



## **The Center for an Agricultural Economy 2008 Annual Report**

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and  
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This report highlights the accomplishments of the Center for an Agricultural Economy in 2008, and outlines some of the challenges facing us in 2009.

Andrew Meyer and others founded the Center four years ago on the belief that there was an opportunity to build upon local tradition and bring together the community resources and programs needed to develop a locally-based 21<sup>st</sup> Century food system in the greater Hardwick region. This vision supports the desire of rural communities to rebuild their economic and ecological health. Through strong, secure, and revitalized agricultural systems that meet both our own food needs locally and create new opportunities to export those products to the rest of the state and beyond.

Increasingly as the weakness of the global industrial food system are revealed, the Hardwick region and the State of Vermont have rediscovered the potential of the state's own food system. In 2004, the Center adopted a unique, entrepreneurial driven-approach to supporting sustainable agriculture, reinforced by the innovative, value-added opportunities food entrepreneurs in the region were creating.

The Center's work in 2008 falls into four areas.

1. **SHARING THE VISION:** Broadly reach out and invite area residents to embrace, support, and expand the Center's vision.
2. **BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE:** To engage residents of Hardwick and surrounding communities in the development and benefits of the cultural and physical infrastructure needed to support the food and agricultural ventures.

3. **PARTNERING:** Rather than duplicating efforts of the regions' other public and non-profit organizations, the Center will build relationships with them and help support their efforts. We communicate and share our model and progress with other communities in the rebuilding of healthy food systems throughout Vermont and beyond.
4. **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE:** Implement a comprehensive series of programs and projects to integrate, coordinate, facilitate and strategically advance the wide array of food and agricultural initiatives underway in Hardwick and surrounding communities, based on a Board-Adopted Strategic Plan.

More details on our activities in these four areas follow.

**First**, the Center opened its office in downtown Hardwick in August 2008 – a major milestone! Many people have now walked through the doors seeking information and having discussions on food systems in the region. Other local groups have used the space as a meeting location for public events. We contracted with Great Big Graphics in Morrisville, Vermont, to create an engaging and informative website [www.hardwickagriculture.org](http://www.hardwickagriculture.org). Of the 1,000's of visitors to the website, several hundred have signed up to receive newsletters or periodic updates concerning the Center's work. In 2008, we used this list to send out both local (Hardwick Gazette) and national (New York Times) articles regarding the Center and our efforts to establish community supported agricultural-based activities, along with announcements of events in the region that relate to the Center's mission. Another accomplishment was the expansion of the Hardwick Community Garden which the Center oversees, making it available to local gardeners for yet another successful year.

**Second**, the Center co-hosted and co-organized a number of agriculture tours from interested folks from within the communities and around Vermont and New England/New York to as far away as Ireland and Spain. By way of another example of outreach, we engaged the Cushman Design Group in Stowe as the Center's partner for architectural design at Atkins Field. The design group has studied the extant buildings and consulted with a structural engineer as to their future. Feasibility of structural integrity and cost is underway, and once determined will assist the Center and friends as to the future uses of the site. We also have worked with Claire's Restaurant in their efforts to source local foods and on a number of other initiatives.

**Third**, the Center entered into partnership with the Northern Rivers Land Trust. NRLT has identified farmland conservation as a strategic priority. The Center recognizes that to achieve greater levels of food self sustainability, bottomland and other prime land must be identified and protected for this purpose. As part of the Atkins Field project, it has been suggested that the 4.4 acres of bottomland on the property should serve as an interactive "tool" to collaboratively promote awareness for the vital connection between productive land and a locally-based, healthy food system. On another front in 2008, the Center worked closely with the University of Vermont, Sterling College, the Hardwick Area Food Pantry, the Kiwanis, Salvation Farms, and many others to grow successful partnerships for the years ahead.

**Fourth**, we advocated, through our mission and programs, for the engagement of agricultural leaders in the emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century food system to build capacity and inspire the public in supporting and implementing this system. The Center in 2008 worked on:

- Creating a working relationship with UVM and Sterling College on *Pies for People* program (local food ingredients donated and prepared for the Hardwick Area Food Pantry) and with other agricultural-related outreach partnerships;
- Exploring financial services that may include connecting investors to area businesses, establishing a lending program, and serving as a re-grantor for larger foundations;
- Creating an interim guide plan for the next steps in the planning for the future of the Center-owned Atkins Field in Hardwick, and continuing the Spring Festival;
- Partnering with the Vermont Food Venture Center on marketing activities associated with their re-location to Hardwick in 2009;
- Developing and implementing collaborative research and student programs with the University of Vermont as established in a joint Memorandum of Understanding;
- Preparing a preliminary feasibility study associated with the consideration of establishing an agro Eco-Industrial Park in the great Hardwick region; and
- Creating a marketing/branding campaign for the greater Hardwick area.

In a special effort at the end of 2008, the *Pies for People* program took a big step with the first significant donation to the Center's Food Access Fund. This program allows for donations to be sent to the Center and, in turn, the Center reimburses over time the Hardwick Area Food Pantry for the purchase of the locally produced food. The folks at the Food Pantry were the recipients for this donation, and are excited to further expand their ability to buy local products in this time of need.

By the way, Bill McKibben says, *"After spending a day in Hardwick, I feel a great burst of pleasure and possibility. Deep and transformative things are happening here. Hardwick has all the pieces of a healthy food system connected and ready to fall into place, and is as far ahead in sustainable agriculture as any place in the country."*

We thank the members of the 2008 Board of Directors, chaired by Tom Stearns, and including Andrew Meyer, Andy Kehler, Tom Gilbert, Pete Johnson, Neil Urie, Linda Ramsdell and Warren Rankin, who have all dedicated hundreds of hours thinking, speaking and writing about the Center's mission and the future of the great Hardwick region.

The Center's activities and programs are made possible by very generous donors, the Canaday Family Foundation, the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund, High Meadows Fund, Vermont Community Foundation, the Block Foundation, Vermont Community Gardeners Network, the Windham Foundation, and the Lydia B. Stokes Foundation.

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*A Vision for a Healthy 21st Century Food System in the Greater Hardwick Community*