

The Center for an Agricultural Economy

2008 Annual Report

January 1, 2009

This report highlights the accomplishments of the Center for an Agricultural Economy in 2008, and outlines some of the challenges facing us in 2009.

Andrew Meyer and others founded the Center four years ago on the belief that there was an opportunity to build upon local tradition and bring together the community resources and programs needed to develop a locally-based 21st Century food system in the greater Hardwick region. This vision supports the desire of rural communities to rebuild their economic and ecological health, through strong, secure, and revitalized agricultural systems that meet both our own food needs locally and create new opportunities to export those products to the rest of the state and beyond.

Increasingly as the weakness of the global industrial food system are revealed, the Hardwick region and the State of Vermont have rediscovered the possibilities of remaking the state's own food system. In 2004, the Center adopted a unique, entrepreneurial driven-approach to supporting sustainable agriculture, reinforced by the innovative opportunities community leaders in the region were creating.

The Center's work falls into four major areas.

1. **SHARING THE VISION:** Reaching out and inviting area residents to embrace, support, and expand the Center's vision of a secure food system.
2. **BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE:** Engaging residents of Hardwick and surrounding communities in the development and benefits of the cultural and physical infrastructure needed to support the food and agricultural ventures.
3. **PARTNERING:** Building relationships with public and not-for-profit organizations to help support their efforts. The Center Board and staff communicate and share our model and progress with other communities in the rebuilding of healthy food systems throughout Vermont and beyond.
4. **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Implementing a comprehensive series of programs and projects to integrate, coordinate, facilitate and strategically advance the wide array of food and agricultural initiatives underway in Hardwick and surrounding communities, based on a Board-Adopted Strategic Plan.

More details on our activities in these four areas follow.

First, the Center opened its office in downtown Hardwick in August 2008 – a major milestone! Many people have now walked through the doors seeking information and having discussions on food systems in the region. Other local groups have used the space as a meeting location for public events. We contracted with Great Big Graphics in Morrisville, Vermont, to create

an engaging and informative website, www.hardwickagriculture.org. Of the 1,000's of visitors to the website, several hundred have signed up to receive newsletters or periodic updates concerning the Center's work. In 2008, we used this list to send out both local (Hardwick Gazette) and national (New York Times) articles regarding the Center and our efforts to establish community supported agricultural-based activities, along with announcements of events in the region that relate to the Center's mission. Another accomplishment was the expansion of the Hardwick Community Garden which the Center oversees, making it available to local gardeners for yet another successful year.

Second, the Center co-hosted and co-organized a number of agriculture tours for interested folks from within the communities and around Vermont and New England/New York to as far away as Ireland and Spain. By way of another example of outreach, we engaged the Cushman Design Group in Stowe as the Center's partner for architectural design at Atkins Field in Hardwick, which is envisioned to be a sustainable agricultural and resource center. The design group has studied the existing buildings and consulted with a structural engineer as to their future. Feasibility of structural integrity and cost is underway, and once determined will assist the Center and friends as to the future uses of the site. We also have worked with Claire's Restaurant in their efforts to source local foods and on a number of other initiatives.

Third, the Center entered into partnership with the Northern Rivers Land Trust. NRLT has identified farmland conservation as a strategic priority. The Center recognizes that to achieve greater levels of food self sufficiency, bottomland and other prime land must be identified and protected for this purpose. As part of the Atkins Field project, it has been suggested that the 4.4 acres of bottomland on the property should serve as an interactive "tool" to collaboratively promote awareness for the vital connection between productive land and a locally-based, healthy food system. On another front in 2008, the Center worked closely with the University of Vermont, Sterling College, the Hardwick Area Food Pantry, the Kiwanis, Salvation Farms, and many others to grow successful partnerships for the years ahead.

Fourth, we advocated, through our mission and programs, for the engagement of agricultural leaders in the emerging 21st century food system to build capacity and inspire the public in supporting and implementing this system. The Center in 2008 worked on:

- ✓ Creating a working relationship with UVM and Sterling College on *Pies for People* program (local food ingredients donated and prepared for the Hardwick Area Food Pantry) and with other agricultural-related outreach partnerships;
- ✓ Exploring financial services that may include connecting investors to area businesses, establishing a lending program, and serving as a re-grantor for larger foundations;
- ✓ Creating an interim guide plan for the next steps in the planning for the future of the Center-owned Atkins Field in Hardwick, and continuing the Spring Festival;
- ✓ Partnering with the Vermont Food Venture Center on marketing activities associated with their re-location to Hardwick in 2009;