



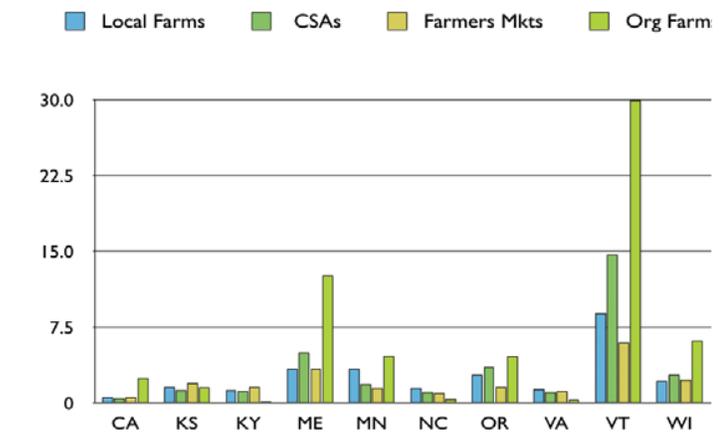
**Project Goal**

Farm to Plate is Vermont’s food system plan being implemented statewide by the 350+ member organizations of the Farm to Plate Network to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.

*“Vermont’s Farm to Plate is THE model of every other state’s process, at least in New England. I think nationally it is a model as well.”*  
 Mark Lapping, Principal Investigator, Maine Food Strategy and Distinguished Professor, University of Southern Maine

**Brief Description**

The Vermont Farm to Plate Initiative is a multi-faceted approach to help create a more-balanced food system by addressing the “how”, the “where” and the environmental impacts of food production, the profitability of food production, and enabling all Vermonters to access local food. The explosion of the local food movement led to the Farm to Plate Initiative being set into motion in the spring of 2009 by the Vermont legislature with the creation of the Farm to Plate Investment Program. At the legislature’s direction, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, in consultation with the Sustainable Agriculture Council and other stakeholders, was given the task of developing of 10-year Strategic Plan to strengthen Vermont’s food system.



State Number Per Capita for Vermont and selected states for Local Farms, Community Supported Agriculture, Farmers Markets, And Organic Farms in 2008. Sources: produced for vtrural.org by Stuart Rosenfeld <http://www.sustainabletable.org> and USDA Economic Research Service, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/organic/>

The resulting Strategic Plan was a comprehensive analysis of Vermont's food system and "crosscutting" issues such as education, workforce development and technical assistance and business planning, among others, all of which impact food systems as a whole. It was developed with effort and input from over 1,200 Vermonters. In order to implement the Strategic Plan, 25 goals were identified and for each goal, accompanying strategies and actions were also identified. For each goal, indicators were identified in order to measure, gauge and track progress. Since 2011, an annual report on the progress Vermont is making towards implementing the 25 Farm to Plate goals has been prepared for the Vermont Legislature which highlights the progress made and challenges ahead.

The Strategic Plan outlines Vermont's food system goals and guides the Farm to Plate Network's work to implement the plan's goals. The Network is made up of over 350 organizations including farm and food system businesses, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, funders, educational institutions and community groups all working together to collaborate and align activities. The Farm to Plate Network is largely self-governed, but receives overall guidance from a steering committee comprised of the Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, the Vermont Secretary of Commerce, individuals representing the Vermont Food Funders Network and the Sustainable Agriculture Council, as well as Network group chairs.

The Vermont Food Atlas is a mapping tool that is used as a supplement to the Farm to Plate Initiative and augments the work of the Farm to Plate Network. It is designed to provide a "bird's eye" view of education, financing and technical assistance resources for farmers and food businesses, as well as build connections between distributors, processing centers, farmers and all other entities involved in Vermont's food system.

The Farm to Plate Network model to implement the Strategic Plan uses the Collective Impact framework, first defined by John Kania and Mark Kramer in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. They also learned a lot about networks from the coordinators of RE-AMP, a collection of over 150 organizations across eight Midwestern states working on climate change and energy policy. Generally speaking, Collective Impact is a commitment from a collection of relevant and important actors from a broad range of sectors to a common agenda to help solve a specific social problem. There are five conditions that, when combined, form the Collective Impact framework: (1) a common agenda; (2) shared measurements; (3) mutually reinforcing activities; (4) continuous communication, and: (5) a backbone organization.

The Farm to Plate Initiative is effectively structured based on the five conditions of the Collective Impact framework. The Farm to Plate Strategic plan outlines the common agenda of the program, while the goals, strategies and performance measures form the shared measurements. The work of the Farm to Plate Network provides opportunities for mutually reinforcing activities and their implementation (to improve coordination, foster collaboration, and decrease duplication), while the Vermont Food System Atlas and Farm to Plate website, along with face-to-face meetings and events enable communication to continuously flow between partners and stakeholders. Rounding out the five conditions of Collective Impact is the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, which functions as the Farm to Plate Network's backbone organization.

Initially, the Farm to Plate Initiative was funded with \$100,000 in ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009)- State Stimulus Funds and \$114,000 in leveraged funds. Early funders included: the Vermont Legislature; the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; the Vermont Community Foundation; the High Meadows Fund; the John Merck Fund; the Jane B. Cook 1983 Charitable Trust; and anonymous donors. In subsequent years, the Farm to Plate Initiative received funding from various sources, with considerable funding from private foundations such as the Henry P. Kendall Foundation (over 60% of program funding for both July 2012 through November 2013 and FY2014) and the State of Vermont. Additional program funding is obtained through corporate contributions.

## **Lessons to Share**

Each year, an annual report has been published for the Vermont Farm to Plate Initiative, highlighting the program's milestones, successes, and investments in the state's food network as well as recommendations for the Initiative's next steps. The annual report is a condensed and polished overview that is inviting to the reader, conveys success easily, can be used in-whole or in-part to convey a message to a specific audience (a good press piece!), and demonstrates the importance of Vermont's food system as an economic driver. In short, documenting and celebrating successes while leveraging successes to achieve future results is critical to securing future funding and stakeholder participation, and the Farm to Plate annual reports are a good example of doing so successfully.

To date, the Farm to Plate Initiative has celebrated a number of successes but two stand out in particular: (1) the creation of a robust Farm to Plate Network which allows for organizations to share information, collaborate on projects and pool resources; and (2) members of the Network are focusing on the goals set out in the Strategic Plan and the distribution of focus on particular goals is relatively balanced, meaning work is being done to achieve all 25 goals.

Data from the 2014 Annual Report illustrates the economic impact and success of the effort:

- While total Vermont manufacturing shed jobs from 2002-2013, food manufacturing businesses increased by 77% and jobs increased 36%—the highest growth rates in New England!
- 28% of Vermont farms engage in direct sales – 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation
- Direct Sales via farmers' markets, CSAs, and farm stands increased 182.4% from 1997 to 2012.

One of many of the products of task forces, a municipal guide to ***Sustaining Agriculture*** was updated via a collective effort:

"A series of agricultural land use planning modules are now available as a resource for land use planners on such topics as farmland conservation, farm and property taxes, commercial composting, agritourism, and food system planning. Municipal officials, local and regional planning commissions, and agriculture advocates will be able to use the modules to guide land use planning for farmland, including ways to update zoning regulations that can sustain and spark more agricultural economic activity in Vermont communities..."

...The agricultural land use planning guide has been broken into five modules and each can be accessed and downloaded from the Farm to Plate website at: <http://bit.ly/VTAglLandGuide>."

In the five years since its creation, the Farm to Plate Network has been successful in its mission, due in part to its structure. Given the scope and range of issues working to be addresses across the food system, and the many sectors, organization types and perspectives involved, the Collective Impact framework has, thus-far, proven to be an innovative and effective solution. No one organization could strengthen Vermont's state food network alone, and the unique, yet shared, vision of all organizations that are part of the Farm to Plate Network have a synergist effect on each other's work and their influence on a state-wide scale.

"Vermont's Farm to Plate statewide food system plan was recognized nationally yesterday in Civil Eats, a national online news outlet for critical thought about the American food system. Vermont: America's Food Relocalization Laboratory features Vermont's lawmakers, businesses, farmers, and schools having done more to re-localize its food system than any other state. " May 13, 2015 VT Food System News

The use of the Farm to Plate Initiative's shared measurement framework, combined with Result-based Accountability, lends itself well to the program's structure and meeting the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. Results-based accountability distinguishes between results for whole populations (population indicators) and results for particular programs, organizations or services (performance measurements), which means that specific organizations are responsible for the programs/services they administer, but they are not responsible for results of whole populations. Population indicators are influenced by the collective impact of the whole. Results-based Accountability helps to manage expectations of both the Farm to Plate Network as a whole and of individual organizations, as well as track progress at the appropriate scale.

### **For More Information**

<http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com>

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