

Health in All Policies: Agriculture

Current Practice and Future Opportunities

Health in All Policies recognizes that health is determined not only by genetics, health care, and individual behaviors but by a complex set of social, economic and environmental factors. This document highlights current action and potential future opportunities to integrate health and health equity into budgetary, programmatic, and policy decision-making in the agricultural sector.

Why This Matters

A vibrant and viable agricultural community will support equity and a high quality of life for all Vermonters. Investing in Vermont's farms and food supply chains strengthens business viability, which enables broader economic prosperity, stewardship of Vermont's ecosystems, and supports access to healthy, local food. Local, regional, and state agriculture and food system policies can help all Vermonters: have access to affordable, healthy, local food; live, work, learn, and play in clean and sustainable natural environments; have access to family wage jobs and economic prosperity; have access to quality education and opportunities; and have opportunities for civic engagement and community connections.

Sector: Agriculture

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment.

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Budget

Affordable, Healthy, Local Food

Current Practice

- ▶ Fund the purchase and distribution of local food to schools and childcare programs, when funds are available from the USDA Local Food for Schools and Childcare Program.
- ▶ Fund the purchase of Vermont grown and produced food to feed local communities, when funds are available from the USDA Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program.
- ▶ Maintain and expand the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant programs to provide grants to schools, early childhood programs, and technical assistance service providers to increase the procurement of local and nutritious food in schools and early childhood programs.
- ▶ Prioritize grants to schools that will use farm to school approaches to address their Local Wellness Policy goals, such as promoting healthy eating habits and increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ Prioritize grants to schools and early childhood programs that will use farm to school approaches to increase student participation in federal child nutrition programs.
- ▶ Make strategic investments to increase nutritious local food procurement in institutions serving meals to vulnerable Vermonters, such as prisons, hospitals, colleges, and nursing homes.
- ▶ Provide grants to strengthen the Vermont farm economy, so that farms can continue producing healthy food that can be consumed locally and regionally.
- ▶ Offer pass-through grant administration for NOFA-VT's Crop Cash & Farm Share Programs and Salvation Farms' gleaning, processing, and distribution programs, when funds are available from the Vermont State Legislature.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Make strategic investments to strengthen food security and enhance farm viability that are informed by the Vermont Food Security Coalition and the [Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035](#) plan.

Clean and Sustainable Natural Environments

Current Practice

- ▶ Allocate State resources in the Vermont Agriculture Water Quality Partnership to engage landowners regarding water quality and conservation practices.
- ▶ Provide funding opportunities for educational, technical and financial assistance to producers regarding conservation and water quality practices.
- ▶ Allocate resources to organizations such as Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, University of Vermont Extension and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to support staff capacity and programs surrounding water quality improvement.
- ▶ Allocate resources to providing technical assistance on topics such as conservation practices, grazing and nutrient management planning and engineering, to support improved water quality and environmental conservation on agricultural lands.
- ▶ Invest in regulatory programming focused on ensuring safe use, handling and storage of EPA-regulated substances.
- ▶ Invest grant funds in the protection of Vermont's working landscape while uplifting responsible land stewardship and viability of working lands businesses.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Expand investment in Vermont's farms to increase adoption of landscape resilience practices; structured use of pay for performance or stipend for enrollment model(s).
- ▶ Allocate resources to funding opportunities focused on projects with ecological sustainability as the focal desired outcome to enhance business viability.

Family Wage Jobs and Economic Prosperity

Current Practice

- ▶ Make strategic investments that support a resilient and sustainable farm, food, and forest economy through the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative.
- ▶ Fund the development, production, marketing and distribution of dairy products through the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center.

- ▶ Provide grants to increase agricultural literacy, strengthen markets for Vermont grown and produced products, improve equitable access to nutritious food, and celebrate Vermont's agricultural identity.
- ▶ Fund small and mid-sized agricultural producers and value-added processors in the meat, produce, and maple industries.
- ▶ Provide financial incentives for institutions to purchase local food.
- ▶ Fund innovative infrastructure and special-purpose equipment projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain and strengthen local and regional food systems.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Explore opportunities to fund farmworker housing and other health care needs.
- ▶ Expand investment in the Farm First Program at Invest EAP to support farmers and their families reduce stress and improve emotional well-being.
- ▶ Support the Governor's Commission on the Future of Agriculture recommendations for future funding in VAAFMM grant programs.

Quality Education and Opportunities

Current Practice

- ▶ Provide grants to schools, early childhood programs, and technical assistance service providers to enhance overall academic achievement, youth leadership, and service impact.
- ▶ Provide dairy education grants to support high school students in exploring careers in the dairy industry.
- ▶ Invest in research and solutions to key workforce challenges experienced by Northeast dairy agricultural and processing businesses and their employees.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Request the re-authorization of state legislative funds for a new academic scholarship program, inspired and informed by the defunct 2+2 FARMS program.

Civic Engagement and Community Connections

Current Practice

- ▶ Invest in regional, collaboratively structured partnerships focused on increasing conversation and engagement around water quality and resources management.
- ▶ Invest in community engagement initiatives to hear feedback and critical needs from the food producing and supply chain industries.
- ▶ Engage local communities, including producers, in policy development and educational spaces to support civic engagement.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Increase investment in development of community engagement programming.
- ▶ Invest additional resources and labor into outreach systems, increasing the accessibility of the Agency's programs (regulatory, grant funding, policy development).
- ▶ Increase collaboration with other State agencies to expand cross-sector communication and outreach to local communities.

Policy

Affordable, Healthy, Local Food

Current Practice

- ▶ Increase amount of local food served in Vermont schools, early childhood programs, colleges, healthcare, and state institutions.
- ▶ Strengthen the Vermont farm economy so that farms can continue producing healthy food that can be consumed locally and regionally.
- ▶ Ensure the safety and quality of Vermont's food supply, including important Vermont farm products, such as dairy, produce, meat, maple, eggs, and honey.
- ▶ Ensure consumers purchasing food and other products get what they pay for.
- ▶ Expand access to federal child nutrition programs, including school breakfast, national school lunch, summer food service, and child and adult care programs.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Collaborate with the New England Food System Planners Partnership to impact local and regional food supply chains and strengthen and grow the New England regional food system.
- ▶ Increase participation in federal child nutrition programs, SNAP and make resources available in other languages.
- ▶ Ensure Electronic Benefit Transfer access, Farm to Family, and Crop Cash outreach at farmers' markets of all sizes.

Clean and Sustainable Natural Environments

Current Practice

- ▶ Collaborate with federal, state and community partners to meet Vermont's goals of increasing and protecting the quality of Vermont's waterways.
- ▶ Provide education and resources to support compliance with Act 250 Criterion 9B to ensure the protection of prime agricultural soils, in regard to development projects.
- ▶ Provide education on, and regulate, the Required Agricultural Practices which promote clean water in Vermont.

- ▶ Provide education and regulation regarding the Vermont Rule for the Control of Pesticides to ensure environmentally and physically safe use, storage, and disposal of pesticides in Vermont.
- ▶ Provide education and regulation regarding food production and processing of produce, maple, dairy and meat products, which incorporate compliance to ensure environmental stewardship.
- ▶ Fund Vermont's working lands and food supply chain businesses through programs focused on sustainable land and resource management and environmentally safe production systems.
- ▶ Support the protection of Vermont's ecosystems via inspection of incoming plant materials and provision of support in removing or managing aggressive and/or introduced species.
- ▶ Collaborate across State agencies to increase the efficacy of environmental protection and public health programs.
- ▶ Continue cross-Agency implementation of the Climate Action Plan strategies towards five impact areas: cutting climate pollution, capturing carbon, resilient working and natural lands, cross-cutting solutions and protecting vital communities.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Develop and implement an equity analysis of programming, in alignment with Act 154 requirements.
- ▶ Increase investment in grant programming to support adoption of conservation-focused practices.
- ▶ Develop an agricultural strategic plan to support the climate resilience of Vermont's working landscapes, including fiscal investment in producers for adoption of mitigation practices.
- ▶ Expand implementation of the *Climate Action Plan* strategies, to move Vermont towards greater climate resiliency and reduce climate impact by 2030.
- ▶ Expand investment in achieving thriving and protected waterways across Vermont, by implementing the *Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership's Strategic Plan 2025-2030*.

Family Wage Jobs and Economic Prosperity

Current Practice

- ▶ Support farms in navigating market and export regulations such as international trade, Accessory On-Farm Business (AOFB), the Act 129 Local Food definition, and other policies that impact their businesses.

- ▶ Make strategic investments and develop policy recommendations that support a resilient and sustainable farm, food, and forest economy in Vermont.
- ▶ Support dairy businesses in the development, production, marketing and distribution of dairy products.
- ▶ Strengthen institutional markets for Vermont grown and produced products.
- ▶ Inspect H2A farmworker housing inspection to ensure it meets federal regulatory standards. Many farms rely on H2A workers for seasonal labor and are required to provide safe housing for these workers.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Stabilize and revitalize Vermont's agricultural industry by implementing the *Vermont Agriculture and Food Systems Strategic Plan 2021-2030*.
- ▶ Collaborate with the New England Food System Planners Partnership to impact local and regional food supply chains and strengthen and grow the New England regional food system.

Quality Education and Opportunities

Current Practice

- ▶ Enhance overall academic achievement for Vermont children through farm to school grants, technical assistance, and professional development.
- ▶ Create supportive, healthy school environments that align comprehensive health and wellness education, school nutrition and physical activity standards and expectations to support the whole learner.
- ▶ Implement dairy industry agricultural workforce development initiatives.
- ▶ Connect with partners in agricultural education and consumer education, agritourism, and marketing to promote agricultural literacy statewide across all life stages.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Increase educators' access to Farm to School classroom resources, professional development, and grants through increased coordination and outreach.
- ▶ Support research and evaluation efforts to understand and enhance the educational value of farm to school.
- ▶ Define and further expand the Agency's role in advancing agricultural workforce development, including dairy and other agriculture sectors.

Civic Engagement and Community Connections

Current Practice

- ▶ Provide translation services with inspectional programming to increase accessibility to resources, programs, and assistance.
- ▶ Continue to develop and utilize best practices for community engagement and information sharing, shaped by Vermont Open Meeting Law.
- ▶ Support the Just Transitions Sub Committee of the Vermont Climate Council efforts to ensure that Vermont's strategies around climate change equitably benefit and support all residents.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Further invest in developing accessible systems of community engagement and outreach to engage all of Vermont's communities in the Agency's work.
- ▶ Expand the availability and use of translation and literacy services to reach vulnerable and underserved communities.

Program

Affordable, Healthy, Local Food

Current Practice

- ▶ Support schools and early childhood programs to serve more local and nutritious food to children through farm to school grants, technical assistance, and professional development.
- ▶ Partner with the Agency of Education on local foods incentive programs to incentivize schools and early childhood programs to purchase local food.
- ▶ Partner with the Agency of Education to promote Local Wellness Policy implementation and increase participation in federal child nutrition programs among Farm to School grant recipients.
- ▶ Coordinate technical assistance to schools and other institutions to assist in increasing local food procurement.
- ▶ Encourage schools and early childhood programs to purchase local and nutritious food.
- ▶ Leverage one-time federal food purchase assistance programs to expand access to local food in schools, early childcare programs, and in charitable food programs.
- ▶ Administer the Local Food Purchase Assistance grant program to purchase Vermont grown and produced food to feed local communities, increase equity, and cultivate new relationships between local growers and entities providing food to their neighbors.
- ▶ Provide education, technical assistance and regulation to ensure the safety and quality of Vermont's food supply, including farm products such as dairy, produce, meat, maple, eggs, and honey.
- ▶ Partner with institutions serving meals to vulnerable Vermonters, such as the Department of Corrections, hospitals, colleges, and nursing homes to increase their use of local and nutritious foods.
- ▶ Provide grants to strengthen the Vermont farm economy so that farms can continue producing healthy food that can be consumed locally and regionally.
- ▶ Coordinate the inspection and testing of devices and products in commerce, such as scales and retail scanners to ensure consumers purchasing food, among other products, get what they pay for.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Define and further expand the Agency's role in food access programming and in achieving the goals of the [Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035](#) plan.
- ▶ Assist state and federal nutrition programming to ensure that all retail stores, farmers' markets and interested CSAs are well equipped to accept SNAP and WIC benefits.
- ▶ Support the Agency of Education to administer federal nutrition programs, promote nutrition education and incorporate local food in healthy food policies.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance to vendors contracted to sell food on State of Vermont property on compliance with state policies on healthy food, in partnership with the Department of Health.

Clean and Sustainable Natural Environments

Current Practice

- ▶ Steward and invest funds through the Clean Water Act and the Clean Water Board to support and supplement conservation and water quality focused programming and technical assistance.
- ▶ Provide grants to support Vermont's producers' adoption and use of water quality improvement and conservation practices:
 - Assistance Programs: Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program, Best Management Practices, Capital Equipment Assistance Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Farm Agronomic Practices, Seeding and Filter Strip Program, Pasture and Surface Water Fencing Program, Vermont Farmers Ecosystem Stewardship Program, Vermont Pay for Performance Program
- ▶ Provide direct technical assistance (education, engineering, planning) to Vermont producers and processors to develop and implement systems that contribute to increased conservation and water quality.
- ▶ Use inspection and education as tools to ensure proper storage, handling and disposal of pesticides.
- ▶ Use inspection and education as tools to ensure compliance with Federal and State water quality and food production and processing regulations.
- ▶ Complete nursery and greenhouse and (as needed) natural spaces inspection to support management of potentially harmful and/or introduced species.

- ▶ Complete mosquito and tick population sampling and reporting, in collaboration with Vermont Department of Health to protect Vermonters against tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses.
- ▶ Support Vermont's agricultural producers and processors in accessing federal funding to increase natural resource management and conservation and energy efficiency on their operations.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Expand investment in partner organizations and multi-partner collaborations, increase resource availability around water quality education and technical assistance.
- ▶ Invest additional resources to leverage Federally available funds through the United States Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service to support Vermont's working lands.
- ▶ Offer pay for performance-structured programs focused on climate resilience and ecosystems services.
- ▶ Explore inter-agency collaboration regarding the potential for increased recycling of agricultural plastics.

Family Wage Jobs and Economic Prosperity

Current Practice

- ▶ Implement programs to support the marketing and export activities of Vermont's agriculture and forestry businesses. Agritourism programs such as the Marketing & Agritourism Blog and the Maple 100 support businesses to undertake agritourism activities and improve their bottom line. Provide educational and connections to financial resources for businesses to enter new markets, learn about exporting products, exhibit at domestic and international trade shows, and engage in other international marketing activities.
- ▶ Implement programs that provide a diverse array of funding to small businesses for infrastructure, equipment, marketing, workforce development, research and more. Support producer associations, service providers, and other institutions to provide business and technical assistance to farm and food businesses – giving them the skills they need to thrive.

- Perennial grant programs: Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Farm to Institution.
 - Recent one-time grant programs: Agriculture Development Grants for Meat, Maple & Produce, Local Food Purchase Assistance, Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure.
- ▶ Fund small and mid-sized agricultural producers and value-added processors in the meat, produce, and maple industries, purchase Vermont grown and produced food to feed local communities, and fund infrastructure and equipment that help businesses increase market access, diversify product offerings, or increase production quantities.
 - ▶ Maintain the Vermont Building at the Big E and recruit Vermont vendors to sell their product at the fair each year.
 - ▶ Collect and aggregate pricing data on a variety of fruit and vegetable crops, as well as a selection of meat and poultry products grown and sold in Vermont.
 - ▶ Support Vermont's food hubs for processing, aggregation, and distribution activities.
 - ▶ Inspect H2A farmworker housing to ensure it meets federal standards.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Support the Governor's Commission on the Future of Agriculture recommendations for future funding in Agency grant programs.
- ▶ Explore possibilities for continued, high-level support to Vermont's food hubs.

Quality Education and Opportunities

Current Practice

- ▶ Support schools and early childhood programs to enhance academic achievement through farm to school grants, technical assistance, and professional development. In particular, the Farm to School Vision Grant supports farm to school projects that promote youth leadership and service impact.
- ▶ Support high school students in learning about careers in the dairy industry through partnerships with the University of Vermont Extension 4-H Program and the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council.

- ▶ Research and invest in solutions to key workforce challenges experienced by Northeast dairy agricultural and processing businesses and their employees.
- ▶ Collaborate with partners in the Vermont Farm to Plate Agricultural Literacy Priority Strategy Team to connect and strengthen agriculture and food education initiatives for all life stages (pre-K to adult audiences).

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Maintain consistent high level-funding for programs. Recent one-time opportunities may be reauthorized in the future by Vermont or USDA and could continue to support these goals.
- ▶ Develop a Regional Dairy Workforce Program for the Northeast.
- ▶ Develop and invest in an Agency strategy for agricultural workforce development.
- ▶ Re-establish a new academic scholarship program, inspired and informed by the 2+2 FARMS program, to increase educational opportunities for young Vermonters interested in careers in food and agriculture.
- ▶ Form a Vermont Youth Agriculture Council to invite youth voice into food and agricultural policy processes and cultivate youth leadership in the food system.

Civic Engagement and Community Connections

Current Practice

- ▶ Provide funding and capacity in implementation of community engagement opportunities regarding policy, funding and natural resource protection.
- ▶ Use public comment periods and feedback forums to increase accessibility of engagement in the policy and program development process.
- ▶ Invest in the development of best practices and resources across all forms of communication, at the Agency level.

Future Opportunities

- ▶ Develop and adopt a Community Engagement strategic plan to develop continuous structures of hearing from communities, as required by Act 154.
- ▶ Increase Agency employee engagement with partner organizations to build relationships and increase accessibility for feedback and understanding constituent needs.
- ▶ Expand outreach and accessibility for public comment periods regarding policy and program development and updates.