

# 2023 Annual Report



## *Gratitude and Impact*

*Dear Friends,*

*What we accomplished in 2023 significantly advanced our mission to relocalize the food system! **Vermont Farmers Food Center** purchased and sold more locally grown and produced food through our programs than in all previous years.*

*This record-breaking year was made possible by our growers, shoppers, and the generous support of hundreds of donors, local businesses, state and federal government programs, and foundations. And we are grateful for all of you!*

*In 2023, renovations in Farmers Hall continued and we started planning for the construction of the Produce Packing Center and Commercial Kitchen Center.*

*Here are a few other highlights from 2023:*



*Online Market increased sales to individuals and businesses*



*Heart of Vermont Agriculture began regional distribution and cross-docking with other Vermont food hubs*



*Once again, Farmacy enrolled more people and purchased more local produce, improving participants' health and benefiting farmers*



*Projects we piloted Rutland County Eats and Locally Yours continued as on-going programs administered in collaboration with our project partners*



*Educational Workshop Series was launched with community partners*



*Root Words returned with a special series on localization's importance*

*Know that you are making a real difference for local growers, food producers, and the community! Together, we continue to do the important work of strengthening our local food web!*

*Thank you sincerely! The Board and Staff of the Vermont Farmers Food Center*

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## Here's what you made possible

Together, we made local food more accessible and increased sales for farmers in Rutland County. We raised awareness of localizing the food system and initiated the renovation of Farmers Hall to provide the necessary infrastructure for farmers and gathering space for the community.



## Heart of Vermont Agriculture



**Online Market** added seven new farmers and food producers in 2023, purchased **\$63,766** local produce for Farmacy and sold **\$60,721** in local food and products to **282** individual consumers, and **\$46,544** in bulk sales to **17** businesses and institutions. In 2023, we began distributing local food from Rutland County to other Vermont food hubs, expanding the market for our county's growers!

**Farm to School** was piloted in fall 2023 at six area schools with a **\$23,573** Local Food for Schools grant from Vermont Agency of Agriculture,

Food and Markets. VFFC staff worked with the School Food Authorities to ensure that 80% of the revenue went to producers with the remaining 20% available for VFFC's storage and distribution. The pilot will continue through the end of the school year in 2024.

**Workplace Wellness** continued in 2023 with three business sites participating. Each week, employees made purchases through the Online Market and VFFC delivered to their workplace. The program gained momentum and popularity with employees!



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## Food Access

***Farmacy: Food as Medicine*** increased participants to **250** in 2023 and has reached over **3,672** people and their households since 2015. Pharmacy food shares were distributed for 15 weeks to eight sites in Rutland County.

This year, the Pharmacy Project collaborated with 25 healthcare clinics, 11 for profit farms, and three non-profit farms. Over **37,500** pounds of local food were packed into Pharmacy bags in 2023.

***Vermont Everyone Eats*** program came to an end in March after operating for **12** weeks in early 2023 and serving **34,193** restaurant-prepared meals in Rutland County. VFFC collaborated with **18** restaurant partners and **21** community partner organizations for distribution. Approximately **30%** of the food purchased by restaurants was locally sourced.

Following the conclusion of Vermont Everyone Eats, VFFC piloted a county-level prepared meals effort,

***Rutland County Eats***. The pilot project operated for **36** weeks and served **3,258** meals prepared



by **15** restaurant partners and distributed by **eight** partner organizations and prepared to transition program administration to Slate Valley Cares. Over **52%** of the food purchased by restaurants was locally sourced.

Summer 2023, VFFC administered ***Vermont Emergency Eats*** for Rutland County to help residents affected by the season's floods. The emergency program lasted for **13** weeks in the summer and early fall serving **949** meals or redeemed meal vouchers with **10** participating restaurants or caterers reporting **57%** of ingredients purchased locally.

In 2022, VFFC partnered with the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging (SVCOA) to launch a pilot meal-kit program called *Eat at Home*. After the successful completion of the pilot, in 2023, the program continued on at SVCOA as a fresh produce distribution program and it was renamed *Locally Yours*.



In 2023, VFFC supplied and delivered local food for *Locally Yours*. VFFC delivered approximately **19,000** pounds of locally grown and produced food to five different senior centers located in Rutland and Bennington County.

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## Education

In 2023, VFFC collaborated with Slate Valley Community Action Network (now Slate Valley Cares), Rutland Parks and Recreation, and Come Alive Outside to organize the *2023 Educational Workshop Series*.

Twelve workshops were held at VFFC and in VFFC's Rotary Greenhouse, and at several locations throughout Rutland. The workshops covered topics from seed starting and identifying garden pests to preserving your harvest and canning basics and received rave reviews from participants!

*“The workshop was outstanding: interactive, hands on and had handouts for later reading.”*

*— 2023 workshop participant*

**Root Words** podcast returned for a special five-part series to delve into VFFC's mission and vision through in-depth discussions with local, state, national, and international leaders on *Localizing the Regional Food System*, *To Build a Community Food Web*, *Restoring Relationships*, *The Making of an Urban Food Center*, and *A Local Food Future*. The special series' episodes have been downloaded over 750 times!



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## Infrastructure

Building renovations on Farmers Hall continued on the interior to replace the old concrete floor and install the vapor barrier and radiant heating. This summer and fall, exterior renovations will begin as well as interior installation of new commercial kitchen equipment and cold storage.

When VFFC receives final approval from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, Farmers Hall may proceed with occupancy. VFFC's staff and advisory committee are conducting operating planning for the expanded facilities and in discussions with tenants and potential tenants to plan for the resumption of daily operations.

The change to USDA's organic regulations in 2023 requires food hubs to obtain organic certification to be able to label food as certified organic and create greater transparency throughout the food chain. VFFC's Operations Manager participated in organic certification training with representatives from other Vermont food hubs so that VFFC will be a certified food center in 2024!

VFFC's nearly three-acre campus in the heart of downtown Rutland, includes a combined 34,400 square feet of storage, distribution, food preparation and educational space across five buildings, is being transformed into a thriving food hub advancing the re-localization of the region's food system.



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## Volunteers make all the difference

From bagging Farmacy shares, and delivering to homes and distribution sites, to caring for the campus grounds and tending our community gardens, our **volunteers make it happen at VFFC**.



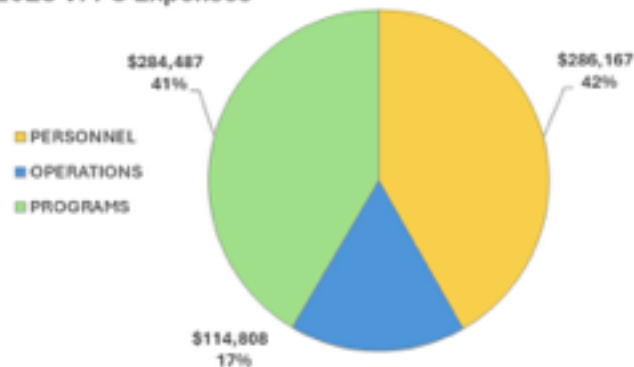
For 2023, the national value of each volunteer hour was **\$31.80**. Last year, our volunteers dedicated around **494** hours of their time making the value of VFFC's volunteer efforts worth **\$15,709!**

*Our wholehearted thanks to each of you!*

## Your generosity in action in 2023

We value your gift and we're making sure it goes as far as possible for the local food community.

2023 VFFC Expenses



The chart above represents VFFC's \$685,461 program and campus operations budget in 2023. VFFC's full organizational budget, including the federal Everyone Eats Program and VFFC's campus expansion project are included in our 2023 IRS Form 990, available on GuideStar.

### Where funds come from

Corporate Grants	9%
Federal Grants	9%
Non Profit/Foundation Grants	30%
Fees for Program Services	33%
Individual/Corporate Donations	17%
Fundraising Events	3%

In 2023, VFFC received \$531,156 from Vermont Everyone Eats to coordinate and close out the federal pandemic relief program for the Rutland region. In combination with our other revenue sources, this grant represented 63% of our total revenue for 2023.

*Your generosity powers so much  
good work for local food  
and we can't thank you enough.*

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