

## FOOD CONNECTS | 2020

*The Taste of Food Connects raised over \$6,000 in donations and nearly \$9,000 in gifts in kind for our Annual Fund. COVID-19 forced our team to think creatively and put a new twist on an old event. This campaign had two purposes: supporting Food Connects and its programs through a silent auction and encouraging community members to shop locally, supporting businesses in our community through a local passport contest.*

*Growing Local Food Markets in the Monadnock Region raised over \$10,000 for our Food Hub to improve our food safety systems. We saw an outpouring of support from the Monadnock Region and beyond. As a result, we purchased a pressure washer, installed new shelving, increased food safety administrative capacity through a new Operations Coordinator, and have run our first mock-recalls on products.*

*Food Connects Gives raised over \$3,000 for our Farm to School program. This month-long campaign of giving takes place during National Farm to School Month. Our program served as a valuable resource for schools looking to adapt to outdoor and physical distanced learning, provided schools with COVID-19 safe cooking guidelines, and facilitated the relationship between our Food Hub and food nutrition programs to provide families meal boxes.*



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## 2020 | ANNUAL REPORT





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**Colby Thomson** Food Hub Driver



There are two words that resonated with me during 2020, resilience and sustainability.

Food Connects has clearly demonstrated how important these concepts were and are going forward. By creating demand for our farmers and producers for their products, we keep them viable.

And in doing so, we build our community's sustainability and sense of resilience. By taking a leadership role in transforming the local food system to support our schools, we provide nutritional education as well as enhancing students' ability to learn and we are working hard to make the case for Universal Meals.

The challenges of the logistics of meeting all the demands for local food sources present opportunities for growth. The staff has embraced these opportunities seamlessly.

Rapid growth can be the downfall of many organizations. But not here. All of the board and staff passionately hold to our mission of healthy families, thriving farms, and connected communities. This mission has never been as important as it is today.



I am so proud to be a part of this outstanding organization.

*Betsy Gentile*  
 Board President, 2015-2020

I am so grateful to the Food Connects team, which grew from 12 employees at the start of 2020 to 21 employees! I am so impressed with both the current staff in how they onboarded and trained the new team while doing their jobs, as well as the new team in adapting and getting up to speed quickly during the challenging times of COVID-19.

We continue to use our aggregation and distribution Food Hub to transform the regional food system. We brought in source-identified food from real farms during the winter months that may not fit everyone's definition of local. This might be considered provocative—we see value in supporting local farms and supply chains that share our values of transparency, caring for the environment and people. Many of us are asking ourselves, "Would you rather eat broccoli from a family farm in North Carolina or a corporate farm in California?" and many of us are answering the former. Now it's our job to figure out the logistics of making that happen and how that fits into our work ahead!

We continue to play a leadership role in strengthening the entire food system. Our strong, sector-spanning relationships have proved crucial to the success of many of these conversations, and our ability to connect schools, farms, local businesses, and charitable food organizations has been a keystone in the region's response to COVID-19. Programs we were involved with sprung up quickly—ranging from small, focused efforts such as the Weekend Foodboxes, to statewide initiatives like Everyone Eats!, which first piloted in Brattleboro. We plan to convene a community dialogue, providing the space to breathe and think collectively about how to capitalize on and improve the new partnerships and systems which have sprung up over the past year.

Our Farm to School program has developed a larger emphasis on food security in response to the pandemic while still ensuring that robust farm, food, and nutrition education is supported in our schools. We focused on ensuring gardens were planted and fully utilized as a refuge for families and students in the spring. This fall, we worked closely with administrators and food service directors applying for Coronavirus Relief Funding, maximizing the resources our local schools received.

We started off 2021 with a bang and a clear focus on doing more of what is important towards our vision of Healthy Families, Thriving Farms, and Connected Communities.



*Richard Berkfield*  
 Executive Director



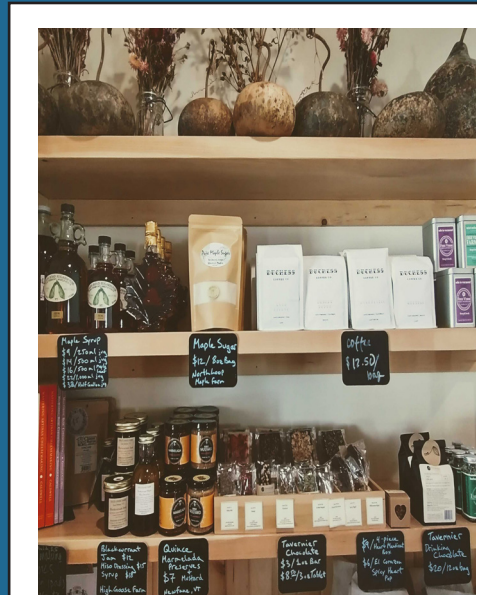


## FOOD HUB RESPONDS TO COVID-19

### SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL FARMERS

Ashlyn Bristle of Rebop farm realized that she would need to tap into regional and local producers to supply her farm store that serves Brattleboro and surrounding towns. “We needed fresh produce at the hardest time of the year in New England to find it,” Ashlyn said. She turned to Food Connects’ regional catalog of source-identified foods to supplement their own food. “Food Connects was there to help us with a network of producers already in place.” Ashlyn’s story is not unique as farm stands across the region turned to Food Connects for help. Just like with Rebop farm, Food Connects was poised to help. Customers flocked to farm stands to meet their food needs, and local farmers became mini-retailers overnight. “Food Connects saved our bacon. It was an invaluable resource to have a community food hub here, serving in the connective tissue of the local food system.”

“**Food Connects saved our bacon.**”



Rebop Farm added to their shelves from Food Connect’s Food Hub

In January of 2020, the VT Agency of Agriculture announced that the state lost 48 dairy farms in 2019. Those that survived faced the demand for milk plummeting in the early parts of the Covid 19 shutdown, forcing them to dump milk.

One way for farmers to avoid dumping milk is to create “value-added products”—cheese, pudding, yogurt, ice cream, etc. Vermont has a robust artisan cheese scene and cheese stores longer than liquid milk and is a good alternative for farmers to earn back some income. But the cheese industry isn’t safe either—the COVID-19 shutdown of restaurants and

schools effectively dried up their markets.

In mid-2020, we released our **Food Connects Cheese Catalog** as a way to help promote and grow the dairy industry in the state. The catalog features 7 Vermont cheese producers, small and large, and over 50 different types of cheeses.

Food Connects was able to bring \$72.1k of locally-made cheeses to a variety of customers who weren’t serviced by traditional distributors putting those local dollars back into the hands that need them the most—our dairy farmers.

## FARM TO SCHOOL RESPONDS TO COVID-19

### WEEKEND FOOD BOX PROGRAM

As Brattleboro Regional Food Service Director Ali West of Fresh Picks Cafe fielded phone calls from families throughout Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) to sign their children up for school meals in the early days of COVID-19 school closures, she was often heartbroken as people reached out to her. Many shared that they were in desperate situations and did not have enough food, not only for their children during the school day but also for their entire family.

“I wondered what could be done to meet the needs for families,” Ali thought. “The regular school meals programs were not enough to feed entire families. So I reached out to Food Connects for guidance.”

Through calls with community partners, Food Connects was able to bring together Foodworks, the VT Foodbank, and the WSESU school nutrition program to address the additional needs Ali had identified.

“We are so happy to be part of this collaboration with the schools because this way, many people who wouldn’t otherwise be helped are able to get the food they need,” remarked Christine Colascione of Foodworks.

“**I wondered what could be done to meet the needs of families.**”



Once the program got going, town staff joined the effort by unloading the boxes weekly at the school, alleviating some of the demands on school volunteers. As a result of this new collaboration, there was a consistent source of **additional food relief for 130 families** in our community and more resilient organizational relationships for when the need arises again. This project served as a model for how community organizations can partner with schools and municipal staff to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in a time of crisis.





## FARM TO SCHOOL

“ Food Connects training on trauma informed practices and farm to school couldn’t be more timely or essential right now. ”

-Alice Charles, Green Street School



### MEMBER SCHOOLS

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

At Academy School, students cooked roasted sweet potatoes in November and can expect to see even more outdoor cooking in 2021.

## FARM TO SCHOOL

The need for cooking and nutrition education has become critical in a post covid world as we found our traditional food distribution channels compromised by the global pandemic. People all over the world and in our community have relied heavily on local farmer’s markets and food producers when grocery store shelves lay bare.

A crucial part of cooking education takes place long before students begin chopping veggies. This is why Food Connects’ Farm to School (FTS) programming focuses on cycles: planting, growing, harvesting, cooking, and eating. Students are powerfully engaged and invested when they have a hand in each part of the process, from seed to plate.

Food Connects hosted regional calls for garden coordinators to share tips and tricks and provide connection during an otherwise distanced season. Thanks to these collective efforts, gardens thrived this past summer. Food Connects Garden Coordinator Tara Gordon maintained six of the gardens in Windham Southeast Supervisory Union. We piloted free family art activities thanks to RiseVT and three local arts organizations—River Gallery School of Art, Insight Photography, and the Human Art of Play. The culmination of these regional efforts were gardens readily awaiting students’ return if public safety would allow.



### REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Farm to School program has continued to develop its expertise in the intersection between Trauma Informed Practices and school nutrition.

Food Connects has already brought the shorter Trauma and Nutrition workshop to educators at the New Hampshire and Massachusetts Farm to School Conferences, as well as presented locally to the staff at Marlboro School.

We’re excited to see the impact of our work grow as more educators understand the connections between food and trauma and gain a heightened awareness of how their actions may unintentionally affect students.

### PARTNER SCHOOLS

- Riverside Middle School
- Saxtons River Elementary
- Twin Valley Elementary School
- Central Elementary
- Bellows Falls High School
- Bellows Falls Middle School



## FOOD HUB

The COVID-19 pandemic stressed our food system and brought about an environment of urgent, unprecedented demand for regional foods. In response, the Food Hub leveraged its longstanding ties with community producers and wholesale customers to rise to the opportunity to meet that demand. As we responded to the community's need for fresh, regional foods, we saw our sales double in 2020, growing to over \$1.1 million. In the first few months of the pandemic, average weekly sales tripled from the previous year.

With a small and committed staff, our Food Hub adapted quickly to respond to the ever-increasing need. We hired six new employees—doubling our staffing levels. We built a second walk-in cooler, added a fourth refrigerated delivery vehicle, started upgrading our inventory and sales software, and began planning warehouse space usage for increased optimization. Designated essential workers, our Food Hub team did not miss a single week of deliveries—drivers were on the road, and workers were in the warehouse every day during a global time of fear and uncertainty. Each motivated by the desire to serve their communities.

The hard work was worth it. We are better situated to grow and prepared to be a force in reimagining food systems. The year 2020 shined a bright spotlight on regional foods. Our challenge going forward will be to keep that light focused and carry the momentum of 2020 forward.

**Everyone Eats!** is a silver lining to the pandemic. Built on the initial work of the Skinny Pancake and Shift Meals, Everyone Eats! is centered around the premise that disaster relief works best when affected communities can direct those funds. First piloted in Brattleboro in August, Food Connects played a key role in the Everyone Eats! Brattleboro coalition from day one and helped the program hit the ground running. Before the program began, Food Connects helped craft the message, got the word, and worked on program design. The Food Hub leveraged existing relationships at both ends of the supply chain to ensure that everyone in the food system benefited by connecting interested customers to local producers. Our Sales Team collaborated with participating restaurants to identify eligible Vermont food products and introduced new restaurants to area producers. Our Operations Team picked up and delivered the food while also providing transportation and frozen storage for left-over meals each week.

We're hoping that participating restaurants will continue purchasing their favorite local products indefinitely!



## FEATURED PRODUCERS



### FRISKY COW GELATO KEENE, NH

Frisky Cow Gelato is the best tasting and highest quality gelato money can buy made with 85% local ingredients and lots of LOVE! In 2020 FCG introduced a new flavor, Mint Owl Crunch, with \$.15 from every pint sold donated to Keene State College. The business applied for National B Corp Certification in August to continue to increase its profits while also implementing actions to do good for the community and the environment. In the fall, FCG won the 2020 Pitchfork Competition sponsored by the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship and the Keene Sentinel, which came with a \$10k prize. Lastly, they doubled their sales in 2020 and worked with Food Connects to get eight more retailers to sell FCG.

"Food Connects has been a critical partner in our goal to double sales in 2020. Food Connects continues to support us to scale up our business and reach new markets! We are grateful and inspired by their commitment to growing our local food system."

Linda Rubin  
Owner

### GRATEFUL GREENS BRATTLEBORO, VT

Grateful Greens is an indoor farming project striving to empower the Northeast food systems with greater self-sufficiency and health. They completed the construction of their indoor farm and started growing in August of 2020. Grateful Greens has partnered with many schools, hospitals, co-ops, and restaurants around the region over the past few months and is very grateful to be serving our community.

"Partnering with Food Connects really helped us get up on our feet and gave us the opportunity to easily serve many co-ops, schools, restaurants, and hospitals around VT and NH. We are especially excited to be serving our highly vital, nutrient-dense sunflower greens to our nearby schools and hospitals, which Food Connects works closely with. We are looking forward to working with Food Connects even closer this year and aiding each other in our mutual growth and service to our communities. Thank you for all your valuable work, Food Connects!"

James Mayer  
Owner  
Grateful Greens



“Partnering with Food Connects really helped us get up on our feet.”



# THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

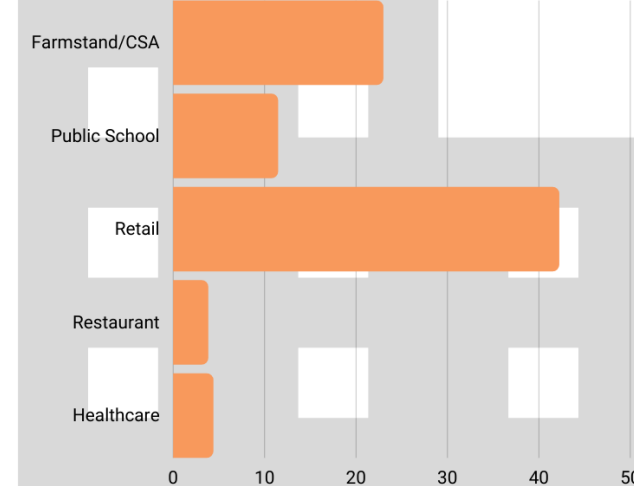
## Philanthropy During the Pandemic



### Nutritional Facts

Food Connects	
2020	
Serving size	
Account	Actual
<b>Calories</b>	
<b>Income</b>	
Food Hub Revenue	1,148,949.01
Unrestricted Revenue	78,626.70
Grants	725,276.53
Education Services	45,767.00
Event Revenue	505.38
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,999,124.62</b>
<b>Cost of Goods Sold</b>	
TOTAL Cost of Goods Sold	1,004,974.85
<b>Total Cost of Goods Sold</b>	<b>1,004,974.85</b>
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>994,149.77</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	
Payroll	443,447.99
Fixed Expenses	52,467.96
Operating Expenses	100,878.37
General & Admin	75,830.31
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>672,624.63</b>
<b>Operating Income</b>	<b>321,525.14</b>

2020 Sales By Customer Type (%)

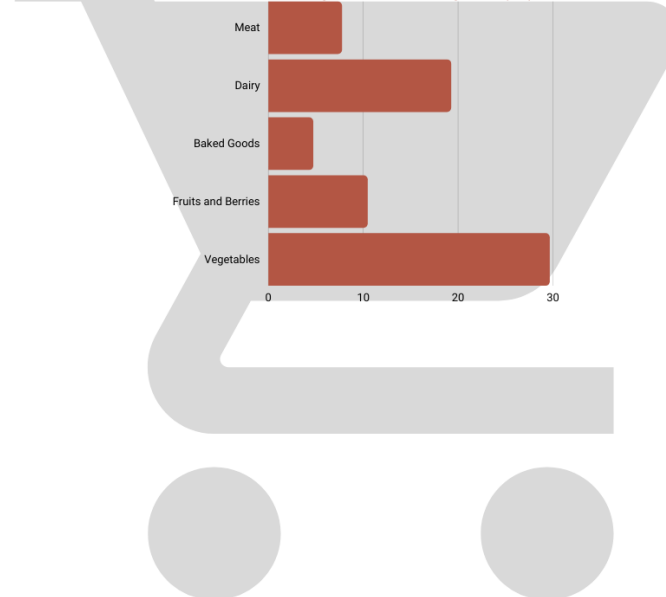


**117 Food Producers**

**\$898,547 back to farmers**

**196 Customers**

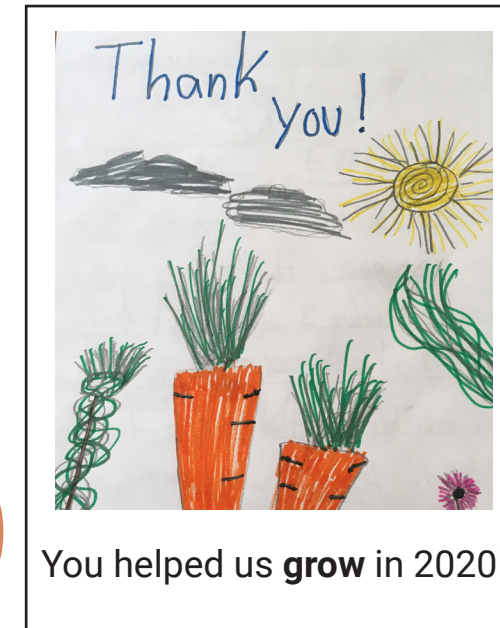
2020 Sales By Product Type (%)



**2 new Farm to School member Schools**

**Provided \$6,315.82 in food donations**

*What can we say but thank you! Amidst the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, one thing we could consistently rely on was the generosity of donors. We ran three successful campaigns on top of our annual giving and saw a record number of gifts, both by individuals and corporations, and could not have done it without your support.*



You helped us grow in 2020!

**Hired 9 New Employees!**

- Against the Grain
- Arc Mechanical
- Bascom Maple Farms Inc.
- Battleboro Food Co-op
- Battleboro Savings & Loan
- Bravo Botanicals
- Brown & Roberts Ace Hardware
- Bulldog Design
- C&S Wholesale Grocers
- CC&D's Kitchen Market
- Chroma Technology Corp
- Edward Jones
- Elm City Compost
- Fenton Family Dealerships
- Franklin County CDC
- Frisky Cow Gelato
- Ganio Land Management
- Glazy for You
- Grafton Village Cheese
- Green Energy Options
- Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship
- Hannah Grimes Marketplace
- Jasper Hill Farm
- JMB Glass
- K. Daley Builders
- Keene Family YMCA
- King Arthur Flour
- Machina Arts
- MamaSezz
- New England Sweetwater Farm and Distillery
- Northeast Soils and Sitework
- Nuttin Ordinary
- Putney Food Co-op
- Savings Bank of Walpole
- Stonewall Farm
- Sugar Bob's Finest Kind
- Sunnyfield Farm Sprague
- Sugarhouse LLC
- Terra Nova Coffee
- The Marina
- The Richards Group
- Tito's Taqueria
- True North Granola
- United Way of Windham County
- Vivace Realty LLC
- VT Salumi
- W.S. Badger Company
- Windham Solid Waste District
- Winter Moon Roots
- Yahso Jamaican Grille