

Healthy Roots Collaborative Advisory Committee Meeting

March 24, 2022 – 9:00am to 11:00 am

Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation, Conf. RM (4th FLR), 2 North Main St., St. Albans, VT

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82700928716?pwd=aTY1NVh4UzZmbmdNTUVXVjM4V3Btdz09>

Attendance: Lynn Douglas, Rachel Huff, Emily Alger, Paul Remillard, Lauren Weston, Nina Hansen, Peter Jenkins, Christine Porcaro

Goals:

- Feedback on Gleaning Programming
- Feedback/next steps on Farm to School direction/activities for Healthy Roots

Times	Agenda Item	Action
9:00 to 9:20	Org updates	
<p>Notes:</p> <p>FC NRCD- Lauren reported that FC NRCD led a local conservation meeting with Franklin, Lamoille and Grand Isle Counties alongside NRCS. Hoping that will lead to local funding projects for NRCS. They hosted Fermenting on the Farm at the Choiniere Family Farm. Looking at different/alternative ways to transform compost and manure into top-notch fertilizer. Lauren also reported that she is on a few clean water councils in our region.</p> <p>FCIDC- Paul has been working at FCIDC part-time since the beginning of the year. He was at the USDA prior to joining FCIDC. He mentioned that FCIDC is going through a comprehensive strategic plan. FCIDC is close to putting together something together. They are trying to capture everything that they do within the community because they do so much more than industrial development. Paul has been working with Tim to develop marketing materials to go along with this new strategic plan.</p> <p>NRPC- Lynn shared that the NRPC Board is doing training centered around climate and racial justice. The executive committee has also started writing an inclusion statement.</p> <p>SHLT- Emily reported that they are continuing to work on their Farm to School project at Folsom. They have a lot of other projects underway with recreation and trails. In regards to the Isle La Motte Kitchen, Christine and Emily met with farmers, school district and supervisory union in the islands and got a little more information on what a lease for the kitchen would look like. Next steps are to have deeper conversations with community members that are interested and get prepared for an ILM Selectboard presentation in May. This is all in preparation for applying for a REDI grant with VHCB.</p>		

Abbey Group- Nina reported that it is a really busy time of the year for the Abbey Group. They decided with the closing of Koffee Kup to bring fresh bread to schools. Most of the schools have started returning to the cafeteria. Nina shared that they are excited the state has given schools the ability for supply chain assistance and the majority of schools will use that to purchase local.

Rachel- Rachel reported that she just heard BFA and Alburgh got accepted to Shelburne Farms Farm to School Institute and is excited to support them moving forward. She shared that she is doing a lot of afterschool programing. She has been in touch with Franklin NE to support schools during the summer in an effort to create different learning environments for kids.

9:20 to 10:00

**2021 Gleaning Presentation
(Peter)**

Notes:

2021 Gleaning Presentation shown on PPT (presented on a calendar year: Jan 2021-Dec 2021) Peter reported that 45,000 lbs gleaned (52,786 total pounds distributed), The VT Gleaning Collective distinguishes between rescued food and gleaned food. Rescued food is typically produce (an example was pallets of Sweet potatoes that ended up at Hudaks and they contacted Peter and he distributed it). Peter noted that not all of this rescued food comes from local farms.

HRC had field trips again. 132 individual volunteers and 511 volunteer hours. Over this past year, HRC Co-gleaned with 3 farms and Peter has been serving as VGC (VT Gleaning Collective) co-chair since March 2021.

Pounds gleaned have been increasing over time(this is just food from local farms). Number of farms gleaned from has increased too. The number of volunteers has been increasing too though still not back to pre-COVID numbers.

Lauren asked if HRC ever had farms back out of the gleaning program?

Peter responded that there haven't been any farms that have officially contacted us and said they don't want to be a part of the program, but we have had farms stop offering stuff for one reason or another.

This past year, there were 28 recipient sites. Deliveries increased for 88% of sites. That increase was on average 691 lbs.

The gleaning program received produce from 16 farms, 4 partner orgs, 3 donation gardens and 1 home orchard. River Berry Farm and Pomykala farm offer weekly gleans.

Volunteers: There were 7 school field trips and 1 church youth group trip. 14 volunteers drove around 2,693 miles for deliveries. Many of those were repeat volunteers.

Lauren asked if Peter ever felt like he wasn't able to get all the produce needed because of lack of volunteers.

Peter responded that there is definitely more food in the field than we can take and that is not necessarily because of lack of volunteers but more so because it would be more than our sites can

take. If there is a large amount of food to glean, HRC will call in other gleaning groups to glean to distribute in their communities.

Food Justice Collaboration: Peter explained that we partnered with the Abenaki Community with the Lank Link Project (program of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation). 567 pounds of food grown and harvested at West farm and returned to the Abenaki Community (both as food and seeds). In relation to this project, we held a Land Link Event at the West Farm led by Chief Don Stevens.

10 winter and 10 summer CSA shares were provided to the Abenaki Food Shelf (~4,000 pounds of produce). Healthy Roots distributed those shares for the Vermont Land Trust.

Migrant Farm Worker Boxes: Peter explained that this is a collaboration with Bridges to Health and NorthWest Family Foods. Bridges to Health is the long-term partner with these farmer households and provide healthcare services. We started with a survey that a NRPC AMERICORP member created. That helped us figure out interest and what we should grow. That has been every other week delivery since June 2021. Healthy Roots role is to source culturally appropriate food for these boxes..

Lynn asked how many people are recipients of these boxes. Peter responded that there are 31 household but the definition of household vary from group to group. They are in Franklin, Grand Isle and Chittenden Counties.

Peter shared that looking forward HRC will be continuing our Food Justice efforts (with the Abenaki Community and Migrant Farmerwork Households), and working with a new and existing donation plot with the West Shore Farm and West Farm, respectively. Peter reported that he will be visiting Community Harvest of Central Vermont and Intervale to get an idea of works for them in their storage facilities. Peter shared that for the next season (and beyond), Healthy Roots want to expand on the metrics we are already using and how to provide the best produce for recipient sites and clients. Peter shared that this could be through better presentation at sites, recipes and also a wash station on the new facility for Healthy Roots.

Emily commented on the survey results that said 93% of sites are feeling good about the produce that they are receiving and expressed was a great job Peter has done at building those relationships. Emily then asked how are we recognizing our cleaning partners.

Peter shared that we send a Thank you card with a montage of photos and that is shared with everyone. Peter expressed that one this that would be cool is to have receipt site write thank you are to the farms.

Rachel added that Farm to School also adds to gleaning. Bringing 30-40 students to a farm is really appreciated by the farmers.

Paul asked for more detail about the Migrant Farmworker Food Boxes. Christine explained the Vermonter Feeding Vermonters program and how that might contribute to the offering of food for that program. Peter added that the person hired by CVOEC to help with this program is

leaving at the end of March. Hopefully they will find someone to do those deliveries. Peter added that there is a chance that he might help with delivery this spring.

Emily asked if Healthy Roots is able to source the quantity of culturally appropriate vegetables needed. Peter shared that the answer is “yes and no”. A lot of it was grown by Angus. Healthy Roots has discussed reserving some space at the West Shore Farm to grow these crops. Peter shared that it would also be helpful if we were able to do more surveying of the populations.

Lynn asked Peter if he thinks that seed availability and climate might mean we have to spend more money. Peter responded that the majority of the produce is available, it is just a shorter growing season. Peter added that we are also trying to see how we can support access to fresh produce in the off season. In the past CVOEO has had funding to do this. We are unsure of that funding now. Lynn added that with freezer space, that could also be helpful to put produce aside. Rachel shared that Healthy Roots should also keep in mind that we are processing food in a culturally appropriate way.

Lynn commented that for future presentations that Healthy Roots should be aware of using too many acronyms without description. Emily also added that HRC keep in mind how we are acknowledging our partners and advertising our programs.

10:00 to 11:00

**Farm to School Discussion
(Emily)**

Notes:

Emily shared that one of the circumstances for this conversation is that HRC Does not currently have funding that is specifically for farm to school work. We wrapped up the last two grants this past December and there is a little bit of money we will use this coming Spring. In summary, HRC wrapped up some big grants, and we currently don't have applications out there for future Farm to School funding. SHLT has been the fiscal sponsor and is not something that it can do moving forward.

Emily shared that we use the model of 3 C's of FTS: Cafeteria, Communities and Classroom. Emily explained the benefits of farm to school- visibility for farmers and local foods, market development, exposing families to local food, supporting long-terms land stewardship. HRC is one of many FTS programs throughout VT. We work and partner with these other regional and state orgs and we continue to work with all schools in the region (not all at once but rotates through time). Emily expressed that Rachel has been the ongoing advocate for this work. She is the one on the ground doing this work with support from Healthy Roots.

Emily asked as collaborative members, what are we hoping for and also shared what other orgs are going for farm to school. Emily shared a graph of the different FTS orgs throughout the state.

Rachel acknowledged that in the graph it looks like parts of the state are missing a FTS program but they are not. Each area has different ways of satisfying FTS without specifically being a FTS organization. Rachel shared that pre-pandemic we had worked to get administrators on board for putting FTS in budgets. Then the pandemic hit and now we are back to square one (Addison and Lamoille Co are doing that). FTS is so embedded in everything the HRC and partners are doing.

Emily shared connection points between FTS and HRC regions:

FTS is a relationship builder with schools, communities, food businesses, farms, other orgs in the states. Emily added that we are a holistic organization; it is one of the things that makes us successful as a collaborative and are involved in different parts of the ag systems.

Emily highlighted opportunities in the region with Rachel as the star at the top. We have the West Shore Farm and West Farm, new commercial kitchen in St. Albans, ILM Community Kitchen, Blue Sky Packing, Tech school (around workforce development), Food Connex , relationship with the NOTCH clinics.

Emily asked Nina to share her perspective of FTS. Nina shared that the Abbey Group is passionate about kids and educating kids about food. And it has been a long hard work to move the menu to look different. Being a contractor is challenging. Abbey Group has influence and enthusiasm but there has to be enthusiasm on the admirative level. Nina talked about Blue Sky Packing, the packing facility they are building in Sheldon. They are starting with packing and delivering and focusing on school clients. They will be packing VeggieVanGo boxes. Nina shared that they would like to expand on those existing relationships. Part of building will have space for HRC for the gleaning program.

Emily asked if this give the Abbey Group you more capacity to distribute local food to schools. Nina answered yes. Lynn asked if they would be cooking in this new facility. Nina responded that they only cook on-site at schools. Local school sites can make rolls, different desserts, but to do a lot of bread at one time is not possible. They won't be delivering meals to schools. The kitchens are the heart of the schools. This facility is just to support the schools with supplies.

Emily asked the other collaborative members about whether FTS seems important and what would they like to see. Lauren responded that FTS is 200% needed in this community and would love to figure out how to keep it going. Lauren shared that she is new to FTS in the region. She knows that it is hard to work with farmers that don't have the understanding of the interconnected nature of these food systems, so FTS is a great way to have knowledge at an early age. The farmers that she works with are being told to diversify and they are unsure where those markets are. Lauren added that there are many watershed partners in the schools and she wondered if there is any way to partner with them.

Paul added that this is a good conversation. In his previous life in USDA, when he started, he was the local loan manager. The local portfolio was 85% dairy, 7-8% maple, and the rest are the farms we are talking about now. Farms that were growing local and had a business plan that was not growth based. When he left the USDA, dairy went down to 40% and maple went to up 45% and this area we are discussing is now 15%. This economy exists so if we can follow it, we are not creating it, which is good governance. Rachel added that dairy is a huge part of what FTS could be and has huge potential. Paul added that he grew up on a dairy and that became a huge motivator to go to school. In terms of workforce development, there is a whole host of work related to dairy farming that does not have to do with cows (electronics, mechanics, etc).

Lynn shared that a half dozen years ago Flether PTO had a bake sale for Thanksgiving and had people pre-order pumpkin pies and she drove up and they were frozen pies form Ohio. They were horrible. There are so many opportunities for kids to understand about local agriculture. It would be great for the kids to see where food comes from.

Emily shared that Rachel emphasized the work FTS does in creating visibility for farms which is very important. FTS uses ag and local food as a tool for learning that is grounded in the place that we live. Peter added that now that COVID is hopefully moving past its peak, FTS can make it a priority to get more schools to farms, potentially develop gleaning relationships with fieldtrips.

Nina added that there is a very important role that Universal School Meals can play with Farm to School. Fingers crossed VT passes S.100.

Emily asked if there were any questions that we should anticipate for our next meeting. Lynn asked about what kind of grants are available. Lauren asked about regulations around dairy and shared that she would be happy to give us an introduction to Kayla at NOFA. Rachel asked about the trajectory of HRC and hiring. Peter shared about the potential VISTA that could help bring capacity to HRC. Lauren added she would also like to know more about the fee for service model other orgs might use.

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