Since 2010, Farmers to You (FTY) has connected Vermont farmers with Boston-area families through weekly deliveries of food they order through the FTY website. FTY handles marketing, aggregation, and customer service so that farmers can focus on what they do best—growing quality food using sustainable, organic methods. FTY arranges pick-up, delivery and payment so that families can focus on what they need most—time to share quality food with each other. FTY currently delivers high quality, fresh food from Vermont (and some New Hampshire) farmers and value added food producers to an average of 400 families per week.

The Flex Fund’s investment was used to support FTY’s expansion to a new, larger hub facility, purchase equipment, add key staff, and streamline their website. FTY leveraged Flex Fund funding to secure additional royalty financing from key Boston-area investors. In purchasing from over 40 Vermont farmers and value-added food producers, FTY is helping keep an estimated 4,200 farm acres in production in Vermont. FTY is fostering increased processing of locally-grown food, like fresh cheeses, soups, sauces, and frozen vegetables by helping Vermont producers gain access to urban markets like Boston. Since their launch in 2010, FTY has added $500,000 of new revenue to their partner farmers and they project adding another $500,000 in the next year.

“We are very happy to have found a partner in the VSJF Flexible Capital Fund. Seeking outside funding was a delicate process as our business model doesn’t fit well with a traditional debt or equity funding. The Flex Fund’s unique structure works for growing food businesses like ours that are concerned with the triple bottom line of profits, people, and the planet. With these investments, we will better serve our growing food businesses like ours that are concerned with the triple bottom line of profits, people, and the planet. With these investments, we will better serve our partners, Vermont farmers and families in the Boston area, and continue to strengthen our local food system.”

— Gregory Georgaklis, Founder and Owner, Farmers to You
Today, over 200 organizations—including food system businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, and capital providers—make up the diverse Farm to Plate Network. The six Working Groups, four Cross-Cutting Teams, and a growing number of Task Forces have accomplished a lot this past year, moving Vermont closer to achieving the 25 goals in the 10-Year Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.

- To increase institutional consumption of local foods, the Aggregation and Distribution Working Group held a match-making event with Sodoxe and Vermont producers and processors (Goal 2 of the Farm to Plate 10-Year Strategic Plan).
- To support existing producer and processor associations and better serve their members, the Technical Assistance for Producers and Processors Working Group is surveying these associations to access their funding and staffing needs (Goal 19).
- To better align food education with today’s food system careers, the Education and Workforce Development Working Group is planning a new Governor’s Institute on Sustainable Food Systems at Vermont Technical College in 2013 (Goal 24).
- The group completed a workforce needs assessment that makes 10 recommendations for developing career pathways in Vermont’s food system (Goal 17).
- To improve dairy viability, the Dairy Development Working Group is developing a guidebook for professional development and technical assistance (Goal 8).
- To stimulate agricultural development and prevent farmland loss, the Land Use Planning Task Force is developing a community resource guide that provides model planning and zoning policies (Goal 5).
- To promote viability and vibrancy of New England’s value-added meat industry, the Meat Processing Task Force, led by VAAFM and NOFA Vermont, were awarded a USDA Federal-State Marketing Improvement Grant for “Scaling Up New England’s Meat Industry” (Goal 7).
- The Close the Loop Coalition Task Force is coordinating resources to meet Vermont’s Act 148 organics diversion target of 100% by 2020 (Goal 14).

To learn more about the F2P Strategic Plan, contact Erica Campbell at farm2plate@vsjf.org.

- Vermont’s Act 148 organics diversion target of 100% by 2020 (Goal 14).
- Vermont’s Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and Workforce Development Working Group
- Vermont’s Food System: an initiative to value-added businesses that are building markets and infrastructure for other Vermont agricultural enterprises and the local or regional food system.

The VADP takes the time to understand each client company—its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats—then works to help chart a unique course to meet their goals for successful market and product expansion, greater control over operational costs, and greater profitability. In the process, the VADP strengthens their management capacity, honors their financial, operational and marketing plans, and helps them access needed capital.

The first cohort of VADP Clients saw their combined revenue and net income increase by more than 20% during their year in the program. Four of the eight clients have already undergone taken facility expansions. In total, they have raised over $1.5 million in grants, borrowing, and equity financing since starting with the VADP.

One of the VADP’s newest clients, Y Enterprises in Ryegate, illustrates what the program hopes to achieve in supporting the infrastructure of Vermont’s food system. Y Enterprises doesn’t grow or make any food products. Instead, they fabricate, adapt, repair, and maintain the equipment that Vermont’s food businesses need to function. Their clients range from Vermont Soy and Kingdom Creamery, to Green Mountain Coffee Roasters and Gringo Jacks, to the Vermont Food Venture Center. They are honored by their clients for what they do and have an appetite for doing more of it.

The VADP is helping Y Enterprises think strategically about their growth in terms of marketing, systems and organizational development, and capital needs. They have begun hiring new employees to meet the growing need for their services and plan significant expansions in the year ahead.

To date, the VADP clients include:

- AQUA VITEA, SALISBURY / ADISSION COUNTY
- CHAMPLAIN ORCHARDS, SHOREHAM / ADISSION COUNTY
- DEEP ROOT ORGANIC CO-OP, JOHNSON / LAMOILLE COUNTY
- EDEN ICE CIDER COMPANY, W. CHARLESTON / ORLEANS COUNTY
- FARMERS TO YOU, JOHNSON / LAMOILLE COUNTY
- FREEDOM FOODS, RANDOLPH / ORANGE COUNTY
- GROW COMPOST OF VERMONT, MORESTOWN / WASHINGTON COUNTY
- PETE’S GREENS, CRAGSBURY / ORLEANS COUNTY
- THE ROYAL BUTCHER, BRAINTREE / ORANGE COUNTY
- SUGARSNAP, BURLINGTON / CHITTENDEN COUNTY
- VERNON FOOD VENTURE CENTER, HARDWICK / CALEDONIA COUNTY
- VERMONT LIVESTOCK SLAUGHTER AND PROCESSING, FERRISBURGH / ADISSION COUNTY
- VERMONT SOY, HARDWICK / CALEDONIA COUNTY
- WESTMINSTER MEATS, WESTMINSTER STATION / WINDHAM COUNTY
- Y ENTERPRISES, RYEGATE / CALEDONIA COUNTY

For information about the VERMONT AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: Business coaching to reach expansion goals

In its second year as a joint program of the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and VHCB’s Farm Viability Program, the Ag Development Program (VADP) provides critical venture coaching to value-added businesses that are building markets and infrastructure for other Vermont agricultural enterprises and the local or regional food system.

Sunflowers in Grand Isle grown for biodiesel production

Since 2005, the VBI has accelerated the development of sustainable on-farm bioenergy production by providing technical assistance and nearly $3M in grants that focus on making biodiesel from oilseed crops to power farm equipment (and produce a livestock feed co-product), grass fuels for heating, and microalgae as a biofuel feedstock.

In 2012, Grand Isle County Farmers launched their Farm Fresh Fuel Project. With the help of a $50,000 VBI grant:

- Almost 90 acres of sunflowers were planted and 30 tons of sunflower seeds were harvested.
- 3,000 gallons of oil from the seeds will be processed into biodiesel to heat the growers’ homes and power their farm equipment, for a combined fuel savings of over $5,250.
- 26 tons of high protein sunflower meal (a co-product from the oil extraction) will be used as an animal feed ingredient or soil amendment.
- The experience of these growers has added to a body of knowledge that will help other farms be more energy self-sufficient with renewable fuels made from locally grown feedstocks.

As 2012 came to a close, VSJF wrapped up production on a 90-minute, documentary style video series in 10 episodes titled, Bioenergy NOW! Made in Vermont. The educational series, which was filmed during 16 months of project activities, shows the people leading the Vermont Bioenergy Initiative and how they are forging the connection between diversified agriculture and renewable energy production. This significant and exciting undertaking is now ready for public distribution to an audience of agricultural professionals, farmers, college and vocational tech students and others. The films can now be seen and shared in HD at the VSJF YouTube channel.

To learn more about the Vermont Agriculture Development Program, contact John Ryan, vadp@vsjf.org.

To learn more about the Vermont Bioenergy Initiative, contact Netaka White, netaka@vsjf.org.