union High School
- Brattleboro Area Middle School
- Winston Prouty Early Learning Center

## Partner Schools

- Bellows Falls High School
- Bellows Falls Middle School
- Saxtons River Elementary School
- Twin Valley Elementary School
- Twin Valley Middle and High School
- Fall Mountain High School
- Guilford Elementary School



# A Catalyst For Change

## Food Connects is Celebrating 10 years of Serving our Community

In 2023, Food Connects is celebrating ten years of serving families, farms, and communities in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. Food Connects evolved from a Food Hub—a small local food distribution operation—and a Farm To School program that were under the umbrellas of several other organizations. Since then, we have grown into a single non-profit, buying from over 200 local and regional farmers and distributing food to schools, co-ops, and farm stands across Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

**Food Connects started as a response to the community's need for education about and access to fresh, nutrient-dense foods. A decade later, Food Connects' rapid growth proves how critical that need was and continues to be.**

Our Farm To School program's early efforts focused on developing Annual Farm to School Conference Professional Development Courses in partnership with Vermont FEED. Eventually, the program developed a Farm To School business model in which member schools contract with Food Connects to plan and implement Farm To School activities, including supporting school gardens, working with school meal programs, and integrated curriculum development. Our Farm To School program has now grown to support over 30 schools in our region.



**Hans Estrin, former biology teacher and founder of Food Connects' predecessor, Windham Farm and Food Network, fills a delivery truck with local food circa 2009.**



**Food Connects staff photo in the early days, including co-founder Richard Berkfield.**

# A Catalyst For Change

The Food Connects Food Hub began in 2008 as Windham Farm and Food (WFF). It was piloted by Hans Estrin and Harlow Farm and coordinated with assistance from UVM Extension. Area non-profit Post Oil Solutions also supported WFF's launch as a mission-driven LLC in 2013. Eventually, WFF merged with Food Connects to turn the Food Hub into one of our core programs. By 2018, Food Connects growth and expansion were well underway, having raised \$250,000 for capital, adding a sales manager, and purchasing another refrigerated truck. Revenue increases by 25% to over \$400,000. Storage demands had increased so much by this point that Food Connects moved into The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Business Park building on Putney Road to meet the demand.

In 2022, the Food Hub bought almost \$1.5 million worth of local and regional food that was then sold and delivered to schools and restaurants and leased another 10,000 square feet in the Brattleboro Business Park for dry, refrigerated, and frozen food storage. This project will help small farmers and food businesses grow, many of whom would not be able to sell their products wholesale without our support. It will also help get more nutritious, regionally-sourced foods into schools by allowing us to keep more food on hand for when schools need it.

Throughout Food Connects' history, we have acted as a catalyst for change. From the beginning, we responded to community needs and became a leader in creating a regional food system. We're proud to have served our communities for the last ten years and hope to continue serving for many more!



**Food Connects Food Hub Director, McKenna Hayes, in our first warehouse circa 2017.**



**The new space, which will expand Food Connects food storage capacity by 10,000 square feet.**

# The Food Hub

## Spotlight on Boyden Farm

Boyden Farm is a fifth-generation farm located in Northern Vermont. It was originally an established dairy farm for many years, but that changed in 2000. They are now one of an increasing number of small family farms that are using sustainable farming practices to breed and raise cattle for nutrient-dense beef.

In 2022, Food Connects sold approximately 6,000 pounds of beef to 20 schools every month, most of which came from Boyden Farm. Together, Food Connects and Boyden Farm replaced almost 70,000 pounds of commodity beef with local, nutrient-dense beef in one year!

This summer we visited Boyden Farm and spoke with Mark Boyden, Owner and Farmer, to find out why working with Food Connects is so important to him.

**FOOD CONNECTS:** How does working with Food Connects help your business? What are you excited about in this partnership?

**MARK BOYDEN:** *“I’m excited that working with Food Connects spreads out the risk for our business. And Food Connects specializes in local. It’s not like dealing with Cisco. Food Connects genuinely wants local.”*

**FOOD CONNECTS:** Why is buying and selling locally and the local food movement important to you?

**MARK BOYDEN:** *“The local food movement keeps us in business and keeps our pastures and fields open. It also keeps the money full circle.”*

Together, Food Connects and Boyden Farm replaced almost 70,000 pounds of commodity beef with local, nutrient-dense beef in one year!



# The Food Hub

**FOOD CONNECTS:** Why is getting your food into local schools important to you?

**MARK BOYDEN:** *“The most critical goal is getting kids to expect local food, so they keep that a priority when they grow up. That’s more important than sales.”*

**FOOD CONNECTS:** What challenges is your farm facing? How can Food Connects help? How can consumers help?

**MARK BOYDEN:** *“Utilizing everything [from our cows]. There’s a lot of ground beef on a cow, and buying that beef helps us use the rest of the animal, not just the tenderloins that people want to buy.”*



“We’re the only people around feeding flax to cattle. It’s rich in omega-3s. We’re not doing 100% grass. It’s been proven that flax is better, and we feed them grass and corn, too. 100% grass-fed is not as high in omega-3s.”

-Mark Boyden  
Owner/Farmer, Boyden Farm



# Financial Dashboard

# Thank You To Our Donors!



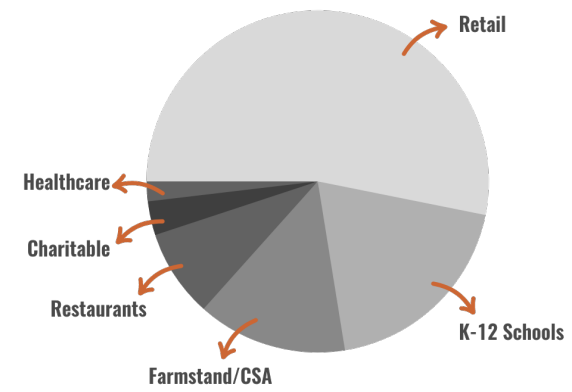
125 Food Producers      288 Customers

\$1,856,450 in food bought from our local farmers

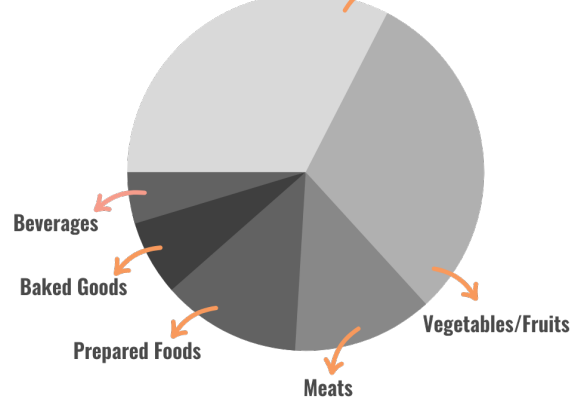
\$418,154 local food sold to schools

Nutritional Facts	
Food Connects 2022	
Serving size	
Account	Actual
<b>Calories</b>	
<b>Income</b>	
Food Hub Revenue	\$2,437,697.52
Unrestricted Revenue	\$147,507.77
Grants	\$715,829.16
Education Services	\$50,889.97
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$3,351,924.42</b>
<b>Cost of Goods Sold</b>	
Total Cost of Goods Sold	\$1,897,045.51
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>\$1,454,878.91</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	
Payroll	\$1,054,282.48
Operating Expenses	\$295,342.78
General & Admin	\$149,346.52
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,498,971.78</b>
<b>Operating Income</b>	<b>-\$44,092.87*</b>

Sales by Customer Type



Sales by Product Type



Frisky Cow Gelato  
Dead River Company  
Scott's Clean Sweep  
Farnum Insulators  
Holiday Inn Express  
Orchard Hill Breadworks  
C&S Wholesale Grocers

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation  
Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets  
Working Lands Enterprise Initiative  
Northern Borders Regional Commission  
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board



USDA Rural Development Community Facilities  
USDA Local Agriculture Market Program

## Ways to Support Food Connects

**Consider a recurring gift**  
A monthly gift is critical to our sustainability

**Donate to Food Connects**  
Reach out to our team to learn how  
[lissa@foodconnects.org](mailto:lissa@foodconnects.org)

**Spread the word!**  
Tell your friends about why you love Food Connects!

\*some grant money spent in 2022 will be reimbursed in 2023