Bennington Farm to Plate
Food System Action Plan

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The case for developing more vibrant local food systems has been made in numerous local, regional, and state plans and reports (Bennington Municipal Energy Plan – 2012, Connecting the Dots in Bennington’s Food System – 2012, Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan – 2011, Bennington Town Plan – 2010, Bennington Regional Energy Plan – 2009, Bennington Regional Plan – 2007). All of these documents are available for reference by link from www.bf2p.org. The intent of this plan is not to reiterate the valid points made in those documents, but to attempt to synthesize the various facts and recommendations into a coordinated set of actions that will advance the following goal:

**Develop Bennington’s local and regional food systems so that abundant and affordable food from our area forms an important part of our community and economy.**

To achieve this goal it is necessary to understand the components of the local food system as well as the entities that exist, or which need to be put in place, to ensure that necessary elements are present and working together with maximum synergy. It is also important to enumerate and explain the benefits of a strong local food system; periodically referring back to these benefits will help keep action steps focused toward specific societal objectives.

**Benefits of a Strengthened Local Food System**

**Community Development and Economic Opportunity**

The Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan notes that approximately two billion dollars are spent on food in the state each year. Given that the population of our region is about five percent of the state total, we can assume that close to $100 million annually is spent on food in Bennington County alone. The Bennington Municipal Energy Plan observes that $50 million annually is spent on food in the Town of Bennington, with three million gallons of oil required for the production and transport of that food. With most of our food coming from outside the region, most of the dollars spent on that food ultimately leave the region. By producing more of the food that is consumed in our region, community and economic development benefits would accrue in two ways:

- Every dollar not exported from the region would be available for people to spend and invest on local goods and services.
- In addition to the direct employment of new farm owners and workers, many new job opportunities would be created in a wide range of secondary and support businesses (e.g. food storage and distribution, food processing, and agricultural support services).

Programs and projects to develop a more robust local food system should, therefore, recognize the community and economic development benefits of redirecting dollars to support local food production and related activities.
Food Access and Food Security
It has been widely recognized that many residents of the Bennington area do not have adequate access to healthy food. Much of the town has been identified as a food desert, according to USDA standards, with little or no availability of healthy and/or locally-produced food in locations convenient to large sectors of the population. This shortage of nutritious food is most pronounced in the center of the community which has the most densely developed neighborhoods as well as the greatest number of low and moderate income residents. The inadequate amount of nutritious food is an issue as is the number and location of outlets, and the cost of the food. Several groups and organizations have begun to address these needs through establishment of food pantries, farmers’ markets, and community meal sites. Others are pursuing a downtown food cooperative and seeking opportunities for improving access to food outlets. Projects identified in this Action Plan address these fundamental issues of access to nutritional food and promote healthy diets in all sectors of the community.

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as existing “when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain an active and healthy life.” The concept of access includes both physical and economic access. Conversely, food insecurity is defined as the lack of access to enough food to fully meet basic needs at any time due, often, to a lack of financial resources.

According to USDA data, 13% of Vermont households are food insecure.

Environmental Quality
Greater production and use of food in the region contributes to improved environmental quality in a number of ways. Utilization of prime agricultural soils for food production ensures that those lands remain open and part of the working landscape. Properly managed farmlands maximize use, reuse, and recycling of local natural resources, thus limiting waste and pollution. Those same practices reduce the need to use petrochemical fertilizers, while increased local production reduces fossil fuel use related to transportation and processing, reducing pollution and carbon emissions. Furthermore, the diversification of farmland use helps to maintain a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem. The net result benefits the natural environment in our region and globally. It will be important to emphasize environmental stewardship in any actions designed to expand and diversify the local food system.

Sustainable Local Communities
The rapid growth and changing character of our communities over the past 100 years has been a direct result of access to abundant and cheap energy. We are at a point, however, where the amount of energy available to us will likely begin to decline, while demand for energy continues to increase. This stress will be exacerbated by growing shortages of other key resources, even resources as basic as water. This shift will place tremendous stresses on national and international economies as the exponential growth in output and consumption that we have come to rely upon becomes impossible to sustain. Economic activity will of necessity become more localized, and local agricultural productivity will become of paramount importance. We will no longer be able to import the vast majority of our food from the Midwest, California, and foreign countries. For a community like Bennington to be resilient in the face of such changes, it must develop an economy that relies much more on the production and exchange of needed goods and services locally. The most fundamental of those consist of the local food system, development of which will provide much of the fabric for a strong local economy and community that is interdependent and sustainable.
II. Components of the Local Food System

The food system for an area is a complex of interrelated entities and processes, all of which must be well-developed for the system to be as vibrant as possible. The system consists of two general categories: the farm and food enterprises (the inner circle in the diagram) and a system of supporting individuals and organizations that help nurture and promote individual elements and cooperative relationships within the system (the outer circle). Important components of the system already exist in the Bennington area. Apparent strengths and weaknesses among these components are discussed in Bennington Farm to Plate’s Connecting the Dots in the Bennington Food System. By expanding, strengthening, and better coordinating these separate pieces, the full potential of the local food system can be realized.

Figure 1: Food System Diagram:
From Vermont Farm to Plate’s 2011 Strategic Plan

*Below each category is shown the corresponding number of listings on the VT Food Atlas. Updated: January 2013
CONSUMER DEMAND
The element of the food system that drives the other components, and which ultimately determines its success, is **consumer demand**. Locally-produced food is created and supplied in response to demand within our region and to demand from outside of the region. The number of people purchasing food at a local farmers’ market or signing up for a community supported agriculture (CSA) share are visible evidence of local consumer demand while specialty products such as maple syrup or cheese are often provided partially in response to non-resident demand.

FARM INPUTS
**Farm inputs** include the natural resources, labor, and equipment required to support farm operations as well as the businesses that supply and service those items. These inputs range from agricultural land and soil to fertilizer, diesel fuel, machinery, and vehicles. Supporting businesses include everything from companies that supply seed and fertilizer to equipment repair and insurance companies.

FOOD PRODUCTION
The many farms, CSA’s, and backyard growers comprise the **food production** component of the food system. These producers may provide fruits, vegetables, eggs, milk, and other items that are purchased and consumed directly as well as animal feed, livestock grown for meat, grain, and other items that require processing prior to purchase and consumption of a final product.

FOOD PROCESSING
**Food processing** is required to transform a wide range of raw food materials into value-added products. A cheese producer, for example, acquires milk from a dairy farm and, through use of special machinery and processes, creates a specialized product that is sold at a higher price than the original feedstock. Meats also require several steps to go from livestock to the steaks, chicken breasts, and ground meats that are sold in local markets.

WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTION
Foodstuffs have to be collected, sometimes stored for a period of time, and transported to stores, restaurants, schools, and other locations where they are purchased by consumers. This **wholesale distribution** requires specialized equipment and systems, and also is the point in the local food system where communication between producers, processors, and retail distributors is critical.

RETAIL DISTRIBUTION
The grocery stores, restaurants, corner stores, farmers’ markets, school cafeterias, cooperatives and other outlets where consumers directly obtain their food represent the **retail distribution** component of the local food system. Some of those outlets make an effort to carry/utilize local food when possible. It is important to involve retailers with food system planning because they help shape much of the consumer demand for products.

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT
**Nutrient management** refers to the way that food waste, livestock manure, and other food system byproducts are used to ensure that energy and nutrients remain in the area and available for use. Composting operations of various scales, including on-farm and backyard composting as well as commercial composting businesses all work to return these valuable resources to local agricultural lands.
The Bennington Farm to Plate Council began an inventory of the region’s food system in 2009 through the Bennington Local Directory, now called the TriLocal Directory.

Collecting the Data
An extensive inventory of the TriLocal Food System, compiled through a cooperative effort by Bennington College and BF2P, reveals some interesting facts about local farm and food enterprises. Most of the more than 200 farms in Bennington County are relatively small, as only 15 report sales in excess of $100,000 per year. Berkshire County (MA) and Rensselaer County (NY) each have over 500 farms, while Washington County (NY) is home to the greatest number and the largest producers in the area, with over 800 farms and total sales of over $100 million per year.

The data also shows that while there are quite a few outlets for food in the region, the area of highest population density (in and around downtown Bennington) has limited outlets for fresh food. It also is interesting to note that most farm input businesses are located outside of Bennington County, with some notable exceptions like Whitman’s Feed Store in North Bennington. Other apparent shortages in the immediate area around Bennington are in food processing, wholesale distribution, and nutrient management (i.e. centralized composting facilities).

Locating Local
A local food system generally is considered to radiate 30 miles from its center, although that definition has to be qualified. The Green Mountains lie immediately to the east of Bennington and with little farmland and few roads, the actual extent of the Bennington food system in areas east of the Valley of Vermont is fairly limited. In contrast, the densely populated area in and around the Capital District of New York pulls much of the agricultural output from eastern New York toward the west (i.e. away from Bennington), minimizing the strength of the relationship between many of those farms and consumers in Bennington. At the same time, however, the concentration of farms in Rensselaer and Washington Counties supports a range of agricultural input businesses that would not exist to serve the smaller concentration of producers located around Bennington. Nearby large urban areas also provide markets for specialty food produced in the Bennington area.

Figure 2
The graphic on page 6 shows how the two largest impactors on a food system—food production and population distribution—exist in the TriLocal area. Most of the region lacks any concentration of either people or cropland, especially the east half, much of which is Green Mountain National Forest.
III. Food System Objectives, Actions, and Organizations

Past work has identified strengths, weaknesses, and improvements needed to ensure that the TriLocal Food System realizes its full potential. The following summary lists principal objectives associated with 8 components of the TriLocal Food System—the 7 listed in Section II, and Food Security, a major issue in the Greater Bennington Area—along with specific projects that will advance those objectives. Organizations best positioned to work on each project are identified by abbreviation. The listed organizations are then described in the following section. That list is not meant to be complete, and BF2P will maintain an updated list of partnering organizations on its website. If your organization would like to be listed, please email info@bf2p.org.

The following projects vary in scope, scale, and timeline; some are short-term, some longer-term, and some actions will need to precede others. The most important aspect of the list is that it provides coordination between many organizations and functions, allowing for more efficient, collaborative work.

A. CONSUMER DEMAND

Objective: Increase demand by expanding the demographic base of consumers who seek to acquire locally-grown and healthy food and raising awareness of options available to those who seek such food. The accessibility of healthy, affordable, local options remains a challenge, but by better coordinating consumers, producers, and services, these projects aim to increase demand and, correspondingly, availability.

Projects

1. Integrate information about the benefits of healthy and locally-produced food into the curriculum of area schools. (ACT, DOH, SVCDC, SVSU)

2. Distribute current information on the TriLocal Food System (description of farm and food enterprises, projects, and events) through a quarterly printed newsletter, website updates, and local media outlets. (BF2P)

3. Create a communication link—to support regular contracting—between large institutional consumers (BC, BBC, KC, MOW, SCM, SVC, SVMC, SVSU, etc.) and local food producers (CG's, CSA's, TC/YAP, etc.), which would address potential programmatic overlap as well as systemic partnership, with particular focus on getting as much available food as possible to those in need. This could include an organized gleaning.

4. Provide and promote public classes/workshops on gardening, personal food production, and healthy cooking, focusing on the personal economic benefits of growing/cooking food and discussing strategies for individuals and families using food assistance programs. (BFM, DOH, KC, MOW, SCM, SVMC, OWCC, WTI)

5. Hold periodic public forums on local food issues and projects, including events integrated into Farmers’ Markets. (BCRC, BFM, DOH, OWCC)
Objective: Increase the local availability and affordability of farm inputs and expand the number of farms in the area that specialize in selling wholesale to markets and institutions.

Projects

1. Provide additional productive agricultural land at low cost for new farmers.
   • Make prime agricultural land at Mount Anthony Union Middle School, Southern Vermont College, and Bennington College available—at low lease rates—to farmers who agree to produce food for those schools/colleges and local markets. (BC, SVC, SVSU)
   • Increase publicly owned land available for community gardens. (Town)

2. Increase land used for farming by promoting backyard gardening and teaching people how to grow various food crops. (SVMC, WTI)

3. Develop educational materials and conduct workshops on farm energy conservation methods and growing and using oil seed crops for fuel for farm operations. (BCCD, BCRC)

4. Expand the local agricultural work force by providing comprehensive training in agricultural practices for secondary school students and adults. (CSA’s, SVCDC)

5. Actively recruit and support businesses that supply seed, fertilizer, feed, and which supply and service farm equipment. (BBC, BCIC, Town)

Objective: Increase the amount and variety of food produced locally, expand opportunities for smaller-scale producers to connect resources, and increase public awareness of the systems through which locally-sourced food is produced and distributed.

Projects

1. Support the growth of existing farm operations through greater access to local markets. This work may initially be closely related to project A.3: matching producers and institutional food consumers. (ACT, BBC, BCCD, SCM, SVMC, SVSU, TC/YAP)

2. Provide education and mentoring services for new farmers and connect them with each other that they may share resources, insights, and ideas. (BCCD, CSA’s)

3. Expand production from backyard gardens, community gardens, and CSAs.
   • Backyard gardens: educational programs and workshops. (WTI, OWCC, ACT)
   • Community gardens: additional land. (BC, BBC, CG’s, Town, SVC, SVSU, SVMC)
   • Community Supported Agriculture: information/promotion. (BF2P, CSA’s)

4. Increase the diversity of agricultural operations and food production—growing more vegetables, fruits, nuts, berries, grains, and meat—by conducting educational programs and highlighting examples of diversification from other areas. (BC, OWCC, SVC)

5. Create a community demonstration garden focused on permaculture, an “edible forest” that would offer public classes. (WTI)

6. Coordinate GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification for interested local farmers, making it more affordable. (BF2P)

7. Establish annual meetings for local farmers, as well as other key players in the TriLocal Food System, to connect and network. (ACT, BF2P)
**D. FOOD PROCESSING**

Objective: Expand food processing capacity in the area, increase the quantity of value-added foods produced, and promote a stronger identity for locally produced/processed foods.

**Projects**

1. Work with owners of existing commercial kitchens and consumer kitchens to establish a coordinated network so that those facilities can be rented to small producers when they would otherwise be unused. *(ACT, BF2P)*

2. Inventory existing storage facilities, and potential sites for new/expanded storage facilities. *(BCRC, BF2P, Town)*

3. Support expansion of existing food processing facilities and recruit new processing businesses (especially meat, dairy, and grain processing), and coordinate/connect interested developers. *(Town, BCRC, BCIC)*

4. Actively assist in the development of a centrally located, cooperative commercial kitchen where time and facilities could be rented to small producers. *(BCRC, BCIC, BF2P, BBC, Town)*

**E. WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTION**

Objective: Ensure that resources are available to store, aggregate, and distribute locally-produced food to consumer outlets in the area, and that individual and small-scale farmers are connected to these resources.

**Projects**

1. Work with existing grocery stores, neighborhood markets, restaurants, and other outlets to encourage their distributors to supply locally-produced food. *(ACT, TC/YAP)*

2. Coordinate production, distribution, and purchase (by wholesalers, institutions, markets, etc.) to make the process more cost effective to farmers and distributors. *(BCRC, TC/YAP)*

3. Actively assist in the development of a local warehousing facility with adequate capacity for short-term storage of locally-produced food, using the inventory created in project D.2. *(BCRC, BCIC)*

**F. RETAIL DISTRIBUTION**

Objective: Make locally-produced food available at a variety of outlets at a reasonable cost to consumers.

**Projects**

1. Develop a food cooperative in downtown Bennington that provides daily and year-round access to healthy, local, affordable food. *(BBC, SCM)*

2. Ensure the continued success and growth of the Walloomsac Farmers’ Market through advertising, recruitment of vendors, and providing a storefront for more regular access to local food products. *(BFM, SCM, CSAs)*

3. Expand efforts to match institutional consumers with local food producers (project A.3) to include local retailers. *(TC/YAP, SVSU, BC, SVC, ACT)*

4. Publicize and reward stores and restaurants that feature local food (“Bennington Local” signs, articles, and ads). *(ACT, BF2P, DOH)*
G. NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

Objective: Capture and reuse nutrients and energy from local agricultural operations, food outlets, and residences.

Projects

1. Support the establishment of commercial composting facilities, such as TAM Organic, and the development of a supply and distribution network, focusing on outreach to major waste producers. *(Town, BCRC, BCIC)*

2. Provide access to, education about, and advocacy for affordable compost materials and public training on backyard composting techniques. *(BCRC, BCCD)*

3. Develop composting programs within local schools. *(SVSU)*

H. FOOD SECURITY

While Food Security is not considered to be one of the sectors of a food system, it is a major socioeconomic issue (particularly in Bennington and Bennington County) which is significantly affected by all the aforementioned projects’ areas of focus. As such, and given the multitude of organizations which have expressed a willingness to work specifically on Food Access and Food Security issues, the following objective/projects have been added.

Objective: Increase access to healthy, affordable food for all residents, regardless of income. Break down existing social and economic barriers through food-based activities that build and connect the community.

Projects

1. Support the sale of healthy, affordable food from retailers in downtown Bennington. *(ACT, BBC, BCIC, BCRC, BF2P, DOH, SCM)*

2. Support and facilitate the offering of healthy, local foods at community meal sites. Add cooking classes and hands-on cooking events at community kitchens. Distribute nourishing recipes using local, healthy foods available at community food shelves. *(BC, BFM, DOH, KC, MOW, TC/YAP, SVCDC, SVC)*

3. Support existing efforts of local growers to donate food to local meal sites, and to offer subsidized CSA shares. Promote the use of EBT cards at Farmer’s Markets by doing community outreach. *(ACT, BFM, CSA’s, DOH, TC/YAP)*

4. Work with local growers to organize gleaning opportunities, to benefit local meal sites. *(BF2P, BFM, CSA’s, CG’s, KC, TC/YAP)*
Key Organizations and Support System

Many local organizations are involved in working with farm and food enterprises to support the development of the TriLocal Food System. Some of those organizations play an active role in one or more functional areas of the system, while others provide support and coordination to help the system grow and strengthen. The projects listed below reference those explained in the previous section.

While this list is an extensive sampling of the organizations that are critical to the success of the this plan’s objectives, it is not nearly meant to represent the totality of players in that process. There are also many organizations not listed in this document that are critical to the success of these projects.

Click on an organization’s logo to visit their website.

**Alliance for Community Transformations (ACT):** The Alliance for Community Transformations, operating under the Bennington County Regional Commission, is a regional source of education on preventative health care and healthy communities/lifestyles, as well as a connection network of health advocates, leaders, local businesses, and community members. Its mission is to empower, mobilize, and inspire local communities to act in collaboration towards greater health and sustainable change. ACT cooperates with other area organizations to conduct studies and carry out programs related to healthy communities, including projects designed to promote greater access to healthy local food.

PROJECTS: A.1 C.1 C.3 C.7 D.1 E.1 F.3 F.4 H.1 H.3

**Bennington College:** Bennington College offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs from its 440 acre campus in the northwestern part of Bennington. Faculty and students in its environmental studies program have been actively engaged studying sustainability issues, including the local food system. The Bennington Sustainable Food Project oversees a student-run garden that has been successfully cultivated in recent years. The campus also includes large areas of prime agricultural land. The college’s dining services is a major consumer of food and attempts to utilize local food when possible.

PROJECTS: A.3 B.1 C.3 C.4 F.3 H.2

**Bennington County Conservation District (BCCD):** The Bennington County Conservation District works with individuals and organizations to conserve important natural resources and support the working landscape in the region. BCCD offers educational programs and conducts specific implementation projects out of its office in downtown Bennington.

PROJECTS: B.3 C.1 C.2 G.2

**Bennington County Industrial Corporation (BCIC):** The Bennington County Industrial Corporation is a nonprofit economic development organization. Its mission is to promote quality jobs in Bennington County.

PROJECTS: B.5 D.3 D.4 E.3 G.1 H.1
Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC): The Bennington County Regional Commission carries out comprehensive regional planning for the Bennington County region and provides technical assistance to municipalities in areas including land use planning, solid waste planning, community and economic development, transportation, and more. The BCRC includes representatives from towns, villages, and interest groups and frequently sponsors educational events and forums on specific issues.

PROJECTS: A.5, B.3, D.2, D.3, D.4, E.2, E.3, G.1, G.2, H.1

Bennington Farm to Plate Council (BF2P): The Bennington Farm to Plate Council was formed to support Vermont’s Farm to Plate Strategic Plan in ways that are appropriate for the region. BF2P hopes to increase the availability and affordability of locally produced food by promoting collaboration among the various players in the local food system, improving awareness of local food issues by undertaking educational programs, and by serving as a clearinghouse for information on local food and related resources. It also oversees www.trilocal.org.

PROJECTS: A.2, C.3, C.6, C.7, D.1, D.2, D.4, F.4, H.1, H.4

Bennington Farmers’ Market (BFM): The Bennington Farmers’ Market is a year-round farmers’ market located in Bennington, Vermont. It has been in existence since 2002. From May through October, the market takes place twice a week on Saturdays and Tuesdays. From November through April, it takes place twice a month, on the first and third Saturdays of each month. The Bennington Farmers’ Market is a producer-only market, allowing customers to purchase goods directly from the farmers and producers. Customers will find a wide variety of vegetables, meats, cheeses, baked goods, crafts, prepared foods and more.

PROJECTS: A.4, A.5, F.2, H.2, H.3, H.4

Better Bennington Corporation (BBC): The Better Bennington Corporation works with local businesses and community organizations to build, improve, and support a vital downtown that benefits our entire community. The BBC aims to incorporate local food enterprises and support organizations into the business infrastructure of downtown Bennington.

PROJECTS: A.3, B.5, C.1, C.3, D.4, F.1, H.1

Community Gardens (CG): There are a number of small, shared, or community gardens in the Bennington area. The largest, the Morgan Spring Community Garden, is located next to the Bennington Recreation Center on Gage Street in Bennington.

PROJECTS: A.3, C.3, H.4

Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs): There are a number of community supported agricultural operations in the region—these farms sell memberships or shares to residents who then receive allocations of food from the farm throughout the year. CSAs are mentioned here separately from other food producers because of the direct relationship they have with consumers.

PROJECTS: A.3, B.4, C.2, C.3, F.2, H.3, H.4
Meals on Wheels of Bennington County (MOW): The Bennington County Meals on Wheels Program is a community resource for maintaining the health, vitality, and independence of senior adults and people with disabilities by providing nutritious, high quality meals. MOW delivers meals to home-bound residents and operates several community meal sites in the region, including the “Bennington Café,” at its headquarters on Pleasant Street in Bennington. MOW seeks to include locally grown food in its menu whenever possible.

PROJECTS: A.3  A.4  H.2  H.4

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PROJECTS: A.3  A.4  H.2

One World Conservation Center (OWCC): The One World Conservation Center maintains a headquarters building adjacent to its nature preserve south of Bennington on Route 7. It houses a large meeting facility and offers educational programs on a variety of topics including sustainability, environmental conservation, and local food and agriculture.

PROJECTS: A.4  A.5  C.3  C.4

Southern Vermont College (SVC): Southern Vermont College offers undergraduate degrees in 19 majors from its 370 acre campus on the lower slopes of Mount Anthony. It is a major institutional consumer of food and also includes extensive open fields located on prime agricultural soils.

PROJECTS: A.3  B.1  C.3  C.4  F.3  H.2

Southwest Vermont Career Development Center (SVCDC): The Southwest Vermont Career Development Center is a Regional Technical Center serving local secondary school students as well as adult learners through a variety of courses, both at its facility adjacent to MAU High School in Bennington and through online learning. SVCDC currently offers programs in agroecology, culinary arts and hospitality, forestry, and other food-system-related career fields, as well as many other programs. SVCDC provides practical, experiential education and is committed to its goal of lifelong learning.

PROJECTS: A.1  B.4  H.2
Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC): The Southwestern Vermont Medical Center is the region’s full service hospital and the county’s largest employer. In addition to a full complement of health services, SVMC’s Wellness Connection offers programs and information on healthy living and eating. The medical center’s campus is also a large institutional consumer of food and seeks to use locally produced food whenever possible.

PROJECTS: A.3 A.4 B.2 C.1 C.3

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU): Overseeing seven elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school which provide public, K-12 education in Bennington and surrounding communities, the SVSU is a major player in the TriLocal Food System. In addition to providing instruction that can emphasize the importance of local food and good nutrition, those schools are among the largest institutional consumers of food in the region. And the MAU Middle School property, located on East Road in Bennington, includes a large amount of prime agricultural land, a portion of which is used as a garden.

PROJECTS: A.1 A.3 B.1 C.1 C.3 F.3 G.3

Town of Bennington (Town): The Town of Bennington is the municipal government that provides services to the majority of the population in southern Bennington County. The town provides space for a community garden and also is considering hosting a commercial composting facility at the solid waste transfer station it owns on Houghton Lane.

PROJECTS: B.1 B.5 C.3 D.2 D.3 D.4 G.1

Tutorial Center—Youth Agriculture Project (TC/YAP): Since 2006, the Youth Agriculture Project has been providing at-risk youth ages 16-21 with opportunities to experience success as they develop transferable job and life skills through the growing, harvesting and marketing of plants and vegetable crops. YAP has developed and maintained community gardens and developed the YAP Food Network, connecting local farms and food producers to institutional and retail food buyers, including SVMC and MOW.

PROJECTS: A.3 C.1 E.1 E.2 F.3 H.2 H.3 H.4

Vermont State Organizations: Many resources at the state level are available to provide assistance with development of the local food system in the Bennington area. The Agency of Agriculture has hired a local food coordinator to work with community groups and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) has overseen development and implementation of the state’s Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.
Vermont Department of Health, Bennington District Office (DOH): The Health Department is a key strategic partner working collaboratively in the community to support the efforts of diverse organizations involved within the food system. Its goals are to make locally-produced food available and reduce food insecurity for vulnerable populations. The DOH will provide demographic and health research data as well as health status reports about the local community to help guide effective population-based programming related to the TriLocal Food System.

PROJECTS: A.1  A.4  A.5  F.4  H.1  H.2  H.3

Walloomsac Transition Initiative (WTI): The Walloomsac Transition Initiative works to facilitate the transformation of the community into one that is based on an equitable, sustainable, resilient, local economy made up of resourceful and engaged citizens. In the area of local food systems, the WTI seeks to develop community and home gardens, teach skills in growing and putting up food, agricultural production, and construct local food storage and distribution systems.

PROJECTS: A.4  B.2  C.3  C.5

Other Organizations
Many other community groups, public and private organizations, and individuals have been and will be involved throughout the ongoing pursuit of this plan’s objectives, and any person or group who is interested in getting involved or collaborating is encouraged to contact BF2P through www.bf2p.org. Visiting the website is also a great way to monitor the progress of the projects mentioned in this plan and to stay apprised of events relating to that work.

Newsletter
Following the publication of this plan, the Bennington Farm to Plate Council will begin producing a regular newsletter. Anyone interested in contributing to the creation or distribution of that newsletter should contact info@bf2p.org.

Vermont Farm to Plate Food System Atlas
The Bennington Farm to Plate Council strongly supports the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund’s work on the Farm to Plate Food System Atlas. The Atlas provides thorough information and contact data for people and organizations throughout Vermont’s food systems. BF2P suggests that anyone working within the TriLocal food system, especially groups working on the projects in this plan, visit the Atlas, and if they have not yet done so, list themselves.

www.vtfoodatlas.org
Successful implementation of this plan will require the completion of many, if not all, of the listed projects. The only way that such a diverse range of complex tasks can be accomplished is through a coordinated effort by the many organizations with an interest in the local food system. Those organizations must work with each other and with the farm and food enterprises in the region. The following steps will help ensure that such a cooperative effort takes place:

1. **Adopt** this plan, which has been modified based on commentary at the Food Systems Forum on April 22, 2013, and based on BF2P’s continued discussion and research, as a working document for all involved.

2. **Agree** to which organizations are working on specific projects, using the suggestions noted in this plan for each project mentioned, form teams, and develop detailed work plans for implementation.

3. **Report** back to the full assembly of organizations periodically through BF2P newsletter and website updates so that everyone is aware of progress or problems in all areas of the food system.

4. **Reassemble** a forum of all of the involved organizations on an annual basis to review the plan, amend it as appropriate, and initiate new projects as needed.

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**Bennington Farm to Plate Council Members:**

- **Susan Beal**  
  Founding Organizer of BF2P, Co-Founder of Walloomsac Farmers’ Market, Mediator

- **David Pearson**  
  Software Consultant, Co-Founder of Walloomsac Farmers’ Market

- **Jim Sullivan**  
  Director of the Bennington County Regional Commission

- **Yael Dolev**  
  Agronomist, Ecologist, Food Coach

- **Valerie Imbruce**  
  Faculty Member of Environmental Studies at Bennington College

- **Nancy Everhart**  
  Agricultural Member at the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

- **Liz Ruffa**  
  Project Director of Northshire Grows!

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