

# Area Out Front With Organic Agriculture And Land Preservation

by June Pichel Cook

**HARDWICK**— The second annual meeting of the Northern Rivers Land Trust on Sunday featured entrepreneurs Andrew Meyer of Vermont Soy and Tom Stearns of High Mowing Seeds as guest speakers. Both men focused on the agricultural pioneering and efforts taking place within the Hardwick area.

Their presentation, "Forging the Future of Local Agriculture: the Center for the Bio-Based Economy," illuminated the partnering of NRLT's goal with the center's to conserve and maintain agricultural land as "working" farms and enterprises.

Stearns said the Hardwick area has more certified organic farms per capita than anywhere else in the country; people were looking here as a model to transform agriculture and "fixing the food system." He stressed the need to preserve an agricultural infrastructure while paying attention to economic realities.

People, nationally and interna-

tionally, are looking to Vermont to see how to preserve an active farming community. Starting a land trust is hopeful and sets aside something for future generations, Stearns said. Finding a 21st century food system that is ecologically sound and healthy is the challenge, and conserving a land base is a missed opportunity if it isn't done.

"We are in the unique position because we still have an active farming community," he said. "Idle farm land is not the goal of NRLT. The goal is to keep (land) thriving — meeting the challenges of farming in the future and conserving resources."

Meyer stressed Hardwick's healthy agricultural activities and

having a land base available while creating an economic base. He said Vermont Soy is reaching out and becoming part of that infrastructure in making "the whole system grow" and tying-in with other agricultural activities.

NRLT's strategic objectives focus on working lands, wildlife, and waterways. Board of Trustees chair Jad Daley noted local efforts are re-inventing Vermont agricultural and sustaining it. The NRLT has a strong commitment to conserving productive agriculture and forest lands, sustaining critical wildlife habitats, and protecting the scenic headwaters of the Winooski, Lamoille, and Black rivers.