Celebrating Fifteen Years of Economic Development, Community Building, and Strengthening Our Food System
From the Executive Director

Dear Friends of the Center for an Agricultural Economy,

Fifteen years ago, CAE was founded by members of our community that value the working landscape, a sense of place, and bringing the community together through food and farm businesses. Since then, our work has taken us to classrooms, farm fields, processing facilities, community gatherings and celebrations. CAE currently works with over 20 food businesses at the Vermont Food Venture Center; is purchasing produce directly from farmers and solving the complex problems of getting that local produce into local and regional institutions; and strengthening community resilience through partnerships with our local schools and organizations.

CAE has achieved many goals over the past fifteen years, but there is much more to do. As I look toward the future I see both opportunities and challenges: a community ready and willing to engage in supporting local food systems, but global markets that drive price points and make it difficult for our farmers and food business owners to remain profitable. Food systems that don’t tell the story of how products are sourced or produced, making it difficult for our local businesses to engage and thrive. Despite these challenges, Vermont is a place where positive impacts can be achieved. We will accomplish our goals to grow a diverse, sustainable farm and food economy by building on our relationships with one another, through creativity and persistence, and by sharing the story of how a strong and diverse agricultural economy contributes to positive community impacts.

After spending 20 years crisscrossing Vermont in my work for the Vermont Land Trust, I am excited to join CAE as the new Executive Director and bring my experience back to my home community, and to support more businesses that share our vision of a sustainable and equitable food system that benefits all members of our community. During our next 15 years we will face new challenges, but we’ve built the expertise and capacity to face and overcome them. We must support existing farms and food businesses while expanding and diversifying our agricultural economy to include more produce, meats, grains, and new operations. These agricultural sectors must be grown so we are maintaining our working landscape and meeting the goals of local food consumption, while also reaching larger regional markets to remain successful. Please take the time to reflect on the success CAE has achieved, the opportunities that are ahead of us and how we can all participate in making our goals a reality.

As ever, we thank you for your partnership and are grateful for your support in all the forms that takes!

Sincerely,

Jon Ramsay
From the Board Chairs

For the last 15 years, the CAE has looked at our regional agricultural economy and thought “What could we do to make this more sustainable? How can we fill the gaps in our systems that will benefit our local farmers and producers? And, how can we transform the model for economic growth, sustainability, and community building?” This dialogue, both internal and external, represents the ideals of our organization and has inspired our board, staff, and leadership.

Over the past six years as Executive Director, Sarah Waring has taken the mission of the founders to the next level. She cultivated a “yes, we can,” belief system that drove this nonprofit forward. Since her onboarding, Sarah grew the impact of CAE by leaps and bounds. Our work with the school system, farm viability, food production, and community outreach has become a model outside of the NEK and even outside of Vermont. Sarah was a true gift to the CAE and because of her we confidently say on this 15th year, that “We are just getting started!!!”

The search for a new ED after Sarah’s move to the Vermont Community Foundation was a big undertaking. Our hiring committee knew that we needed a strong leader, someone with ties to the agricultural economy and ideally someone who understands the ideals of the Northeast Kingdom and the work the CAE is involved in. After a four-month search, we are so pleased to welcome our new Executive Director, Jon Ramsay. His 20-year career with the VT Land Trust is a testament to his dedication to the working lands of Vermont. He has been a farmer since he could put on his rubber boots, and now operates his own farm with his wife and son in his hometown of Greensboro. And, his desire to make this place so many of us call home, better for his son and the next generation is exactly why he is our new leader. As co-chairs of the CAE, we would like to offer our heartfelt gratitude to Sarah Waring for her years of service to our community, and a warm welcome to Jon Ramsay. We are so excited to see where you will lead us!

Emily Maclure                      Margie Prevot
Board Co-Chair                    Board Co-Chair
Bridging the Gap Between Local Farms and Local Meals

Our Farm-to-Institution social enterprise, branded as JustCut, is our fastest growing area of work. We buy produce from local farms, then peel, chop or shred the product for use in local school, hospital, and health center kitchens. In 2018 we supplied 26 schools and institutions with local vegetables!

In 2018 JustCut:

- Purchased over 110,000 lbs of local produce
- Worked with 7 farms to proactively contract for the growing season
- Supplied 26 schools & institutions with local produce
- The program employs 4 people in the local food system

“CAE has been a good market for us as a wholesale oriented farm; being able to sell predictable volumes of crops throughout the year has been a solid asset in our financial stability and growth. The staff is professional and easy to work with, and their enthusiasm and positive attitude is a breath of fresh air in the business.

On top of that, it’s great to see an organization actively working to expand regional wholesale markets and help deliver higher quality produce throughout our communities. I strongly believe this is work that needs to be done to continue the growth and resilience of the local food movement.”

- Angus Baldwin, West Farm, Jeffersonville, VT

Our Farm Partners:
- Foote Brook Farm, Johnson
- West Farm, Cambridge
- Jericho Settlers Farm, Jericho
- Riverside Farm, East Hardwick
- Chappelle’s Potato Farm, Williamstown
- Provender Farm, Cabot
- Shetler Family Farm, Brownington

Our Institutional Partners:
- Barre City Elementary School
- Brattleboro Memorial Hospital
- Cabot School
- Circus Smirkus Camp
- Copley Hospital Inc.
- Craftsbury General Store
- Craftsbury Outdoor Center
- Dartmouth College
- Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center
- Green Mountain Farm to School Programs
- Hardwick Elementary School
- Johnson Elementary School
- Lake Region Union High School
- Lyndon Institute Aladdin
- Morristown Elementary Schools
- North Country Union Junior High School
- Northern Vermont Regional Hospital
- Rabbit Hill Inn
- Siskin Coutts
- Spaulding High School
- St. Johnsbury Academy
- The Scale House
- University of Vermont
- University of Vermont Medical Center
- Williamstown Middle and High School
"We use the rainbow carrot shred on our salad bars and have often heard customers say: 'Wow, those look delicious!'"
- UVM Medical Center

We have been doing business [with JustCut] since 2014. Each year, our volumes are increasing thanks to their collaborative efforts to process local vegetables. Our patients and retail customers are able to enjoy these local foods all year round. We’ve shared our successes with other hospitals hoping they will purchase from JustCut at the VFVC.”
- Deborah Keane at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center

JustCut sales increased 25% in 2018

JustCut 2018 Sales by Product

Which adds up to over 340,000 servings of local produce!

Shetler Family Natural Acres, Brownington, VT

Left: A pallet of produce ready to go out to various hospitals
Right: We work with a few different distributors, and sometimes our staff even ends up picking up a load of spuds
Supporting Food Systems Businesses

At CAE we work with farms and food businesses in all stages of development, from beginning to transitioning, and provide specialized support and business planning assistance specific to each business’s needs. We believe that viable working farms and thriving food businesses are critical to our future.

Some of our 2018 highlights include:

Making 12 client promotion videos through our Meet the Maker series! These were shared widely online and aired on Vermont PBS to share the stories behind these locally-made products. You can view them on our website, [www.hardwickagriculture.org](http://www.hardwickagriculture.org)

Conducting brand audits for 4 food and farm businesses to identify strengths, weaknesses, marketing strategies, and challenges for the future.

Assisting Small Axe farm with business support services while they recovered from a devastating fire in late 2018. They are back on track for the 2019 growing season!

Supporting Rhapsody Natural Foods in its work to re-localize its soybean supply by engaging bean growers and processors, equipment suppliers, and other buyers in the state to identify an economical value chain for organic soybean production.

Participating in the conservation and transfer of an organic farm from Peter Decker to Eli Shetler in Barton. Eli is raising lambs and growing oats on the former organic dairy.

A potato field at the Shetler Family’s All Natural Acres. The Shetlers are an example of a family that has accessed many different CAE services, including business and marketing advising, a business builder loan through the Vermont Farm Fund, and selling produce to our JustCut program.
Vermont Food Venture Center

In its 7th year of operation in Hardwick, the VFVC team has continued to streamline the onboarding process for new clients, become better at identifying business readiness, and providing the other types of support that make it worthwhile to invest in using our shared-use commercial kitchens.

“2018 was a great year for us at Tom Knows Salsa. The CAE continues to support our small business by offering us services and encouragement in so many ways. In 2018, we attended a FSMA Food Safety Course, were given the opportunity to appear in their Meet the Maker video series AND we jumped into the top-5 kitchen usage clients! They have helped us become more efficient producers while we are in the kitchen and have a more visible product outside in the community.”

- Devon Williams, Tom Knows Salsa

The Next Generation of Food System Entrepreneurs!

St. Johnsbury Academy’s Field Semester students worked with us over the course of 2018 to develop a value-added product in the VT Food Venture Center kitchens. Students started with 36 pounds of freshly picked blackberries, explored potential processing methods and ultimately settled on a shelf-stable Blackberry Simple Syrup. 12 students, 2 teachers, and Connor, our Facilities Manager, used the VFVC production kitchens to juice berries, combine with sugar and water to cook a simple syrup, and package the final product into over 120 10-oz glass bottles. The results were delicious, and new projects with St. J Academy are already in the works for 2019 and beyond!
Business Services by the Numbers

In 2018 the Business Services Program assisted:

- **54** Farm & Food Business Advising clients with services ranging from marketing and distribution consulting to food safety training and production scaling.
- **21** Farm clients with business planning services through the VHCB Farm Viability Program. These include wholesale market growth, cash flow analysis, and long-term estate planning.
- **7** Working lands businesses to secure loans including farms, food distributors, & wood products businesses.

Held **3** skill building workshops assisting **28** people from **22** businesses.

In 2018 the Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC) had:

- **23** Production clients in shared-use commercial kitchens.
- **2,791** Kitchen hours used - our busiest year yet!
- **45** Storage clients.
- **5** Food safety workshops serving **50** businesses.

Since opening in 2011, the VFVC has:

- **117** Production clients served.
- **16,913** Kitchen hours used.

For a total of **16,913** kitchen hours used.
Place-Based Education: What Active Community Partnerships and Farm-to-School Integration Look Like in OSSU

CAE’s partnership with the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union focuses on strengthening and expanding place-based and food systems education. We work closely with stakeholder groups to connect local and regional resources with these efforts. Strengthening school-community connections is a cornerstone of this work, and key to a sustainable cultural shift toward improved education, community health, and economic vitality.

Artisan & Entrepreneurship Academy at Hazen!

In 2018, the Northern Borders Regional Commission awarded a grant to Hazen Union High School for the development of a new Artisan and Entrepreneurship Academy. Launching in the 2019-2020 school year, this collaboration between Hazen, CAE, and WonderArts will draw from community partnerships to create coursework focused on entrepreneurship, skill and business development, apprenticeships and employment education.

In 2018, we identified youth leadership as a program area focus. Early efforts to lift up youth voice include:

- Student members of the survey design team contributing to the OSSU Place-Based Farm to School Education evaluation project
- Student members of Partners in Learning, the committee that coordinates many school-community events
- Supporting the new HES student council
- Bringing OSSU students to the Future of Education Design Studio
- Support for a student initiated project to revitalize the Hazen Greenhouse in 2018
In 2018, Hazen Union High School students participated in the first annual spring service week! 150 students from grades 10-12 participated in more than 20 projects at local businesses, farms, community spaces, and in their own school.

“The students were focused and worked hard in rain, on a wet hill. Kids who arrived a bit off and distant quickly and thoroughly engaged in the task. We were delighted. Also, 3 volunteers asked if they could come back to help. I hired them for three hours on the following Saturday.”

- Community partner

“Over the years, I have been involved in several food related activities at school. I have helped to take care of the school gardens from planting, to weeding, to harvesting and preparing food. I have been to Riverside Farm and learned about good farming practices and planting seeds. I have been to the Laggis Farm, where our class picked and processed over 800 pounds of corn and fed our school many times. I have helped make many loaves of homemade bread that were donated to the Food Shelf and served at Harvest Dinners. And what I really like the best, is spending time with adults and friends working hard and having fun indoors and outside.”

- Fifth Grader Sadie Gann in speech to community at HES Harvest Dinner

Hardwick Elementary School Students Cooking for the Harvest Dinner

Read more about our work with OSSU schools in our blog, OSSU We See You! Visit ossuweseeyou.wordpress.com for the latest updates.

I love the blog... It is such a positive and uplifting way to see what great things we are doing in our community with students, food and education. Thank you for putting it together and for all the support you give to us!

- OSSU teacher

Craftsbury Master Chef Jr. Team

16 OSSU teachers participated in our Farm to School Professional Development training in the 2017-2018 school year.

Here’s what they had to say:

“I am motivated to get out of the classroom more so students can understand and respect the opportunities right out our back door.”

“This course has helped remind me that we all learn best by doing. Also the real-world connection is key for student buy-in.”

Hardwick Elementary School inservice workshop on integrating sustainability as a school-wide theme
Bringing Community Together

In its 10th year, Pies for People baked 172 pies, our biggest year yet! The pies were distributed to 9 locations including food shelves, nursing homes, care centers, and community dinners.

Thank you to High Mowing Seeds, Sterling College, and to all the community members who volunteered their time!

In 2018 we launched a grassroots capital campaign to build a new open-air pavilion and primitive trail additions at Atkins Field. 11 historic Woodbury Granite Co. relics were identified to be marked and mapped.

... and this work will be completed in 2019!

Stay in the loop: the Atkins Bulletin is the best way to hear about events and celebrate community efforts at Atkins Field! To subscribe, email bethany@hardwickagriculture.org

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Northeast Kingdom Organizing

What began in 2015 as a listening project in our community meant to uncover barriers to food access has grown into a vibrant social justice movement: Northeast Kingdom Organizing. NEKO is a member-led coalition of community and faith based groups from Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties. NEKO uses community organizing practices rooted in narrative, relationships and place to bring together the resources required to solve local problems.

NEKO’s Purpose:
To improve the quality of life of the people and places of the Northeast Kingdom by building pathways so that each of us has a voice in the decisions that impact our lives.

NEKO’s Theory of Change:
We share our stories and listen to the stories of others. We build relationships across perceived differences. We take action together to solve local problems.

“Finally I feel like I’m going to make a difference. Finally I feel like I’m going to adequately be able to help people. Finally we will all be heard. Community organizing is real, it starts with the people of the community.”
-Gladys Chambers, NEKO Intern

Community members discuss community based child abuse prevention strategies at a Children, Youth and Families team meeting

Owen Sukkaew discussing racial justice and equity in the NEK at the NEKO’s Youth Summit in April

2018 Marked the beginning of a process to transition NEKO to an independent 501c3. The CAE continues to participate as a member and to serve as the fiscal agent. In November, NEKO’s members voted on three initial campaigns and elected a founding Executive Council.

Transit Access
Neighborhood Food Security
Third Street Neighborhood Organizing

NEKO is a member of the InterValley Project, a New England wide network of place based democratic organizations working towards social, economic, and environmental justice.
Innovative Financing for Farmers

As of 2018, the Vermont Farm Fund has officially loaned over $1,000,000 to food and farm businesses in VT!

Established in 2011, the Vt Farm Fund operates as a true revolving loan fund: as the community of recipients repays their loans, funds are replenished for the next round of borrowers. Our goal over the next 5 years is to grow the fund so that interest payments will cover its operating costs - ensuring that this critical resource for farmers remains sustainable and viable for years to come.

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The Vermont Farm Fund is a program of CAE in partnership with Pete’s Greens. To support the fund or for more information, visit www.vermontfarmfund.org
Financial Report

Expenses

Administration 18%
Community Programs 21%
Technical Assistance 14%
VFVC 17%
Vermont Farm Fund 1%
JustCut 25%

Development 3%

Revenue

Donations 35%
Grants 35%
Rental Income 8%
JustCut Sales 11%
Fee-for-Service 10%
Other Misc. 1%

Administration $184,218.64
Community Programs $210,483.54
Development $29,825.16
Technical Assistance $143,460.35
Vermont Farm Fund $14,413.35
JustCut $255,118.46
Vermont Food Venture Center $170,178.83
Total $1,007,698.33

Donations $422,338.01
Grants $420,464.91
Fee-for-Service $117,480.86
JustCut Sales $131,221.09
Rental Income $99,176.16
Other Misc. $12,864.73
Total $1,203,545.76

“It is great to see all the great work that is happening throughout OSSU. It is always surprising how little we know of events in the other schools. With impending mergers it is even more important that we increase awareness and seek out ways to share and collaborate.”

- OSSU Principal

A happy student snacking on greens at the Wolcott School garden workday
Becky and Stew Arnold have a deep connection to place, and at the forefront of their relationship with community are the farms and food entrepreneurs in the core geography of CAE’s work. The Arnolds see CAE as an important asset in the community to bring these businesses together, guide them to existing resources, and provide the infrastructure to grow.

While both grew up in Barre, Becky and Stew have throughout their lives spent as much time as possible in Greensboro. “It is the center of our universe”, said Becky. The couple now lives in Greensboro year-round since retiring in 2014. They feel fortunate that the place they call home values businesses that are connected to the land, and hope that CAE will continue to assist future businesses so that more people can live and succeed in our area. “CAE is an innovation center, a place that supports farm and food businesses that are rooted in our community, and we believe in that”, said Stew. In past years, Becky and Stew have supported CAE’s annual fund, participated in Pies for People rolling out crust or baking pies, and most recently supported CAE’s grassroots fundraising campaign to build a pavilion at Atkins Field in Hardwick. Becky concludes by saying, “We hope CAE will continue to help future generations of entrepreneurs achieve success and remain rooted in this community. This is a creative place with an independent spirit, and CAE is at the forefront of cultivating that future.”

“CAE is an innovation center, a place that supports farm and food businesses that are rooted in our community, and we believe in that.”

Thank You!

To the over 200 community members near and far who supported CAE in 2018, Thank You! YOUR partnership makes this work possible.

Donate today at www.hardwickagriculture.org to join our community of supporters!

Left: Weeding blueberries at Atkins Field
Right: Carrot taste-tests at Hazen Wellness Fair