



2009 Annual Report





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**“The Center for an Agricultural Economy to Hold
Anniversary Open House ~
Even though the doors have been open for a year, Thursday
the CAE celebrates its first full year in its Main Street location
by hosting its first official open house.”**

~Tommy Gardner, *The Hardwick Gazette* (8.26.2009)

Cover photograph courtesy of Bonnieview Farm



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Strengthening Our Community. Building a Healthy Local Food System. Serving as an Information Hub.

In the coming years these words will continue to serve as the basis of CAE's mission to revitalize, strengthen, and secure our food system.

2009 was a memorable year for members and supporters of CAE. Since opening our office doors in August 2008 we have been busy carrying out our mission by providing agricultural information and offering resources to surrounding communities, and slowly defining our place as a piece of the Hardwick agricultural puzzle.

Remembering community agricultural roots and focusing on locally grown food sparked a great deal of local and national media attention. We are proud to say that we have been able to share our vision with many people and hope that we can inspire communities around Vermont and beyond to learn from our experiences. CAE's progress in 2009 has been made possible largely due to our valued members, our generous donors, and the desire of the community and state to seek a healthier food system.

Over this past year we have made important community connections that have resulted in programs that have both been beneficial and educational. By involving local schools such as the Hardwick Elementary School, the University of Vermont, and Sterling College we were able to implement programs including REACH, the annual *Pies for People* and *Soup for Supper* project, as well as brainstorm plans for the future of Atkins Field.

We accomplished a great deal in 2009, and look eagerly to the future to continue to fulfill our mission and put more plans into motion. We are confident that the ongoing pursuit for a healthy 21st century food system will better the lives of our community friends and neighbors as we build on our local agricultural traditions and inspire others to do the same.

Tom Stearns, Board Chair

Monty Fischer, Executive Director



2009 Core Goals

- **Community:** Strengthening our towns and region through vibrant community spaces with a focus on a robust local economy
 - **Atkins Field** – a multi-use property that will be both the center of the food revitalization program – possible year-round farmers market, demonstration fields - and in reality the town common, a location for Hardwick town-wide and regional events such as annual May Hardwick Spring Festival
 - **Hardwick Community Garden** – with a focus on welcoming all, being inclusionary, and related-events
 - **Value-Added Infrastructure:** Non-profit partner in opportunities, such as the Vermont Food Venture Center, to enhance infrastructure capability for a local agricultural economy (production, storage, consumption & export)

- **Security:** Assuring a safe food system for all in the region by facilitating increased access to local food for as many as possible.
 - **Food Access Fund** – sourcing local food for Pantry
 - **Pies for People & Soup for Supper** - volunteers and donations
 - **Hardwick Community Garden** expansion and school program partners
 - **Schools & Seniors** increased access to local foods

- **Information:** Expanding the CAE's role as a hub providing local food system knowledge and a place for consumers and producers to meet and to tell the story of the greater Hardwick model to Vermonters and to others
 - **Local Food Systems** definition and information
 - **Tours & Site Visits** facilitation
 - **Media** inquiries clearinghouse
 - **Connector** to the many in-region resources, especially as a first stop for would-be farmers
 - **Collaborations** with academic and other groups

An Information Hub

Sharing Ideas and Working with Others

A dedication to community development and a passion for local food is where a healthy food system starts. Much more than the food itself, our healthy 21st century food system is made up of local farmers, local schools, businesses, and the people of Hardwick.

To help support the system, we work hard to cultivate important local agricultural relationships. Additionally, we serve as a central place for information and ideas to be exchanged.

“The vision of the Center for an Agricultural Economy is to build upon local tradition and bring together the community resources and programs needed to develop a locally-based 21st century healthy food system. The Center vision supports the desire of rural communities to rebuild their economic and ecological health through strong, secure, and revitalized agricultural systems to meet both their own food needs locally as well as to determine and build the best opportunities for value-added agricultural exports.”

From backyard vegetable gardens to vast fields, we provide the community with the best resources, and encourage those interested in being part of our vision to let us help connect you to the Hardwick agricultural movement.



Tom Stearns, High Mowing Seeds Test Fields



Emeril Lagasse & Monty Fischer at CAE

Photographs courtesy of UVM (left) and Wenonah Petersen (right)

Strengthening the Community

Partnerships

Academic Collaborations:

Partnerships with academic institutions have been a vital component to the success of the CAE's programs.

Working with educational institutions such as the University of Vermont, Sterling College, and Hardwick Elementary have supported our vision of community involvement. From these partnerships we have been able to give back to the community in numerous ways.

Pies for People and Soup for Supper:

Pies for People and Soup for Supper, a program that was first launched in 2008, has had another successful run. Various partner organizations and businesses have once again shared their resources for this community effort. Emerging out of the CAE's existing partnerships, the program represents our community's commitment to local foods for local families. Food donated by area farmers and producers is transformed into nutritious pies and soup by a volunteer labor force and then distributed to local organizations that serve families in need.

Students and staff from our institutional partners, the University of Vermont and Sterling College, were once again involved in the process. Many local businesses donated their agricultural products for the effort. The success of this program illustrates how local farmers can help their community, while the community, in turn, supports its farmers. This idea for improving people's access to locally grown and locally made products continues to sprout into something big enough to benefit everyone.

REACH After-School Program:

The Community Garden space proved to be an excellent facility to develop a partnership with Hardwick Elementary School. The 21st Century REACH (Rural Education, Academics, Community, Healthy lifestyle) After-school Program focuses on connecting children to the process of growing food and caring for the animals that provide them with food. Through the CAE, the program gives children the chance to be a part of the local agricultural movement.

Thanks to generous donations, a new project has been finalized, which in addition to relying on donations from local farmers, will encourage children to grow at their home or in the Community Garden their own pumpkins for the Hardwick Trails-sponsored *Pumpkin Walk* in the coming years.

Additionally, we have started laying the groundwork for a summer program in the Community Gardens. Our goal is to keep the children engaged and interested all year round in the agricultural process. When school lets out, we want the children to continue to be enthusiastic about the food growing process, and to have a fun and educational experience outdoors.

Strengthening the Community

Partnerships

Food Access Fund:

Made possible by an anonymous donor, the Food Access Fund is a project that has grown out of our partnership with the local food pantry. The existing funding has covered the costs of buying local products to stock the food shelf. Farmers in the area get a fair value for their product, the food pantry benefits from having an increased variety of fresh local food options, and low-income Vermonters gain affordable access to healthy, local products.

This win-win-win proposition exemplifies the CAE's approach to improving our community through collaboration with other organizations. The Food Access Fund, driven by our commitment to supporting our neighbors and partners, has helped us to advance our mission of increasing food security for everyone. Here at the CAE, we firmly believe that a tight-knit community becomes stronger and more vibrant when everyone comes together to help those in need. In that framework special thanks to Janet Steward and Ray Shatney of Greenfields Highland Beef, along with Pete Johnson and Meg Gardner, Andrew Meyer, Neil Urie, Andy and Mateo Kehler, Steven Obranovich, Jeffrey Ferrell, Cheryl King-Fischer, Elena Gustavson, and many others, for generous food donations and recipe preparation throughout 2009.



Photograph courtesy of Elena Gustavson

Healthy Local Food System

Developing Local Resources

Community Gardens:

For years now the CAE has embraced the concept of community gardens, in which area residents and community members tend plots within a shared garden. Worldwide, the community garden model has become increasingly popular, with people embracing it as way of developing communities through a shared agricultural resource. Locally, the Hardwick Community Gardens (HCG), continue to bring Vermonters together to share in the process of growing their own food. The HCG provides a place for people who might not otherwise grow their own food to learn about gardening and become agriculturally active. The CAE thanks the Hardwick Electric Company and Hardwick's Town Manager Rob Lewis for the use of this land in 2009.

The Gardens have enabled us to both bring our message to a wider audience and expand access to locally-grown food. They've also served effectively as a teaching tool and outdoor classroom. The CAE has involved area youth in the HCG through the REACH 21st Century after-school program. Future generations are learning how to cultivate their own food, contribute to their communities, and become active stewards of a communal resource through programs held at the HCG.

This year has marked another phase of incremental expansion and improvement of the HCG. We are pleased to see more and more people and organizations getting involved with the gardens each year, making them a dynamic and on-going local success story.

Atkins Field:

In 2009, the community envisioning process was the main focus for Atkins Field. We have held meetings with the community, outside consultants, and internally about how best to develop the area, while maintaining its historical integrity. Our goal is to develop innovative plans and ideas for the space. Plans that will better serve the community by facilitating the support of individuals, businesses, non-profits and educational entities that are engaged in the local agricultural movement. Milford Cushman and Jay Caroli from Stowe have been very helpful.

Over this past summer, students from the University of Vermont took our research of Atkins Field and conducted some of their own. The end result was a developed potential layout for the area. Their plans included numerous ideas that would benefit our local community.

Currently a significant challenge we are faced with is appropriate funding for such a large and ambitious project but we are optimistic that in the coming years we will see our plans become a reality in phases. We have been able to donate granite company historical artifacts to The Hardwick Historical Society with the help of local historian Paul Wood.

Healthy Local Food System

Developing Local Resources

Vermont Food Venture Center:

Our CAE has recently become part of The Vermont Food Venture Center's plans. The VFVC will be a state-of-the-art food business incubator once the VFVC management team completes arrangements for them to relocate to a facility in Hardwick. The move allows the VFVC to expand their operations and build on the existing network of small agriculture-related businesses in the area. Many other advantages notwithstanding, the new plant represents a huge improvement for them in terms of physical space alone.

We plan to continue to work with the VFVC as it settles into its new location and encourages more food growers and producers to join its operation. For its part, the VFVC will support our area farmers by offering consulting services and technical assistance, as well as providing on-site infrastructure for food processing. The new site will also feature cheese making and meat processing. The VFVC's food business incubation model has great potential to benefit the area's farmers and small business owners as their enterprises develop.



Photograph courtesy of Wenonah Petersen

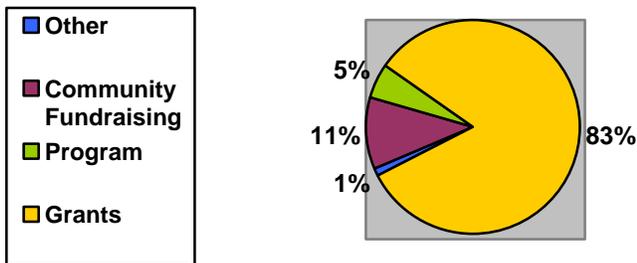
Vermont Senator Leahy Stops By

Bringing the Vermont Food Venture Center to Hardwick –with the Meyer Family

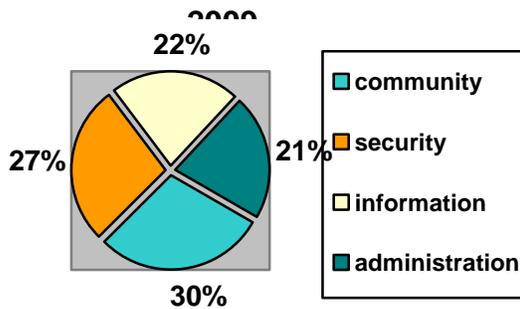
In August 2009, Senator Leahy visited Vermont Soy to announce the securing of \$350,000 in federal grants for the move of the Vermont Food Venture Center to Hardwick. Members of CAE have already agreed to assist in this project and we hope that the move will help to create new entrepreneurial opportunities for many Vermonters. The facility, which will have 14,000 square feet of multi-purpose space, is expected to open in late 2010.

2009 Financials

2009 Revenue



Total Revenue \$103,274.62



Total Expenses \$88,002.29

The CAE is especially appreciative of the financial support received from all of its members and donors. Donor support is the lifeline for CAE's operational success.

The following sources generously supported the CAE throughout 2009: Solidago Foundation; Jane B.Cook 1992 Trust; Preservation Trust of Vermont; New England Grassroots Environment Fund; Vermont Agency of Agriculture; Davis Conservation Foundation; National Life Foundation; Vermont Community Foundation, Holborn Foundation; Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund; Block Foundation; Vermont Housing and Conservation Board; and anonymous donors.

The CAE also thanks its many volunteers and friends throughout 2009 who so generously gave of their time and talents to furthering the goals of the CAE, including Julie Ruth for web design, Anna Masozera and her UVM class, Joe Speidel, Paul Costello, Jolinda LaClair, John Mandeville, and Ryan Torres.

The 2009 CAE Board of Directors has been the guiding force throughout the year to assure a balanced budget and careful management of all CAE resources and assets.



Looking Ahead

The coming year looks to be an exciting time at the CAE, as we build on the progress we've made in 2009 and move ahead on some of the long-term projects that are still in their infancy. Atkins Fields, for instance, will move out of the planning phase. As more funding becomes available, the agricultural and recreational elements of that endeavor will soon begin taking shape on the landscape. The major intentions for the site will not be realized overnight, but the gradual transformation, toward a place that serves more people in more ways, has begun.

The CAE's existing partnerships, which have already spurred many successful projects and events, will offer more opportunities for collaboration and innovation in 2010. Our relationships with educational institutions will continue to bring our message to future generations of farmers and consumers. As we line up more funding sources, we hope to increase our outreach into the community and find more avenues to educate young people about sustainable agricultural ideals.

The way the community has rallied together to make *Pies for People* and *Soup for Supper* a success over the past two years suggests that it is likely to become an annual event. There is every reason to be optimistic that more and more people and organizations will get engaged in that venture and the many others throughout the year. Having already teamed up on *Pies for People*, the Atkins Field planning, and various strategic communication pieces, CAE and the University of Vermont have laid an impressive foundation of established outcomes. Our UVM partnership, like each of our other organizational relationships such as with Sterling College and New England Culinary Institute, has demonstrated the value of mutual efforts toward enhanced community, healthy food systems, and sustainable agriculture.

The growth of 2009 is likely to spill over into our efforts in 2010. The high level of media exposure that we have received over the past year may be an indicator of our both our progress and our momentum—our past accomplishments and our future potential. The CAE enters 2010 with a much higher profile, both locally and nationally, than it had only a year or two ago. The economic recession, despite its hardships, has further brought our vision into focus. Each national food scare, energy crisis, pollution problem, or financial mess brings more public awareness of what is wrong with the status quo. We hope that the CAE can continue to promote better public understanding of the connections between these problems and many of the world's current agricultural practices. We look forward to expanding our partnerships, moving ahead on our long-term projects, and furthering our mission-related goals in what promises to be an exciting new year! Your continuing support is most appreciated!



Meet The CAE Board of Directors and Staff

2009 Board Members (note: affiliations for identification purposes only):

- Tom Stearns, President (Wolcott – High Mowing Organic Seeds)
Andy Kehler, Vice President (Greensboro – Cellars at Jasper Hill)
Pete Johnson, Treasurer (Craftsbury – Pete’s Greens)
Andrew Meyer, Secretary (Hardwick – Vermont Soy)
Neil Urie, Director (Craftsbury – Bonnieview Farm)
Annie Gaillard, Director (Hardwick – Buffalo Mountain Coop)
Tom Gilbert, Director (Hardwick – Highfields Center for Composting)
Linda Ramsdell, Director (Hardwick – Galaxy Bookstore)
Warren Rankin, Director (East Johnson – Top Rankin Organic Dairy Farm)

2009 Staff:

- Monty Fischer, Executive Director (May-Present)
Elena Gustavson, Education & Community Outreach (June-Present)
Wenonah Petersen, AmeriCorps Member (August-September)
Hilary Hoffman, Consultant (January-April)

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