

Organic Ag Group Sprouts Up

by Nathan Meunier

HARDWICK—A group of local agricultural producers have joined together to create a non-profit organization in support of organic agriculture in the area.

The Center for a Biobased Economy, located on Bridgman Hill Road, is a new organization formed to develop, demonstrate and promote opportunities in agriculture as well as new markets and products to local farmers.

The concept for the center has been around for a very long time,

said executive director Hilary Hoffman.

"The concept is an entity that could pool resources and bring attention to the various options that exist for agricultural producers," she said. "We have a number of local people coming together that comprise our board who feel there's a great future in Hardwick for them."

The group of area agricultural producers involved with the center includes Northern Hardwick Dairy, Bonneview Farm, Top Rankin Farm, Pete's Greens and Jasper Hill Farm,

said Hoffman. They will eventually seek involvement from additional farms and producers.

She said the group wants to be very pro-active in working with the center to determine what all the options are available to help support area producers.

Hoffman explained a biobased product is something that is made out of recycled agricultural products.

"A biobased economy would lessen our reliance on petroleum
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based products and lessen the environmental impact," she said. "It would contribute to community economic development.

"One very important reason why we established the center in Hardwick is this is a very good area for this. We feel very positively about Hardwick and there's a good infrastructure of services."

At this time, the center is collecting a lot of information about work on biobased products as well as biofuels and biodegradable plastics, she said.

She said it is also a very good time for the center to begin as the buy-local movement and the desire to grow and support organic is quite strong.

The group plans to meet three times a year with its board of directors and is also in the process of establishing an advisory board, she said. They held their first meeting last month.

One project they are keeping tabs on is the soy feasibility study being conducted by Vermont Soy,

which hopes to build a soy processing plant in the Hardwick Industrial Park. Hoffman said they will be paying close attention to the recommendations that come out of that study and will work to support them.

"We hope to put some programs into place that would support area farms in diversifying organic rural crops such as soy beans, corn and organic wheat," she said.

One of the initiatives the group is putting forward is a program that would provide technical assistance on-site for agricultural producers seeking to diversify their crops.

"If producers could access the additional equipment necessary for diversification on a trial basis, it would make diversification a much less risky endeavor," she said.

She said Hardwick is a good place for the center to be established because of the industrial park and the potential for food-oriented companies that would seek to buy from local producers.

A website and newsletter are in the works, she said, and people can contact the center at 472-5227 for more information.