

Root Words



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Root Words is a collaboration between Vermont Farmers Food Center, Shrewsbury Agricultural Education & Arts Foundation, Shrewsbury Historical Society, WEXP, and many other community members. Root Words showcases stories of how food and agriculture connect us with our community and our landscape. The project ran from 2017-2021 and was made possible by support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as from this community.

These images provide a picture of a community and a place, from an agricultural perspective.

Many people have been part of this project. These folks served on the project steering committee: Heidi Lynch, Stephen Abatiell, Joan Aleshire, Jack Crowther, Tracy Weatherhogg, Aaron Korzun, Grace Brigham, Peter Grace, Terry Martin, and Galen Miller.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this installation and guide, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Use your phone's camera to scan the QR codes that appear in this guide for links to videos, audio stories, recipes, and other online media related to the images.

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Chief Shirly Hook

Chief Shirly Hook of the Koasek Traditional Band of Abenaki has been caring for plants all her life. Today she is caretaker of the Abenaki Tribal Garden in West Braintree, VT. Hook tends to some traditional food crops from our region, including ground cherries, Jerusalem artichokes, and Koas corn.

Koas corn has been passed down and tended by seed savers and gardeners since it was gifted from Abenaki to Jesuit farmers in 1675. Hook was inspired to tend a garden by her father and uncle who used to compete over who could grow the biggest potatoes. She hopes today's children will find their own mentors.

"I just hope the children can get involved with one of the programs around so they can learn how to garden. It's beautiful, I love to do it, it warms your heart and soul, [In the garden] everything is beautiful, even a weed."



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"Abenaki Landlink Part II"

Meadow & Marshall Squier

Meadow Squier is a sixth generation farmer in Tinmouth, VT. On July 14, 2019 the Squier family hosted Root Words: Stories From the Farm at the Old Firehouse in Tinmouth.

The Squier's paint an interesting picture of the changes on a family farm from the day's when Marshall's father John sold bulk root vegetables for seasonal storage direct to families around Rutland, to the present day, where Meadow and her husband Josh experiment with farming and ranching strategies that take our changing climate, and customer preferences, into account.



Allen Mills Jr.

Allen Mills Jr., author of "Barnyards, Barefeet, and Bluejeans," still lives on the 280-acre family farm in Florence, VT that was powered by draft horses and the hard work of his mother, father, and sisters. At it's height, the family farm operated with a herd of nearly forty Holsteins.

It wasn't long ago when all work, even the area's marble mining, relied on the horsepower of horses and oxen. To the Mills' the animals were part of the family.

"This was I guess you'd call it the last horse farm. We did all our work here primarily with the horses. ...The haying process which was done with with horses... Hay had to be raked with a dump rake, the wind rows tumbled into small bunches, and then pitched onto the wagon. That took a family to do that... but family then as I'm thinking about it meant much more maybe, than it does today. because of the farming process, we were all involved. And that was a very deep connection.

The family was the farm."

Vermont has over 800,000 acres of federal and state land open to hunting and 65,000 resident hunters, most of whom hunt white-tailed deer. Many youth first experience Vermont's forested landscape following a parent or guardian through the woods during hunting season and, if the hunt is successful, will have local venison to share with their family and friends.

Stephen Abatiell, pictured above with a buck in a photograph by his father Peter Abatiell Jr., began joining the family at deer camp at age seven. This buck was taken with the rifle his grandfather once hunted with.



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"The Family was the Farm"



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"Hunting, A Family Tradition"



Lorryn & Evelyn Trujillo

Lorryn and Evelyn Trujillo of Clarendon are active 4-H members that show heifers and enjoy sharing their knowledge with the club's beginners.

The Trujillos have gained valuable life experiences through their work with animals and in competitions.

Evelyn's learned not to take though judges too personally, "...don't let anyone discourage you from doing something you love or have interest in. Stay persistent and keep working towards your goal."

Lorryn provides encouragement for other youth that may not have considered life on the farm, "You don't have to be born on a farm to have a passion for agriculture."



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"4H, Beyond the Barnyard"

Kacie Lyn Martinez

Woven Seeds was a participatory weaving project which brought together Rutlanders to share and interlock our fibers, stories, and seeds. In partnership with 77Art,

Rutland's artist-in-residency program, we asked community members to join us in June of 2019.

The project was initiated by Brooklyn-based participatory fiber artist Kacie Lyn Martinez who was in Rutland on an artist residency from 77Art.

Charlie Brown

In 1978 Charlie Brown had recently purchased his father's farm and equipment and was looking for new customers. He found them at the Rutland farmers market. Since then he's worked the farm and farmstand with his wife and partner Mary, served off and on on the market board of directors, and provided for the community.

"If it wasn't for your customers you wouldn't be in business so you want to make sure you meet as many people as you can, be as friendly as you can to them and treat them with respect... I feel we would be nothing without our customers."



Al Ridlon Sr.

Al Ridlon Sr. has been tapping trees and sugaring in VT his entire life. On April 28, 2019 Al and many other community members swapped tales at "Stories from the Sugarbush" at the Russellville Schoolhouse in Shrewsbury.

In 1940, Grace Korzun would accompany her father gathering sap when she was a child of three. They went to the sugar bush with the gathering tank on a sled pulled by their team of percherons. The horses were voice trained so that the gathering was a one-person job.

Sugaring has continued since indigenous communities began the practice generations ago. Today the big sugaring operations use plastic tubing and reverse osmosis filters to process as much as 2.5x as much sap from a tap as the old days.



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"Sugaring in Vermont"

Shoshana Bass

Sandglass Theater is a renowned theater company specializing in combining puppets with music, actors, and visual imagery, since 1982.

Shoshana shared her art and facilitated a community story workshop on November 3, 2019 in Shrewsbury.

"What draws me to this is the love of the craft, the love of my family, and the love of the community and networks we are part of. I am passionate about being a rural born and raised artist and find much inspiration from the landscape we live in... rural stories are important in our national narrative and consider it part of my work to share these stories and provide opportunities for them to be heard."

Peter Grace & Grace Brigham

Peter and Grace led a demonstration and facilitated story sharing around ice cutting for Root Words in January 2020. Before refrigeration, ice cutting was a critical part of the food system, and Vermont ice was cut and shipped all over the world. One attendee reminisced cutting ice with his father on Combination Pond in Rutland.



All of the people in this series of images are connected to Vermont Farmers Food Center's Farmacy project. Farmacy Project emphasizes 2 core elements - fresh produce prescriptions for individuals as "medicine" for chronic diet-related health conditions and fresh produce provided to these clients, grown exclusively by new and emerging Rutland farmers. The project fosters community through cuisine, gathering, and knowing your farmer. above, Galen Miller teaches knife skills to a young chef in a Farmacy cooking demonstration.

Nati Torres & Yamira Alomar Torres

The Alomar family have been sharing their food with the Rutland community for over 20 years as a regular vendor at Rutland's Ethnic Festival, and in 2019 at Root Words' Traditions Table dinner series, and for a Salsa dancing and Puerto Rican cuisine block party.

"You get to know a little bit of our flavors in the food made by Puerto Rican hands and in the dances, because salsa plena bomba is our culture. We have been in Vermont for 21 years and we have been doing it at the ethnic festival and farmers markets... we feel very happy when we share our food and recipes, I think that by knowing our food and culture they learn a little better about our island, Puerto Rico."

Frank Wallace & Dolly Cole

Fank and Dolly are Vermont Crop Cash Ambassadors. Crop Cash is a double-value coupon program that promotes the purchase of fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs at farmers markets that accept 3SquaresVT/SNAP benefits.

Ilham & Fatima Kirto

Ilham Kirto and her mother Fatima prepare almonds for Traditions Table, our pop-up dinner series that celebrated community members' cultures and food traditions and brought us together to learn and share, during the spring of 2019. We served over 150 dishes from Poland, Puerto Rico, Morocco, and Italy.



Gleaning is an ancient practice of providing harvest seconds for those who may lack access to it otherwise. Extra food is gathered from fields or markets and distributed to those who lack access. Gleaning reinforces the connection between farmers and community, and creates a social network of people working towards a common goal.

Emma Weatherhogg volunteered with SAGE to glean from Rutland's farmers market, while the Vermont Foodbank distributed to network partners.

"Volunteering to glean makes me feel like I am a steward of this earth. I have built relationships with the farmers - oftentimes I will go to the market just to have conversations with these amazing human beings. I am creating a difference in the food system and local community."

Terry Martin is a homesteader and timber-framer in Shrewsbury, VT.

As a kid he'd help the family take down the old barns, move, and reconstruct them. Now he cuts timber and hand-raises community structures like the historic rail car depot on the east side of VFFC. "Forestry was one of the first things the farmers did when they got here.

They cleared out a space from the forest.

First thing I do at a site is take a look around. I try to use the rocks and trees there at the site. That brings you right to the Earth right away. It's a gift in Vermont that we have it all right here. I can't do it alone, I like to do it with people power. It's a tradition that goes along with timber framing not because we don't have machines to do it, It's because it's a wonderful thing to come together. The whole thrill of doing these frames is the group effort."



Jesse Pyles, Smokey House

"Smokey House Center has always believed that real work, tied to meaningful stewardship of the land, can empower individuals and enrich communities. In recent years our Community Farm project has grown thousands of pounds of produce with hundreds of volunteers for donation to community food programs like the VFFC Farmacy project. And we've gotten creative about land lease and other supports that enable hardworking, small, family farms on our land to contribute meaningfully to the local agricultural economy. As we've developed some of our recent programs, we've focused first on the hyperlocal community, working closely with our school and with other organizations to share our incredible, 5,000-acre, conserved property. While the magnitude and beauty of the broad landscape is impressive, I feel most connected when digging potatoes with local kids. I love seeing the same kids come season after season, put potatoes in the ground, dig them up months later, and share them with their families through our school-based CSA program. It feels good to grow good food. It feels GREAT to share it. I'm so struck by the diffusion of responsibility among the farmers and food systems advocates in the region. We are so lucky to have such thoughtful, caring people growing good food and making sure that people can get it."



Kara & Ryan Fitzbeauchamp

Kara and Ryan grow on four acres and in three greenhouses at Evening Song Farm.

"I think one of the things I really like about farming is the connection that it gives me to our community and I value the relationships that we have with our customers. I really value what our farm means to our customers. A lot of the folks who get vegetables from us, we've heard from them that ... it's more than just a source of food for them but it also is a way of being connected to the working landscape of Vermont and it has changed some of the ... way they cook changed the way they eat and has opened them up to new things, new things they hadn't tried before, new ways of preparing food that they haven't tried before and so it's sweet to hear the ways that... our farm is meaningful for people. People come to our farm to pick up and bring their kids here and see a landscape that's being used to produce food for our community... that's one of the things that I value about farming." -Ryan



Strawberry and tomato blossoms in VFFC's
Rotary Educational Greenhouse.



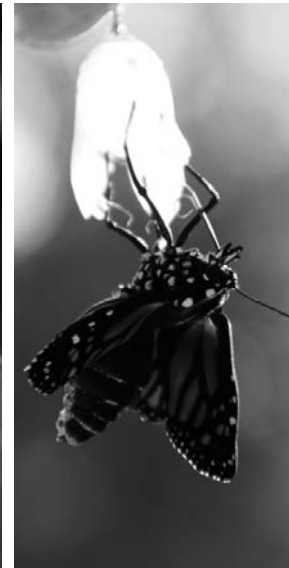
Koas Corn growing at
the Abenaki Tribal
Garden in West
Braintree.



Kale and the old Ford tractor at Alchemy
Gardens in Shrewsbury.



A farm in Mount Holly.



April Cioffi, Community Gardens

Rutland City has two community garden locations where aspiring and weathered gardeners can reserve a plot. April

Cioffi coordinates these spaces, as well as educational opportunities for Rutland's gardeners.

"A community garden gives the opportunity for community members in a given region to gather in a space and produce vegetables or flowers or fruits over the course of a gardening season, the difference between doing this at your home versus doing it in a community garden is community- the sense of being with other gardeners, learning from other gardeners, its that sense of shared interest... we're all about community health and spending time outside."



Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"Community Gardens"

Scott Courcelle, Alchemy Gardens

Scott and Lindsay Courcelle started Alchemy Gardens in West Rutland in 2010. They now tend land in West Rutland and Shrewsbury. Scott is an educator that shared his process with new bakers at this sourdough workshop with SAGE in January 2019.

"Its in the same thread as the gardening I do. Its a really long tradition, a dynamic process that is harnessing life, like seeds being passed down that we nurture into our produce. Sourdough is in the tradition of harnessing the life all around us, but its not a straight line or set of conditions, like growing food, it is part of a dynamic environment, its like alchemy, taking simple parts, and making something greater."
"I'm interested in empowering people to have some piece in being directly involved in nourishing themselves, I find that inspiring. I feel like that's a role I can serve in our food system."

Scan to listen to Root Words Podcast episode
"Growing Farmers Part II"





"FABEL (Farm-Based Experiential Learning) is a VFFC program that's designed to bring gardening and farming skills and life situations to students around Rutland County and beyond.

Our mission is to educate kids and get their hands in the dirt and teach them the basics of where their food comes from, how to grow it themselves, and the nutrition and health surrounding that. Farm and garden learning is really important to students because it gives them a sense of place, it gives them an ability to connect to the world around them, it really addresses socioeconomic issues that children might face in other parts of their lives and allows them to create resiliency in growing something and taking care of something, and learning to provide for themselves and learning how to treat their body in a healthy way." -

Melinda Hardt, VFFC

Cat Buxton

Cat Buxton is an advocate and educator for food systems change. For Cat, it all started with the love of growing plants and wanting desperately to minimize and manage waste. When she realized that both passions complimented one another she got into composting.

"The groundbreaking work of soil microbiology fascinates me. The more I learn about the living soil zoo the more I fall deeply in love with the dynamic interactions between microbes and plants, above and below the ground. I spend a lot of time cultivating what I like to call the social mycelium that holds our communities together, expanding upon the understanding of the foundational soil mycelium that literally holds our landscapes together. Learning from nature makes me feel complete. Inspiring others to trust in nature as teacher and share that learning and knowledge with each other brings me joy."

Greg Cox

Greg is a visionary farmer who has dedicated his life to building agricultural opportunities throughout the region. He is a founding member of Vermont Farmers Food Center, an incubator farm host, and mentor to many young farmers.

He and his wife Gay own and operate Boardman Hill Farm in West Rutland, VT.

