To Our Partners

Four years ago, I joined the CAE team as a green executive director - the Board of Directors took a chance on letting me guide the organization as it grew. My concept of the breadth and depth of the CAE’s work was limited at first. But our vision - to recreate a food system for our local economy, our environment and our communities - is far reaching. The local and global impacts of our conventional food system are pernicious and widespread. Solutions must be created at a local and regional level first; strategic initiatives that create lasting impacts in Hardwick and beyond.

As we forge the linkages which make a place-based and regenerative agricultural economy possible, we find ourselves with new partners every year. From the Vt Housing and Conservation Board to the Hardwick Area Food Pantry, our partners cross many sectors, because the food system connects us all. But more than that, we strive to fill the gaps - where the risk might be too high for others - through projects like our Farm to Institution Minimal Processing.

And it’s making a difference. Farmers are working with us to sell locally grown produce to colleges, hospitals and schools. Small businesses are growing their markets and producing great local products. Volunteers are teaching gardening and cooking classes. School students are eating locally—and getting their hands dirty!

The agricultural economy is growing. The local food system is getting stronger. But none of this could have happened without your support. We thank you for your leadership.

-Sarah Waring, Executive Director

CAE Board of Directors 2016

Paul Costello: Vt Council on Rural Development
Matthew Derr; Sterling College
Tom Gilbert; Black Dirt Farm
Pete Johnson: Pete’s Greens
Andrew Kehler: Cellars at Jasper Hill
Emily Maclure: Craftsbury General Store
Andrew Meyer: Vt Natural Coatings and Vermont Soy
Jon Ramsay: Vermont Land Trust and Sawmill Brook farm
Tom Stearns: High Mowing Organic Seeds

When farmers and food businesses invite youth to visit their operations, the results are always terrific, and often hilarious.

Even though our schools are rural, many of our students have still never visited a working farm.

In 2016 CAE assisted in 14 field trips for our area young people—engaging with producers across our communities.
This year the Business Advising and Technical Assistance program hit its stride. After working with the Farm and Forest Viability Network for two years, we have measured our work in 2016 as follows:

12 New Business Advising Projects
From assisting the transition of mature food businesses out of the Venture Center and into their own spaces, to helping diversified farms modify operations to match farm investments with growth opportunities, our business advising projects assist a dynamic group of farm and food businesses reach their potential in our region’s food system and marketplace.

35 Food Business Consultations
Each food business receives personal attention and responsive follow-up services as we test assumptions and map a path to production for each product and brand.

Financial Statements Workshop Series
More than 20 attendees learned the value of essential financial statements – Balance Sheets, Income Statements, and Cash Flow Projections—and how to plan for profit with your business goals in mind.

Teaching Production Efficiencies
CAE partnered with farm service providers Rutland Area Farm and Food Link and NOFA-VT to provide production efficiency trainings for vegetable farms in the northeast. The work in 2016 included:
1. Conducting case studies of exemplary farms in the region;
2. Researching Lean manufacturing principles and how to apply them to agriculture;
3. Hosting Ben Hartman, author of the Lean Farm, for two farmer workshop days;
4. Developing a direct-service model for Lean farming consultations during the 2017 season.

And work begins on an online Food Safety Regulation tool in 2017!

**The Story of Goats**

VT Chevon is undergoing a transformational stage in its development as a company. With physical aggregation of animals and processing now centered in Randolph, founder Shirley Richardson is able to devote herself to a long-term strategic marketing campaign. Connor, Daniel and Rose Wilson, an independent consultant with expertise in local food marketing, are working with Shirley and VT Chevon on best ways to access urban gourmet food markets for the product line, which now includes a private label merguez sausage in addition to fresh and frozen premium goat meat.
Community Programs 2016

It’s all about partnerships, projects and participation! A few examples include:

- In 2016, we logged 2,119 community involvement hours up 76% from 2015
- 89 participants, 59 members, and four garden mentorships emerge at Grow Your Own, our food access partnership
- Hazen Union School students plant 54 fruit and maple trees and 60 fruit bushes at Atkins Field
- Waterline improvements and a timber frame garden shed, 64 gardening spots and a shared greenhouse are in place at Atkins Field
- Reeve Basom hired as place-based agriculture and education coordinator for OSSU, leads district-wide inservice
- Our NEK Listening Project turns the corner and finds its true direction: CAE and community partner organizations work together to create a new Northeast-Kingdom-wide organization focusing on community social and economic justice. 22 new leaders went through training in 2016.

Inspiring the next generation...

In 2016 Wolcott Elementary School came out in force to build a brand new school garden and a busy student named Evan told our staff how focused and productive he felt as he worked in the soil. A few months later at an August inservice day, with 300-some staff from all six Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union schools were participating in a place-based, food systems education session. In a parade of success stories to celebrate the great work of the school teams, it was Evan’s speech that brought the room to its feet and galvanized a spirit of collective energy for advancing farm to school initiatives:

“Hi, My name is Evan Rockwood and I am a third grader at Wolcott Elementary. Working in the garden makes me feel happy and helpful. My energy is more focused in the garden compared to how I feel some of the time with other school work. I am glad that I get to help my school grow things. Being in the garden teaches me that plants are important. I like to help my community. I would like to say thank you to my teachers.”
Reaching more mouths

Our Farm to Institution program has two goals; to expand markets for farm partners to diversify their revenue streams, and reach those Vermonter who are served at institutions. We know that institutions provide an anchor in our communities—whether they are colleges, hospitals or schools, and we help them to leverage their power to buy local, creating jobs and supporting farms.

**Volume of Local Produce and Sales over time:**

- **2014:** 46,000 lbs, Sales of $29,244
- **2015:** 60,000 lbs, Sales of $51,387
- **2016:** 76,000 lbs, Sales of $95,985

**Number of schools:** 8 schools in the fall of 2014, which grew to 16 schools in 2015, and we are at a total of 21 schools at the end of 2016. Our average monthly sales to schools increased by more than 40%, from around 700 lbs a month average at the end of our first year (14/15 school year) to over 1000 lbs per month last year (15/16 school year).

VFVC Grads

In 2016, the story of our graduating and growing businesses from the VT Food Venture Center continues. This year, we were excited that two woman-owned businesses, Butterfly Bakery and Nutty Steph’s, were able to scale up their production and move into new facilities.

Also, Purify Juice, a raw pressed juice company grew out of our space and found a copacking facility in Vt.

In the VFVC facility, we also said good-bye to our anchor tenant of the past three years, Grassroots Distribution, and put out a half-year RFP and application process to find a great match for the 2,400 sq feet. We had three terrific applicants (pasta, cheese and a dressing/marinade business), one of whom is a current client in our rental kitchens. In January of 2017, Cellars at Jasper Hill began their construction and move-in process.

At the VFVC, business viability and food safe processing continue to be our highest priority!

We are thrilled to be working with University of Vermont Medical Center and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, two of our region’s largest healthcare providers—and both members of Health Care Without Harm.
The Vermont Farm Fund grows…

This unique revolving loan fund has focused for years on assisting farmers and food producers as they grow, or to help in emergency situations. Over the years we have grown the size of the fund to serve more farmers.

Our Vt Farm Fund Advisory Board includes Pete Johnson, Bruce Urie, Hope Colburn, John Ryan and Nancy Baron. This team of advisors, along with our new Program Manager Kate Stephenson, receive applications from around Vermont, provide outreach and loan education and work with small and large scale farm and food operations. In 2016 these loans included:

- Vermont Cranberry Company
- Little Village Farm
- Butterfield Brothers
- Jersey Girls Farm
- Zack Woods Herb Farm
- Hartshorn’s Farm Market
- and A Drop of Joy, a value-added farm and food copacker

Network Projects…

Our staff participated in Farm to Institution New England’s (FINE) Community of Practice for Food Processors, joining 7 others business incubators and food processors across our region. We published case studies about our work, and produced a joint video - all available on FINE’s website:

farmtoinstitution.org/new-england-local-food-processors

Also in 2016, we partnered across the Northeast Kingdom, bringing together a food system leadership team who assisted in the creation of the 2016 Northeast Kingdom Food System Plan. This critical guiding document will provide strategic direction for the next ten years for investment and growth in the food system. We are proud to present the final plan, written by and housed at NVDA;

nvda.net/agriculture.php

Our story is one of collaboration, growth and challenge; we thank you for being a part of it!