

Vermont Farm Show

REVISIONING

Scope of Work

Prepared for the Vermont Farm Show Board and all statewide agricultural leaders

SCOPE OF WORK OVERVIEW

The Vermont Farm Show Board (VFSB) recognizes that agriculture in Vermont has changed. The [Vermont Farm Show](#) was last held in 2020. In 2022, VFSB began to navigate planning for a farm show that represents the shifting and emerging needs of farming in Vermont, is financially sustainable to manage, and both celebrates **and** supports all of the people who grow and produce food in Vermont.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 members of the Farm Show Board actively engaged in a revisioning process to inform how, when, and where future farm shows can be offered. The result of this first stage of inquiry is preparation of a Scope of Work to address shifts in Farm Show governance structure, funding, overall management, and how to plan for event programming.

The revisioning process presents an opportunity for resource and power sharing, inclusive community engagement, and to meet the expanding needs of a more diverse agricultural landscape. Revisioning the Vermont Farm Show with the recommendations in this Scope of Work aligns with [Farm to Plate Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan](#) intentions for Vermont agriculture to be more economically viable, environmentally resilient, and socially just.

Table of Contents

Project Overview.....	Page 1
Scope of Work Intentions.....	Page 2
Farm Show Revisioning Context.....	Page 2
Purpose.....	Page 2
Value.....	Page 3
Shifts.....	Page 4
>Recommendations<.....	Page 5
1) Agriculture Leadership Collaboration & Funding.....	Page 5
2) Management/Leadership Transition.....	Page 7
3) Inclusive Statewide Community Engagement.....	Page 8
4) Future Farm Show Programming Suggestions.....	Page 9
Next Steps.....	Page 10
Revisioning Background.....	Page 10
Scope of Work Contributors.....	Page 11

Scope of Work Intentions

- TO CONVEY that the current nonprofit organizational and financial structure does not serve the current or potential purpose nor does it provide an advantage (and could be a disadvantage) to how the Farm Show is sustained over time. The way the Farm Show is currently structured provides no investment or incentive for organizing an event that meets the changing landscape of agriculture in Vermont.
- TO SUGGEST collaborative statewide leadership engagement to determine how a statewide agricultural gathering can become a shared effort among the organizations and institutions who serve farmers. The Scope of Work presents an invitation for dialogue among statewide agricultural leaders for the Farm Show to adopt a new organizational and event structure, determine a new fiscal model and funding sources, and shift from a one-person farm show manager to a shared management model.
- TO RECOMMEND that future Farm Show programming is determined and driven by an inclusive community engagement process from a full range of Vermont agriculture audiences including farmers and food businesses, agricultural education/nonprofit/government institutions, farm vendors and service providers, agricultural students of all ages, and people who love and support agriculture.

FARM SHOW REVISIONING CONTEXT

Below are a series of short overviews that provide information about the Vermont Farm Show purpose, value provided/could be provided, and reasoning for change. This information was gathered over the course of conversations that contributed to the development of this Scope of Work and can be built upon in moving the Scope of Work Recommendations (page 5) forward.

Farm Show [Potential] Purpose

(Harvested throughout revisioning process to-date, 2022-2023)

- A statewide agricultural gathering that is designed to celebrate and center the needs of farmers, growers, and producers of all scales and types of agriculture.
- Statewide gathering inclusive of all Vermont agricultural communities and representative of the whole landscape of farming in Vermont.
- A new kind of Farm Show that celebrates the diversity of Vermont agriculture and people, features strong education and innovation elements, and builds connection, relationships, and support among farmers and food businesses, agricultural education/nonprofit/government institutions, farm vendors and service providers, students, and people who love and support agriculture.
- A statewide agricultural gathering that provides: networking opportunities, awareness of new technology, education and training, latest equipment, marketing opportunities, support and encouragement, policy and regulatory guidance.

Farm Show [By-Law] Purpose

(originating from 1979, revised in 2017 and 2019)

This corporation shall be a non-profit agricultural organization (principal place of business, the address of the Farm Show Manager) and shall be operated as required to maintain an exemption under section 501(c)(5) of the Internal Revenue Code or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code. The objects of this corporation are the betterment of conditions of those engaged in the pursuit of agriculture or horticulture, the improvement of the grade of their products, and the development of a higher degree of efficiency in their respective occupations. In addition to these general purposes, particular purposes of the corporation shall be

- (1) to hold, conduct, and operate an annual Vermont Farm Show to provide an opportunity for coordinating, unifying, correlating, and promoting the agricultural interests of Vermont;
- (2) to organize and conduct meetings at which various agricultural individuals and organizations can meet together;
- (3) to display and exhibit farm equipment, supplies, and Vermont farm and home products for the education and instruction of agricultural actors; and
- (4) to engage in any and all lawful activities incidental to and in pursuit of the foregoing purposes, except as restricted herein.

Farm Show Existing Value

Elements of the Farm Show that brought value and are relevant today/to be built upon:

- A “homecoming” feeling of belonging and “warm and fuzzy” space for farmers
- A place to build and strengthen personal and professional relationships across the industry to influence shifting agri-“culture.”
- Building connections in person.
- Agriculture industry association programming.
- Educational programming (needs to be expanded, more diverse, and intentionally aligned with the needs of today’s farmers).
- A place for information and learning about emerging agricultural trends (needs to be expanded beyond equipment and dairy technology).

Farm Show Potential Value

Ideas and suggestions for what value the Farm Show or other type of statewide agricultural gathering centered on farmers could provide:

- Build a shared understanding of where Vermont agriculture is at, what’s on the horizon, and how to sustain local agriculture in Vermont.
- Heightened and intentional focus on farmer visibility and connections; trust and relationship building across the agricultural community.
- Strengthen industry communication, direct conversations, and explore ways to bring agriculture into more daily conversations.

- A way to build understanding of all aspects of agriculture among people working in and serving agriculture; bring the stories, community and connections to life.
- A new kind of farm show could be a place to bridge divides among those who have been excluded and the systems (and people behind the systems) that have excluded people with marginalized identities from agricultural opportunities.
- Relationship building and less formal interactions with regulators; encouraging agricultural literacy within the industry.
- Intentional opportunities for BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and Migrant Farmers to both access resources and contribute to Farm Show programming.
- Agriculture innovation and environmental resilience programming for farmers, students, leadership, and career development.
- Intermingling of different generations.
- A place to foster communal care and offer mental/physical health resources and support.
- Exposure to career paths, technology, networking & connections, information across sectors.
- A place for the “finger on the pulse” of the wholeness and entirety of Vermont agriculture.
- A way to celebrate farmers and center their needs while also creating cycles of appreciation and support between farmers and eaters.

Farm Show Shifts

What was not working, does not work anymore, needs to change:

- A nonprofit structure focused solely on managing an event (the farm show) that relies on show revenue and volunteers is no longer financially viable or operationally sustainable.
- The sense of belonging has been geared towards the white male dominant group. Marginalized communities and groups have been intentionally and unintentionally excluded in conscious and unconscious ways.
- The “trade show” component has dwindled as vendors (large and small equipment) see decreased sales and farmer/producer/attendee purchasing habits have changed since 2020 (and even before).
- Nonprofit organizational structure is struggling to maintain the existing show responsibilities and does not have capacity to manage Farm Show revisioning. At the same time, the Board recognizes organizational, financial, and structural shifts are what is needed yet does not have the resources to manage a revisioning process.
- Educational components were disconnected and centered around “free trade show” stuff rather than robust learning experiences.
- Product contests seem less relevant than in the past for a variety of cultural reasons and there are challenges and questions around capacity to manage all aspects of the contests.
- Longstanding perception of the Farm Show is outdated and requires substantial branding and messaging shifts.

▶▶▶ RECOMMENDATIONS ◀◀◀

1) Agriculture Leadership Collaboration & Funding

Opportunity: The long break in Farm Shows, a changing agricultural landscape, and board/industry agreement that a revised Farm Show is needed presents an opportunity for deeper collaboration, resource re-allocating, widespread agricultural community engagement, and power sharing among Vermont agricultural organizations and institutions, which aligns with intentions for a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse Vermont.

- **CONVERSATIONS TO HOLD**

- Build a shared understanding with the Vermont Farm Show Board of the Scope of Work.
- Identify next steps towards cultivating a new governance model for the Farm Show Board and the required funding in collaboration with statewide agricultural leaders.
- Identify interest from Vermont’s agricultural leadership community to collaborate and co-create a new kind of Farm Show that could also present a collaborative way to approach industry-wide agricultural events.
- Facilitate dialogues with Vermont agricultural leaders to explore capacity and coalition building for statewide agricultural events, including, but not limited to a “Farm Show”.
- Build a shared understanding of the purpose and objectives of a new kind of Farm Show.
- Engage agriculture industry associations (Vermont BeeKeepers Association, Vermont Beef Producers Association, Vermont Cheese Council, Vermont Dairy Industry Association, Vermont Sheep and Goat Association, Vermont Sugar Makers Association, and any other agricultural product industry associations in Vermont and neighboring communities) to determine how they want to be involved as many have shifted from conducting business meetings from the former Farm Show.
- Invite collaboration and partnership with agricultural institutions (universities, colleges, and Extension offices), agriculture industry associations, and government agencies for leadership collaboration as well as joint programming, shared marketing, networking opportunities, and how to incorporate the latest research and innovations from these partners.
- Leadership organizations to include: Migrant Justice, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Northeast Organic Farming Association, Rural Vermont, Salvation

Farms, Sterling College, USDA/NRCS, UVM Extension, Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets, Vermont FFA Foundation, Vermont Farm Bureau, Vermont Farm to Plate Network, Vermont Land Trust, Vermont ReLeaf Collective, Vermont State Colleges, Vermont Sustainable Agriculture Council; agriculture industry associations, regional food organizations; other relevant state government agencies, and any other Vermont agriculture leadership organization.

- **FUNDING TO SECURE**

- Funding is needed to resource this Scope of Work.
- Funding is needed to pay for participation from agricultural leaders whose positions do not pay for them to participate in this Scope of Work and to shift from the inequitable expectations and exclusion of volunteerism to paying for the labor required to address this Scope of Work.
- Funding is needed to pay for the creation and sustainability of a new leadership structure.
- Funding is needed to pay for inclusive community engagement.
- Funding could come from a mix of grants, sponsors, foundations, state agricultural leadership organizations, institutions, and government agencies, and federal/national money including and not limited to: American Farmland Trust, Farm Aid, Farm to Institution New England, Farm to Plate Network, Food Tank, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, National Farmers Union, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, National/Vermont Young Farmers Coalition, New England Grassroots Fund, Shelburne Farms, Slow Food USA, Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, The Land Institute, The National Center for Appropriate Technology, The Organic Trade Association, The Rodale Institute, The Rural Coalition, United States Department of Agriculture, UVM Extension, Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets, Vermont Community Foundation

Background Information*

Farm Show revenue was from vendors, primarily large equipment dealers, who do not find it worthwhile to rent booth space given the changing economic and supply chain landscape and how it impacts point of sale. This was the primary income for the Farm Show which paid for a show manager and show costs. This model is no longer financially viable or operationally sustainable.

●●● The above recommendations require collaborative action in order for the following recommendations to take shape. ●●●

2) Management/Leadership Transition

Opportunity: To explore a more collaborative, equitable, and accountable leadership model that centers power and resource sharing, diversity, and just labor practices. Many Vermont organizations are attempting to create more equitable leadership models and this is an opportunity for Vermont agriculture to employ socially just approaches to meet the needs of all farmers and producers.

- **FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

- Cultivate a new event structure funded and resourced by existing Vermont agricultural leadership organizations and institutions.
- Agricultural leadership support for securing state and national grants and federal funding.
- Identify a fiscal sponsor or event management model similar to the Vermont Tourism Summit.

- **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE**

- Create a paid council or steering committee with a diverse representation of agriculture leadership and agricultural community members with specific roles and responsibilities to co-create and co-manage the show.
- The council/committee would be the governing body as well as the “show manager”.
- There are specific job descriptions and members are paid for their labor.
- The council/committee manages the community engagement process, including any consultants.

Background Information*

The Farm Show Board is all volunteer, representing agricultural organizations within the state with minimal annual state or institutional financial support (an approximate \$3000 grant for product contests from the state legislature). Maintaining an active and engaged board has become challenging due to capacity and financial needs among the agricultural community. Creating a board that represents the diversity of Vermont’s agricultural community calls for financial reciprocity of labor. The last Farm Show was held in 2020, just before the pandemic. There were plans to hold a 2024, however without a new vision and how to deliver on the new vision, there was no feasibility to hire a show manager.

3) Inclusive Statewide Community Engagement

Opportunity: An inclusive and coordinated community engagement plan creates the opportunity for a new kind of Farm Show (or statewide agricultural gathering) that is shaped by Vermont’s changing, emerging, and product/culturally diverse agricultural community. A statewide effort that engages the entirety of Vermont’s agricultural community can provide the data, information, and stories to best support the current and future needs of people who grow and produce food in Vermont.

- **PRIORITIES**

- Community engagement is critical to provide input, feedback, and insights to inform programming moving forward. Transparent communication in decision making processes will build trust and encourage participation across the agricultural community.
- A community engagement process could be implemented and coordinated by the new council/steering committee in partnership with community engagement consultants (work with consistent facilitators throughout the process).
- Curate parallel information available in existing plans and organizational research to determine what additional information is needed.
- Ensure community engagement is inclusive of all agricultural community audiences as well as accessible which includes language interpretation services, accommodating people with disabilities, and meeting people’s needs in order to be able to participate. All community engagement is compensated with accommodations to participate (food, childcare, access).
- Build upon agriculture industry association engagement and collaboration recommended in 1) Agriculture Leadership Collaboration & Funding.
- Plan for collaborative engagement and ownership in the process with agricultural communities who have been historically excluded: Migrant Farmers/Laborers, Young Farmers, Farmers who Lease/Need Land, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Farmers.
- Intentional emphasis to include migrant farm workers and New American farmers as an integral part of Vermont’s agricultural community.
- Go where the agricultural community is at (similar to Rural VT “groundswell tour”) through surveys, meetings, conversations, focus groups, and social media.
- Two-way communication throughout the community engagement cycle, giving participants ownership in the process.

Background Information*

- *New growth in Vermont agriculture is based on a different set of values than the traditional, dairy-focused industry. The Vermont Farm Show has traditionally served the dairy industry and many pivots are required to be relevant to and serve Vermont’s changing, emerging, and more product and culturally diverse agricultural community.*

4) Future Farm Show Programming Suggestions

Opportunity: Agricultural programming to be shaped and designed by the people most impacted by the services - the people who grow and produce food and agricultural products with support from the service organizations and institutions. Center and celebrate farmers!!!

- **PROGRAMMING SUGGESTIONS**

- Substantive education and training to support advanced learning, skill building, and farming techniques.
- Latest technology and equipment awareness to benefit productivity and efficiency with farm activities.
- Educational programming to connect land access to being in relationship with the land and in community with people, plants, and animals.
- Programming to bridge divides - race, gender, class and age; education for legislators; farm and eater cost dialogues, dairy and environmental justice conversations.
- Networking opportunities to connect farmers/suppliers/buyers in same industry.
- Marketing opportunities to showcase products and build skills to expand customer base.
- Agricultural career focus with a job fair, seasonal worker opportunities, resources to get farmers to attend.
- Support for navigating challenging times with natural disasters, climate change, economic downturns, and other volatile conditions.
- Opportunity to facilitate dialogues that address concerns and challenges with policy makers and regulators and create positive changes for the whole industry.
- Panel discussions, keynote speeches, and different types of networking events to foster dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration.
- Mentorship opportunities and needs based connection opportunities.
- Increase awareness and opportunities to learn about sustainable and environmentally just farming practices.
- Health care, workforce, and financial support for people working in agriculture.
- Cross industry relationship building among farmers and producers, institutions, nonprofits, government agencies, vendors, students, and the general public.
- Celebration of farmers! Bring in ceremony, storytelling, food, and cultural practices from different cultural communities in Vermont.

These suggestions are a sampling of programming suggestions that arose during revisioning process dialogues around Farm Show purpose and community engagement. The intention of this Scope of Work is for an inclusive community engagement process to inform the substance of Farm Show programming. This list can help provide context for the kind of programming contributors to this Scope of Work are interested in seeing at a statewide agricultural gathering that centers and celebrates farmers.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps to actualize this Scope of Work is for statewide agricultural leadership collaboration. Planning dialogues among agricultural leaders and the determination of how to fund the recommendations in this Scope of Work are prioritized below (replicated from Recommendation 1: Agriculture Leadership Collaboration & Funding).

- **CONVERSATIONS TO HOLD**

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- Facilitate dialogues with Vermont agricultural leaders to explore capacity and coalition building for statewide agricultural events, including, but not limited to a “Farm Show”.
- Build a shared understanding of the purpose and objectives of a new kind of Farm Show.

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- Funding is needed to pay for the creation and sustainability of a new leadership structure.
- Funding is needed to pay for inclusive community engagement.

REVISIONING BACKGROUND

In 2022 Vermont Farm Show Board members Glenn Rogers and Julie Wolcott submitted a proposal for a \$5000 capacity building grant to work with Rae Carter of EmpowR Transformation, a communication facilitator and equity educator with a food system and Farm Show background. The grant goals were to scope an emergent process for revisioning the Vermont Farm Show through an organizational structure and community engagement lens.

This Scope of Work is the deliverable from the grant, facilitated and prepared by Rae Carter (EmpowR Transformation) and managed by Kyla Parmelee (VFSB Vice-President/NOFA-VT) with support from Julie Wolcott (VFSB Board Member/Rural Vermont), Kristina Sweet (VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets - VAAF), and Jake Claro (VT Farm to Plate).

*Background Information and overall context for this Scope of Work was provided by Kyla Parmelee and Julie Wolcott (VFSB), Abbey Willard and Scott Waterman (VAAF), and Jackie Folsom (Farm Show Manager 2013-2020) at a meeting in December 2022.

SCOPE OF WORK CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions to this Scope of Work were provided in revisioning process and community engagement planning dialogues held in May/June 2023 with the following Contributors:

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Thank you to all of the Contributors to this Scope of Work for revisioning the Vermont Farm Show and for the continued interest to engage in next steps as they emerge.

Questions and Conversations about this Scope of Work can be directed to Kyla Parmelee, Vermont Farm Show Vice-President at vermontfarmshow@gmail.com.