Vermont Community Foundation’s
Food and Farm Initiative
Vermont Community Foundation

- Founded in 1986
- Located in Middlebury
- $14 million in grants annually
- $200 million in assets
- More than 630 funds
Vermont is....

• Agriculture is core to Vermont’s economy...
  – 20% of Vermont’s land is in farms
  – Highest ag sales in New England, $776M
  – 62,000 jobs is “food system”

• ...and Vermont’s identity
  • 95% of residents “value the working landscape and its heritage”
  • Tourists value Vermont’s bucolic vistas and support 11.5% of Vermont jobs
Vermont is...

• Home to a vibrant local foods movement
  – Most farmers’ markets per capita in the country
  – Legislatively created VT Farm to Plate Strategic Plan and Network of 350 organizations

• Struggling with food-related health and equity issues
  – 1 in 5 Vermont kids at risk of hunger
  – 60% of Vermont adults overweight or obese
So we created…

A five-year campaign working at the nexus of hunger, health, and the state's agricultural tradition to connect all Vermont families with healthy, local food—regardless of where they live or what they earn.
Why?

- Our staff-identified desire to pursue systemic change
- Our board-identified vision to “tackle, mobilize, and connect on issues of importance to Vermont”
- Our donor-identified core competencies:
  - Identify trends and gaps
  - Vet and recommend grantees
  - Bring people together
  - Report back on impact
  - Manage philanthropic structures
Why?

We can make Vermont “better together.”

- Bringing together nonprofits, donors, state leaders, and investors
- Using our unique perspective and resources to increase our state’s capacity to solve this issue.
  - Elevate the issue
  - Accelerate change through targeted grants
  - Build community capacity to address long-term
  - Invest in Vermont businesses
How did we start?

1. Supported and built upon existing research and planning

2. Assessed intersection of need, capacity and donor communities’ interests
   - Need for champion on food security and local foods
   - Vermont Farm to School programming as sweet spot
What we’re targeting

• More local food into wholesale markets
  – Business planning for farmers
  – Coordination with distributors
  – Increased processing capacity

• More local food to kids at schools
  – Training with school food service communities on procurement and preparation
  – Increased participation in school meals program, benefits equity, efficiency, and price points

• More Vermonters seeing Vermont’s food as their own
  – Marketing and education to increase consumer acceptance and demand
What we’re doing
What we’re doing: Elevating the conversation

- **Events**: Invited donors and community leaders with top-notch speakers and grantees

- **Communications**: Reports, content-driven social media

- **Earned media**: Feature articles in local papers, local TV talk shows, radio interviews

- **Sponsorship**: Vermont Restaurant Week, Vermont Foodbank conference
What we’re doing: Grantmaking

• Invested $1M in first 2.5 years
• Grants up to $75,000 – *that’s big for us!*

  – Projects required to be collaborative with potential for statewide impact on market-based food system
  – Minimum grant period extended to be 18 months, most projects renewed
What we’re doing:
Grantmaking

FARMERS
Farmers are the backbone of Vermont’s working landscape. For their foods to reach more Vermont families in need, they need well-targeted business planning and infrastructure for storing, processing, and delivering their products.

Farmer Training
The Northeast Organic Farmers Association of Vermont provided timely technical training to farmers, distributors, and schools on new USDA rules that affect the purchase of local food.

SCHOOLS & Other Institutions
Schools serve the vast majority of Vermont children, and are an important source of nourishment for many. Yet schools need support in the form of new infrastructure and professional development before they can increase the amount of healthy, local food they serve.

SCHOOLS
Planning and Mentoring
Vermont FEED’s Farm-to-School Institute provided training, planning support, and ongoing mentoring to teams from 24 schools.

State Policy Change
6,000 more Vermont kids are eligible for free school meals thanks to a policy championed by Hunger-Free Vermont that made Vermont the first in the nation to provide all low-income children with free breakfast and lunch at school. And more kids eating school meals means more resources for schools to source local food.

Local Food Education
More than 60% of Vermont schools have adopted the Harvest of the Month program which promotes local food to kids and families.

SCHOOLS
Coordinated School Outreach
Hunger Free Vermont and Food Connectorgo school by school in Windham County helping connect more kids with local food in school.

KIDS & FAMILIES
Most Vermont families value fresh, local food and would buy more of it, but barriers to access like driving distance, familiarity with local harvests, and the often higher price tag limit their choices.

Innovation in Processing & Distribution
The Center for an Agricultural Economy launched a business that’s already bringing tens of thousands of pounds of lightly-processed Vermont-grown vegetables to schools and other institutions.

The Vermont Farm to Plate Network
The Food & Farm Initiative is aligned with the Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan’s goal to increase access to local food and supports the activities of the Farm to Plate Network - 350 institutions working together to grow Vermont’s food and farm economy.
What we’re doing:
Grantmaking

Examples:

• **Systems mapping** and strategic planning for Farm to School Network

• Analysis and piloting of **social enterprise** to lightly-processed Vermont vegetables for schools

• State **policy change** that made VT the first state in country where low-income kids get free meals

• **Technical assistance** for farmers, schools, and distributors on USDA food procurement rules

• School-based equitable food **buying clubs**

• **Harvest of the Month** marketing campaign
What we’re doing: Convening and Capacity-building

• Grantee convenings, *before* and after grants are made

"Collaboration at this scale was not the norm for how we had been working, how organizations have been working, or how our society has been working... And I think it's paying off."

- Anore Horton, Hunger-Free Vermont

• Results-Based Accountability coaching
What we’re doing: Investing

• VCF policy to invest 5% in Vermont

• $2M invested in 6 deals, 26% of VT portfolio
  – Sourcing Vermont specific food deals that meet our investment standards and capacity takes time
What’s happened

• Much stronger partnerships between food security and local foods organization

• More market-oriented projects amongst those organizations

• Increased organizational capacity among those regional institutions

  +plus+

• Increased fundholder engagement

• Enhanced state leadership profile

  +plus+
Vermont’s food system continues to grow

Over 60,000 Vermonters are employed as farmers, waiters, cheese makers, brewers, bakers, butchers, grocery stockers, restaurateurs, manufacturers, and many other food related jobs. About 12,000 businesses are part of Vermont’s food system. Vermont’s food system has expanded faster than the rest of the state’s economy over the past decade, and has appeared to recover from the Great Recession at a more robust pace. Total Vermont employment grew 2.5% from 2009 to 2013, while the number of businesses has slightly decreased.

In comparison...
- 1.13 Machinery mfg.
- 0.55 Wood mfg.
- 0.3 Recreation

Vermont farmers narrowly topped Maine for highest Ag sales in New England.

Today, the number of farms in New England is the highest it’s been since 1964.
Local foods at breakfast, lunch, and dinner

When does your district serve local foods?

81% breakfast
96% lunch
5% dinner

Local foods are also served as snacks (54%), in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (68%), and during summer meal programs (41%). (See the details)
Types of capital built

Directly:
- Intellectual
- Social
- Financial

Indirectly:
- Individual
- Natural
- Built

“Without VCF, there was no coordinated effort. Brought together two big challenges – food security and sustainable agriculture – lot of value in combining these issues and allows on the ground players to come up with more innovative and long lasting changes.”

- Food and Farm Initiative Grantee, Summer 2014
How much?

- Grantmaking: $1.1M in first 2.5 years, aiming for $2M
  - 50% from a VCF-held settlement fund for health and nutrition
  - 40% raised from fundholders and foundations
  - 10% from unrestricted sources

- Staffing:
  - 50% FTE for lead staff, 10% of Comm staffer, plus support of rest of staff
  - Paid from unrestricted sources

- Events and Communications: ~$20K/year

- Evaluation: ~$20K so far

- Investments: $2M so far
Advice for others

• Consider your best role in working in a field where the big dollars are not philanthropic

• Being clear with grantees that this is a new way of working by and with the Foundation

• Prepare and plan to bust internal silos