



Community Action Plan for St. Albans City, Vermont

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

September 2019



For more information about Local Foods, Local Places visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>

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COMMUNITY STORY

St. Albans City is a community of 6,918 people¹ situated in the northwestern portion of Franklin County, Vermont, near the shores of Lake Champlain. The original town of St. Albans was chartered in 1763 by New Hampshire Gov. Bennington Wentworth and named after St. Albans of Hertfordshire, England. Jesse Welden, a Revolutionary War veteran, is believed to be the first to settle and build a log cabin on what is now Main Street in downtown St. Albans. Other settlers soon followed, seeking suitable land for agriculture and creating a town rich with agricultural products, including produce, livestock, butter, and cheese. St. Albans soon became a convenient stop for travelers between Boston and Montreal, adding to the community's growth.² Later, St. Albans became known as "Rail City" due to the introduction of the railroad passing through town. The Central Vermont Railway established its headquarters and manufacturing facilities in St. Albans City. Local rail operations grew to include the company's operations center, freight stations, a repair shop, a roundhouse, and other offices and shops by 1923.³ Originally a village in the center of the town, the city of St. Albans was incorporated as a separate municipality in 1896.



Figure 1 – Historic buildings and an appealing streetscape help make downtown St. Albans City an attractive place to live, work, and visit.

The railway was a key component of St. Alban's growth in the 19th century. When railroad industry eventually suffered economic stress, it caused other local businesses and industries to suffer as well.⁵ Several large downtown fires further contributed to the economic stress experienced by businesses along Main Street. Today, over 11 percent of St. Alban's population lives below the poverty line,⁶ about 20 percent of consumers in the region participated in 3 Squares Vermont (SNAP) as of 2016, and in 2018, 75 percent of students at St. Albans City School qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. Food insecurity and a lack of access for fresh produce has created a rise in chronic diseases in the city, giving residents a desire to increase healthy and local food access.⁷

The economic stress faced by downtown businesses and St. Albans prompted concerned local officials, local stakeholders and residents to seek a path forward to revitalize downtown and the local economy. Community

¹ U.S. Census Bureau "St. Albans City, VT." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stalbanscityvermont/INC110217>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

² City of Saint Albans. "History." <https://www.downtownsaintalbans.com/history/>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

³ Burlington Free Press. "Plenty of history in St. Albans." <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/2014/09/11/plenty-history-st-albans/15483285/>. Accessed May 22, 2019.

⁴ City of Saint Albans op. cit.

⁵ City of Saint Albans op. cit.

⁶ US Census Bureau op. cit.

⁷ St. Albans City Local Foods, Local Places 2019 Application.

demand has inspired visioning exercises and revitalization efforts dating back to the early 2000s. The community has worked to revitalize the commercial and downtown center with support from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development and the Vermont Agency of Transportation. The Northwest Regional Planning Commission conducted the HUD “Healthy People, Strong Communities” project, which, in part, led to the creation of the Northwest Vermont Healthy Roots Collaborative. Using a Collective Impact model and funded mainly by Northwestern Medical Center, the collaborative works to support the local agricultural economy while addressing local food access and education. Healthy Roots works with local farmers who are facing logistical and cost difficulties accessing larger local and regional markets, in part due to the dispersed population in this rural area. Local distribution routes extend as the island communities in Grand Isle County on Lake Champlain, which can be over a 30-mile drive via highway. While Healthy Roots incubated a local distribution service that has been running for three years, finding new and creative ways to more cost effectively distribute product to residents is a high priority for local farmers. Being able to more readily access local food is also a high priority for many residents.⁸



Figure 2 – Planters along Main Street beautify the area while helping collect and filter stormwater—just one way the town shows its care for the environment.

In line with farmers’ and residents’ priorities, St. Albans City hosts the Northwest Farmers Market in downtown’s central square, named Taylor Park. Healthy Roots and area partners have worked closely together to develop an annual food tasting event called *In Good Taste*, which brings residents and farmers together to celebrate local food. Healthy Roots and its partners such as Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation, St. Albans City, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Northwest Family Foods, South Hero Land Trust, the Abbey Group, Workforce Investment Board, and Northwestern Medical Center are striving to improve food equity, ensuring all residents of St. Albans City have access to healthy, local foods on a more permanent basis. These organizations also hope to add stability to the lives of farmers in the region, supporting economic and community revitalization. Healthy Roots sees value in local food planning in as a way to further its goals to foster a resurgence in the community’s agricultural economy where residents and farmers are connected and nourished by local farms and their food.

Now housed at Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Healthy Roots Collaborative hopes to expand St. Alban farmers’ ability to sell their produce directly to residents through enhanced distribution networks and a resurgent local food culture that further drive local economic revitalization. The visioning and goals around strengthening the local food economy already has the support of many residents, farmers, and local public and private institutions including Northwestern Medical Center.

⁸ St. Albans City Local Foods, Local Places 2019 Application.

With these goals in mind, Johanna Setta, the Healthy Roots Coordinator, requested technical assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program in 2019 to engage residents and develop an action plan for promoting the local food system and a more healthy, walkable, economically vibrant community. The goals of the Local Foods, Local Places program are to create:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy, local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- Revitalized downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods.

The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Northern Border Regional Commission. St. Albans City was one of 15 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2019.

A Local Foods, Local Places steering committee was formed in St. Albans City in preparation for this technical assistance award and is comprised of a variety of community stakeholders (Figure 3). They were supported by a technical assistance team of consultants and multiple federal and state agency partners (Figure 4). The steering committee expressed a desire to bring community members together to create an action plan that engages residents in downtown revitalization and economic development opportunities that support the local food economy amidst the major infrastructure changes happening in the community.

The remainder of this report and appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the outcome: a community action plan to achieve St. Albans City's goals.



Figure 3 – Steering Committee Members



Figure 4 – Technical Assistance Team

ENGAGEMENT

The technical assistance engagement process for Local Foods, Local Places has three phases, illustrated in Figure 5 below. The plan phase consists of three preparation conference calls with the steering committee and technical assistance team to clarify goals and arrange workshop logistics. The convene phase includes the effort's capstone event—a two-day workshop in the community. The act phase includes three follow up conference calls to finalize a community action plan and strategize on how to maintain momentum generated during the workshop. The community workshop was held over a two-day period from September 16-17, and the activities those days are described below. Workshop exercise results are summarized in **Appendix A**, workshop sign-in sheets are provided in **Appendix B**, a workshop photo album is provided in **Appendix C**, a data profile in **Appendix D**, funding resources in **Appendix E**, and general references in **Appendix F**.

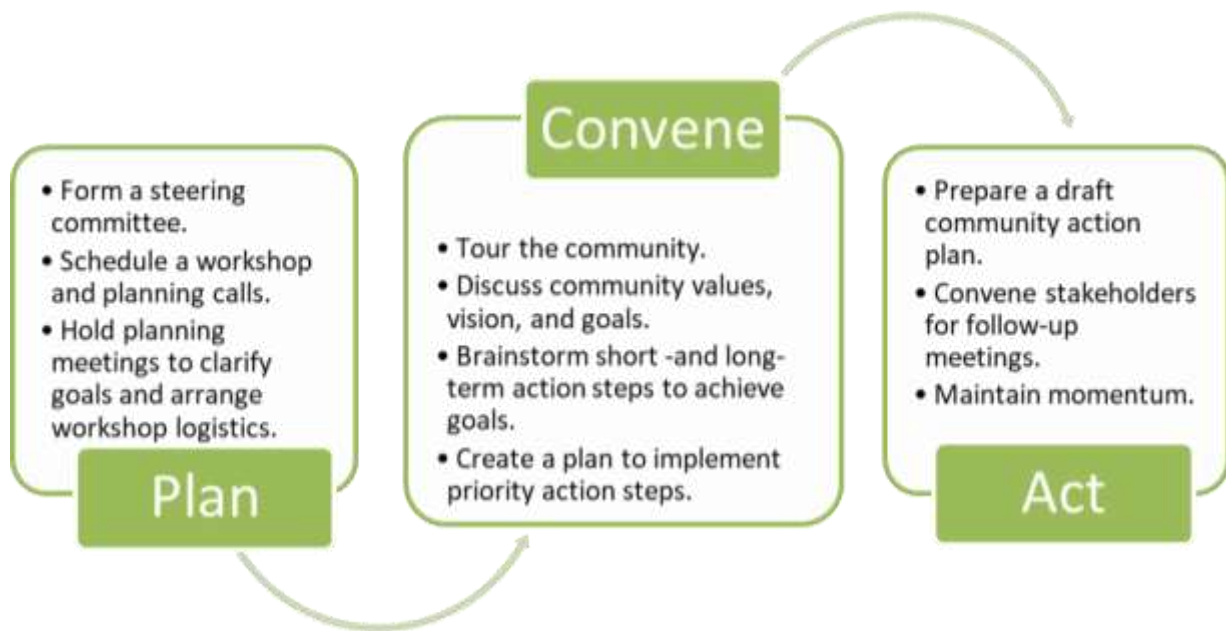


Figure 5 - Local Foods, Local Places technical assistance process diagram.

COMMUNITY TOUR

The Local Foods, Local Places steering committee organized a tour of key sites in St. Albans City for the technical assistance team. The purpose of the tour is to provide federal and state partners a tangible sense of what is going on in the community related to the local food system and community revitalization efforts. Tour participants have an opportunity to engage directly with various stakeholders along the way. Finally, the tour can help the steering committee see their community with a fresh perspective and think about what the community's key assets are, what could use some improvement, and how connected or disconnected key locations are.

The tour began with a lunch at City Hall catered by Evelyne’s on Center, a local bakery and catering company that specializes in healthy food. During lunch, Jeremy Perez, owner of AFK Kombucha described how his new smoothie and juice shop is providing a healthy beverage option for St. Albans City commuters. Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning and Development for the city of St. Albans, discussed the history of the city and recent efforts to revitalize the area, including the demolition and cleanup of a former Solo paper products plant that closed in 2005. Tax-increment financing helped build a parking garage behind Main Street businesses and helped attract a new downtown hotel, which opened in 2017. Across from City Hall, a mixed-use project is under construction that includes 63 subsidized and market rate apartments along with 25,000 square feet of new commercial space. Complementing the new development, events like the annual Vermont Maple Festival, bring the community together and attract tourists and visitors from around the region.

After leaving City Hall, the first stop on the tour was the St. Albans Co-op Store, a hardware and grocery store run by the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery, a dairy co-op with 360 member farms (Figure 6). In addition to selling local dairy products from co-op members, the market sells other shelf-stable groceries, including local value-added products. Although it is an important source of food and other necessities for St. Albans residents, the co-op does not stock fresh, local produce. The next stop on the tour was the only full-service grocery store downtown that does offer fresh produce, although very little of it is locally grown. Food City is an employee-owned grocery store within walking distance of many residents, serving a vital function for the community (Figure 7).



Figure 6 – The St. Albans Co-op Store sells a variety of goods, including pet food, automotive parts, home hardware, groceries, and boots, all supporting family-owned dairy farms.



Figure 7 – Food City is the only full-service grocery store serving downtown St. Albans City.

The tour continued with a visit to Martha’s Kitchen, an organization that serves more than 20,000 meals annually to those in need. With support from churches, businesses, and individuals, a cadre of volunteers serve lunch daily at their downtown facility. Brother Bob Begley who oversees day-to-day operations at the kitchen spoke to the group about its mission, approach, and history in the community. Robert Ostermeyer then spoke about Northwest Family Foods, which operates a food shelf serving 6,000 people five days a week in downtown St. Albans City. He spoke of the challenges and inefficiencies in a system of food distribution dependent on donations and volunteers, many of whom are aging.

After leaving Martha’s Kitchen, the group visited Red House Sweets and Catalyst Coffee Bar, two new businesses that bring the community together around food. There, the group met with Cindy Livingston and Angie Sturm who are beginning discussions with interested residents about opening a consumer-owned food co-op in St. Albans City. Healthy Roots is interested in helping the group explore whether this idea is feasible for the community—whether it can be financially viable and what impact it would have on other businesses downtown.

The next stop on the tour was Rail City Market (Figure 8), where the group spoke with its new owner Ashley Cleare. She described the challenges of stocking more fresh, local food in the store—the need for more coolers and freezers, inconsistent quality from suppliers, and a limited stock that means customers cannot necessarily rely on the store having what they need. However, she also noted that the store could easily be expanded, opening up several possibilities for how to use the space.

The final stop on the tour was Taylor Park, the site of the weekly downtown Northwest Farmers Market (Figure 9). There, the group spoke to Jeff Teitelbaum, who serves on the Board of Directors. The seasonal market operates mid-May through the end of November on Saturday mornings, with about 25 vendors, including farmers, artisans, and bakers. The market attracts local residents and tourists, including many Canadians who come across the border. Although successful, he noted that more vendors would help the market attract even more customers. Marie Frey, owner of Hudak Farm, also spoke with the group about her 150-acre farm and farm stand located two miles north of downtown, which is open seven days a week. In addition to offering another source for local food, the farm operates a composting facility that creates a closed-loop system with environmental benefits.



Figure 8 – Rail City Market sells gifts and natural foods, including bulk goods, coffee, honey, maple syrup, and more.



Figure 9 – Taylor Park hosts the Saturday morning Northwest Farmers Market May through November.

The overall picture from the tour was of a community with a mature downtown redevelopment plan reaping the rewards of past work to revitalize the historic Main Street. St. Albans City is in a rich agricultural region, but the limited options for purchasing local food downtown mean that many residents still face barriers to accessing fresh, healthy food, particularly the food insecure. Throughout the tour, the community members

who spoke to the group conveyed the deep culture of caring that permeates the community, setting the stage for a collaborative and productive workshop.

VISION AND VALUES

Tim Smith, St. Albans City Mayor and Executive Director of Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation, welcomed attendees to the workshop's first session in City Hall on the evening of September 16th. He spoke of the Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative's work promoting local foods for the last five years, and the community's goal to support to food and farm businesses so they can thrive. After opening remarks, the meeting facilitators introduced participants to the Local Foods, Local Places program with a short presentation. The team highlighted the program's elements and the benefits of a local food system. They also shared examples of other communities pursuing goals like those in St. Albans City.

The facilitation team then led attendees through a group exercise designed to explore core values of the community (Figure 10). Participants completed the statements, "I believe that St. Albans City..." and "I believe that St. Alban's City's local food system...." The exercise allowed participants to reflect on and share their beliefs with the group, which highlighted many of the common perspectives and aspirations among residents. Many participants shared positive attributes about St. Albans City and were optimistic about the potential of the local food system to grow.

In another group exercise, the facilitation team asked workshop participants to write aspirational headlines for the local newspaper, the St. Albans Messenger, for 5-10 years into the future, imagining what progress they would like to see in the development of St. Albans City's local food system and revitalization of downtown. Participants highlighted how they envision

I believe that St. Albans City...

- *Is a livable, walkable, close and caring community where you go out for a half hour walk and come back an hour and a half later.*
- *Possesses enormous opportunity to address social injustices within our community's culture with the basic need of healthy food as our common ground.*
- *Is a place where people can feel at home and welcome to dream.*
- *Has a lot to offer and just needs help bringing the pieces and people together.*
- *Has the benefit of scale: large enough to have resources of consequence; small enough to have a community of agreement.*

I believe that St. Albans City's local food system...

- *Is less strong than its agricultural assets, knowledge, and workforce would indicate... The community consumers will best strengthen the system ourselves.*
- *Has a great deal of potential but is not achieving it... We could feed ourselves and others beyond our county. The food is not getting to the people.*
- *Is ready to explore new avenues of distribution.*
- *Is expanding rapidly as many understand the benefits of local food production, but we need to work hard to educate all residents on what those benefits are.*
- *Stands blinking before the radiance of its own future.*

Figure 10 – During a workshop exercise, participants were asked to complete the statements "I believe that St. Albans City..." and "I believe that St. Albans City's local food system..." Some of the thoughts shared during this exercise are shown above, reflecting the ideas that helped frame the workshop's action planning sessions on day two.



Legend

FAVORITE PLACES AND ASSETS

- 1. Houghton Park
- 2. Taylor Park
- 3. Barlow Street Community Center and Park
- 4. Hard'ack Recreation Area
- 5. Turning Point Center
- 6. Rail City Market

AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

- 1. Stormwater issue

FOOD SYSTEM ASSETS

- 1. Food City
- 2. Northwest Technical Center
- 3. Martha's Kitchen
- 4. USDA Service Center
- 5. Food pantry at Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action
- 6. St. Albans Co-op Store
- 7. Bellows Free Academy - High School
- 8. Community garden at Northwestern Medical Center
- 9. Deli at Beverage Mart
- 10. 14th Star Brewing Co.
- 11. Bob's Meat Market
- 12. Northwestern Medical Center Kitchen
- 13. Rail City Market
- 14. Northwest Farmers Market

POTENTIAL FOOD SYSTEM ASSETS

- 1. Available lot
- 2. Potential for agricultural and value-added processing curricula at NW Tech
- 3. Winter farmers' market at City Hall
- 4. Expand edible landscapes and maintain turf and trees for farmers market
- 5. Rail City Market
- 6. Twigg's
- 7. Jeff's Maine Seafood
- 8. Catalyst Coffee & Red House Sweets
- 9. Downtown restaurants
- 10. Rite Aid
- 11. Dollar General
- 12. Evelyne's on Center
- 13. Family Dollar
- 14. Northwestern Medical Center Kitchen
- 15. Turning Point Center

Figure 13 – Workshop participants identified community assets on a map of downtown St. Albans City.

ACTION PLAN

The group exercises and discussions during the St. Albans City workshop were designed to facilitate the development of a Local Foods, Local Places action plan, which guides the local community in implementation of the vision and goals they have established. The action plan is organized around four goals that were identified by the Local Foods, Local Places steering committee, refined during the workshop, and finalized in follow-up conference calls. During the workshop, participants brainstormed possible actions to help achieve each goal, prioritized those actions, and then provided details on how to complete the highest-priority actions under each goal. The action plan outline below lists each goal and supporting actions. Following the outline, more detailed action tables clarify the purpose of each action, measures of success, timeline for completion, roles, and possible sources of support and funding.

- **Goal 1** – Increase education about and access to healthy, local food, especially among food insecure populations by addressing real and perceived barriers.
 - **Action 1.1** – Set up a meeting with the city to discuss the status of current efforts and next steps to ensure sidewalk construction on Lemnah Drive that is deterring food access for some pedestrians.
 - **Action 1.2** – Use the findings from the Grand Isle United Way food access survey to develop a study of barriers to local food access in Franklin County.
 - **Action 1.3** – Increase community recognition of the value of the Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative for promoting farm to school and local food education and access.
- **Goal 2** – Support existing and establish new, financially viable local distribution channels to support local agricultural producers and buyers.
 - **Action 2.1** – Explore distribution services for institutions and other buyers.
 - **Action 2.2** – Hold more Healthy Roots mixers to introduce growers, makers, and buyers in a social setting.
 - **Action 2.3** – Research potential on-line platforms to connect wholesale buyers and growers.
 - **Action 2.4** – Make Rail City Market a pick-up location for pre-ordered fresh, local food.
- **Goal 3** – Increase the number of outlets (e.g., schools, institutions, retailers, social service providers) in St. Albans City procuring local food and taking steps to reduce food waste.
 - **Action 3.1** – Explore extending the St. Albans Farmers Market year-round.
 - **Action 3.2** – Expand retail space and infrastructure (e.g., coolers) in Rail City Market so it can carry more local food.
 - **Action 3.3** – Create a steering committee to establish a democratically owned food co-op.
 - **Action 3.4** – Approach Food City about Increasing the amount of local food sold in the grocery store.
 - **Action 3.5** – Explore possible efficiencies in how recovered food from farms and supermarkets moves throughout the region.
- **Goal 4** – Build a culture supporting local producers and food entrepreneurs by incorporating local food into downtown plans, branding, and events.
 - **Action 4.1** – Establish a vehicle for marketing local food and producers in Franklin and Grand Isle counties.

- **Action 4.2** – Build the celebration of local food and procurement into city and regional plans as they are created or revised.

GOAL 1: Increase education about and access to healthy, local food, especially among food insecure populations by addressing real and perceived barriers.

Saint Albans City has seen positive economic change in recent years. However, despite a relatively strong economy and a location surrounded by agricultural lands, many residents, particularly those who are food insecure, have difficulty accessing healthy, local food. Downtown retail food outlets that exist sell only a very limited selection of fresh, local food. Although there is a popular weekly farmers market, its limited hours and seasonal opening restrict when food is available. In addition, some lower-income residents have the perception that the existing local food outlets cater to a higher-income clientele and would not serve their needs. This goal is about increasing the demand for local food by educating residents about its benefits and availability and addressing real and perceived barriers to accessing what does exist.

Action 1.1: Set up a meeting with the city to discuss the status of current efforts and next steps to ensure sidewalk construction on Lemnah Drive that is deterring food access for some pedestrians.

What this is and why it is important	Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action operates an emergency food shelf on Lemnah Drive in Saint Albans City. However, the road lacks sidewalks, making it uncomfortable and unsafe to walk along. Sidewalks would give residents wanting to access the food shelf and other businesses or properties on the street a safe way to get there without needing to drive. The city has explored installing sidewalks on Lemnah Drive, but the status of those plans is uncertain. This action seeks to accelerate those efforts.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting occurs and plans for sidewalk construction are clarified. • City identifies funding and commits to a timetable for sidewalk construction.
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting by October 1. • Timeframe for construction project set after meeting.
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chip Sawyer (City of Saint Albans Planning Department) • Robert Ostermeyer (Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Council • St. Albans Walk and Bike Group – outreach and political support • Rise VT – outreach and political support • Northwest Regional Planning Commission – technical assistance
Needed resources and possible sources	<p>Construction funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vermont Agency of Transportation ○ Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development ○ Vermont Department of Health – e.g., Better Connections grant ○ USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program

Action 1.2: Use the findings from the Grand Isle United Way food access survey to develop a study of barriers to local food access in Franklin County.

What this is and why it is important	The United Way conducted a survey of Grand Isle communities to investigate food access issues among residents. Reviewing the existing survey could provide some insights on food access regionally and serve as a model for developing a survey specific to Franklin County. The survey would help elevate the voices of those who most need assistance so strategies can be tailored to address barriers to local food access.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey participation rates – need enough to get actionable data. • Survey data helps define goals for improving food access.
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey created by spring 2020. • Survey implemented and results assessed by end of summer 2020.
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) • Elizabeth Nance (Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation) • Amy Carmola (United Way of Northwest Vermont)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Franklin/Grand Isle Hunger Council
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer and staff time for survey creation, distribution, and analysis • Funding for survey printing and distribution – possibly from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vermont Department of Health (check with Suzanne Kelly) ○ Rise VT

Action 1.3: Increase community recognition of the value of the Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative for promoting farm to school and local food education and access.

What this is and why it is important	The Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative is a regional food systems program supporting the growers, producers, and consumers in Franklin and Grand Isle County. Healthy Roots has played a central role in providing programs and services for consumers and producers in northwest Vermont that focus on food education, access, and infrastructure. Given the programs and connections the organization has developed, ensuring its long-term viability is an important step for achieving the goal to address real and perceived barriers to accessing local food. More community recognition of the collaborative’s value would help it meet its fundraising goals that are necessary to continue current programming and expand into new areas. This recognition can be gained by presentations to school boards, the Select Board, and organizations that might provide financial support. For example, Healthy Roots could advocate with city council and school districts for prioritizing farm-to-school funding, and develop a “business plan” that outlines a budget, goals, and measurable outcomes for farm-to-school programming that will continue to grow.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet fundraising goals in existing fundraising plan

Action 1.3: Increase community recognition of the value of the Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative for promoting farm to school and local food education and access.

Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research examples of successful programs like Healthy Roots from other communities (e.g., Fairfield’s dedicated position focused on outdoor education) by November 2019. • Prepare written and verbal success stories that demonstrate the impact of Healthy Roots by November 2019. • Present to city council, community groups, municipalities, and schools about Healthy Roots’ mission and programming beginning November 2019 and ongoing.
Lead	Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Roots Advisory Board • Local Foods, Local Places steering committee
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers to help advocate • Case studies, reports, and success stories • A “business plan” that outlines a budget, goals, and outcomes for farm-to-school programming continuing to grow

Goal 2: Support existing and establish new, financially viable local distribution channels to support local agricultural producers and buyers.

Distribution can be challenging for small producers who do not have enough volume to support the needed infrastructure or supply major buyers. Likewise, many small buyers do not make purchases large enough to justify a delivery from a large distributor. A local food aggregation and distribution system can help connect growers and buyers, supporting a more robust local food system. This goal is about building on past efforts to create local distribution channels so that growers have a larger market and buyers can find sources for local food.

Action 2.1: Explore distribution services for institutions.

What this is and why it is important	<p>Pumpkin Village North is one of the few local food distribution channels serving Franklin County, but most of the current buyers are grocery stores, not institutions. The Abbey Group, which manages food service for the school system, would like to incorporate local food into school menus, but with approximately 50 schools, it is uncertain whether there is enough local food available to meet their needs. Pumpkin Village North could help find and/or develop another distribution service able to supply the Abbey Group with the food it needs would create more opportunity for local farmers, diversity the local food market, and supply school children with more healthy, fresh produce, helping to educate them about its value.</p>
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Action 2.1: Explore distribution services for institutions.	
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of schools supplied with local food • Number of producers supplying food to schools • Volume of food supplied to schools • Value of the product sold – must be enough to cover the cost of the service • Percentage of school food that is local (by value)
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations have already begun • School deliveries by fall 2020 • Assess progress in spring 2021 to see if everyone is satisfied
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seth Wolcott-MacCausland (Pumpkin Village Foods) • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nina Hansen (Abbey Group) • Angus Baldwin (West Farm) • Abbie Nelson • Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets • Elijah Massey, USDA Rural Development
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer and staff time • List of products (able to be produced locally) that each institution would consider purchasing • Identification of price, volume, and seasonal requirements that would create/preclude purchasing opportunity • Financial incentives for buyers to purchase product, perhaps from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Existing farm to school grant ○ Working Lands Grant or Local Food Market Development Grant from Vermont Agency of Agriculture ○ USDA Value-Added Producer Grant

Action 2.2: Hold more Healthy Roots mixers to introduce growers, makers, and buyers in a social setting.	
What this is and why it is important	<p>Healthy Roots has held two events to connect growers and buyers: one in Grand Isle in 2017 and one in Franklin County in 2018. These mixers were considered successful, but that success depended on considerable follow-up work with participants to help with matchmaking. Continuing this activity would help build on the initial progress. Events could be held in the winter during the slow farm season, and they could be low-key/low-cost events to reduce the financial burden of hosting them.</p>
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of attendees at events • Amount of local purchasing generated • Number of producers receiving technical assistance
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next mixer in December 2019 • Events could be quarterly if hosting duties were shared

Action 2.2: Hold more Healthy Roots mixers to introduce growers, makers, and buyers in a social setting.

Lead	Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emily Alger (South Hero Land Trust) • Producers to share hosting duties
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venue for events (possibly provided by producers) • Funding to staff and host events, possibly provided by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Producers ○ Vermont Fresh if it receives USDA funding the organization applied for to hold mixers throughout the region

Action 2.3: Research potential on-line platforms to connect wholesale buyers and growers.

What this is and why it is important	Healthy Roots has used an online platform (Your Farmstand) to connect growers and buyers. Local Food Marketplace is one possible software that could also help do this. An on-line system would be always available to growers and buyers and would streamline communication, removing the need to invest so much time in matchmaking. However, a client management system is needed first and might meet Healthy Roots' needs. This action entails researching options and deciding on the best mechanism to connect wholesale buyers and growers.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination that a platform meeting these needs exists • Number of growers and buyers using the platform • Volume of food available/needed that is matched
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision on whether to launch by fall 2020
Lead	Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annie Harlow (VT Sustainable Jobs Funds) • Jake Claro (VT Sustainable Jobs Funds)
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for infrastructure • Time to develop the platform—need to identify funding for a staff person to do this • USDA Rural Business Development Grant could potentially support

Action 2.4: Make Rail City Market a pick-up location for pre-ordered fresh, local food.

What this is and why it is important	Rail City Market offers a small selection of fresh, local food, but it has struggled with balancing the need to stock only as much as can be sold before it spoils and consistently stocking enough so that customers can rely on it being there when they shop. Offering pick-ups for fresh food that is pre-ordered through a CSA, on-line farmers market, or direct sales with a farmer (such as for turkeys at Thanksgiving), could help address this challenge while also offering another venue downtown for residents to get fresh, local food. Offering pick-ups would benefit Rail City Market by bringing more customers into the store while also giving producers a convenient way to make deliveries of small orders.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new customers visiting Rail City Market • Number of pick-ups at the market • Number of growers using the market for pick-ups • Amount of storage space used (as a measure of volume of food sold)
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store redesign to accommodate cold storage for food within 1 year • Coolers in place after funding for them is identified
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashley Cleare (Rail City Market)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) – help with grant writing for coolers • Abbey Willard (Vermont Agency of Agriculture) – help connecting with farmers
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Store layout redesign: Ron Batcher, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service • Funding for coolers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SBA Microloan program ○ Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Grant ○ USDA Rural Business Development Grant program – would need a non-profit or municipal applicant. The applicant would own the cooler for its useful life, however Rail City could use 25 percent of the cooler space for activity not directly related to the project purpose (fresh food pick-ups).

Goal 3: Increase the number of outlets (e.g., schools, institutions, retailers, social service providers) in St. Albans City procuring local food and taking steps to reduce food waste.

Although St. Albans City has a long history as an agricultural region and is surrounded by land in agricultural production, there are few outlets for residents and visitors to purchase fresh, local food downtown. Most local food that is available is in the form of shelf-stable, value-added products. This goal is about increasing the supply of fresh, local food available in existing downtown outlets, complementing goal 1 to increase demand and goal 2 to connect buyers and growers.

Action 3.1: Explore extending the St. Albans Farmers Market year-round.

<p>What this is and why it is important</p>	<p>St. Albans City currently has a seasonal farmers market operating late May through the end of September. A winter farmers market could build on the existing market, helping to develop the habit among residents to buy a portion of their groceries from local producers. Season extension strategies like high tunnels, value-added products, and meat/dairy could ensure that residents have access to local food year-round and provide a more consistent income for producers.</p> <p>This effort would begin with a question on the Healthy Roots’ annual farmers market survey to see if there is interest in either a winter farmers market or a winter CSA share, possibly with pickups at Rail City Market to support Action 2.4. If there is insufficient interest among St. Albans vendors, those from nearby markets could be asked to participate.</p>
<p>Measures of success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of producers at the market • Market sales • Number of customers at the market
<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Open for Winter 2020-2021</p>
<p>Lead</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer farmers market staff • Northwest Healthy Roots?
<p>Supporting cast</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) • Alissa Matthews (Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets) • Christine Kubacz (Foggy Brook Farm; Local Fare) • Jeff Teitelbaum (farmers market board)
<p>Needed resources and possible sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An indoor location for the market, e.g., a church, school, or city hall • Information on best practices – Champlain Island Farmers Market • Funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vermont Agency of Agriculture will potentially have a possible new funding program that could be used ○ USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Food Promotion Program

Action 3.2: Expand retail space and infrastructure (e.g., coolers) in Rail City Market so it can carry more local food.

What this is and why it is important	<p>Rail City Market currently carries a small selection of local food, but space is limited, particularly space for products that require refrigeration or freezing. This action is about expanding the retail space into the unused back portion of the store and adding refrigerators and freezers. Although related to Action 2.4 (making rail city market a pick-up location for pre-ordered fresh food), this action is about stocking rail city with products that would be available to all customers during all open hours. Rail City Market would be able to bring more customers into the store with more inventory, making it a one-stop destination for food; producers, residents, and visitors would have a local food retail outlet downtown, and the city would benefit by having a destination that highlights what is special and local to the area.</p> <p>The store expansion could also potentially include space for food demonstrations or classes that would further help generate interest in and support for local food.</p>
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of local food sales • Overall sales in the store
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start conversations now • Implementation by late 2020
Lead	Ashley Cleare (Rail City Market)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northwest Healthy Roots • Annie Harlow (Farm to Plate) – retailer tour and direct TA
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Store layout redesign: Ron Batcher, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service • Funding for coolers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ St. Albans city loan programs ○ SBA Microloan program ○ Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Grant ○ Vermont Local Food Market Development Grant

Action 3.3: Explore establishing a democratically owned food co-op.

What this is and why it is important	<p>A food co-op in St. Albans would provide a regular source of local food and give residents ownership over the enterprise, allowing them to make decisions like having a “green” store that buys local, seeks to reduce wasted food, and minimizes packaging waste. A food co-op could improve local food access by giving residents a place where all feel welcome to shop, addressing some of the perceived barriers among low-income individuals about shopping at the farmers market.</p> <p>This action involves determining if there is sufficient demand among potential customers for more local food, whether this need can be met by existing businesses, and whether a co-op would negatively affect existing businesses.</p>
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Action 3.3: Explore establishing a democratically owned food co-op.

Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diverse and inclusive steering committee is established that represents the population in terms of race, socioeconomic status, etc. • Steering committee meets regularly.
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering committee members identified by December 2019 • First meeting by January 2020
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Auer • Angie Sturm • Cynthia Livingston • Marianne Hunkin
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brother Bob Begley (Martha’s Community Kitchen) • Robert Ostermeyer (Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action) • Tim Smith (City of St. Albans) • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) • Other co-ops: Morrisville, Buffalo Mountain Co-op • Ashley Cleare (Rail City Market)
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and guidance on starting a food co-op <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the Food Co-op Initiative ○ the Indiana Cooperative Development Center • Funding for market analyses and feasibility studies – USDA Agricultural Research Service Local Food Promotion Program

Action 3.4: Approach Food City about Increasing the amount of local food sold in the grocery store.

What this is and why it is important	<p>Food City is an employee-owned grocery store, the only full-service grocer in downtown St. Albans City. It is walkable for many residents, and an important outlet for those who can’t or don’t want to drive to one of the grocery stores outside of the city. Offering local food in the grocery store is an important avenue for improving access to local food as it is the primary source of groceries for many St. Albans residents. Pumpkin Village Foods North is already supplying Food City with products from five northwest Vermont producers. However, Food City does not generally advertise which produce is locally produced. This action is about encouraging Food City both to increase the amount of local food purchased and market to consumers when local food is available. If more residents understood that Food city supports local producers, it could attract new customers who want to support them.</p>
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of local producers selling food in Food City • Amount of sales of local food in Food City
Timeframe	Begin conversations with Food City corporate office by fall 2019
Lead	Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots)

Action 3.4: Approach Food City about Increasing the amount of local food sold in the grocery store.

Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chip Sawyer (City of St. Albans) • Angie Sturm
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to initiate conversations • Connection to Food City corporate owner (Zak Schlar) – Chris Beling (EPA) is able to make an introduction.

Action 3.5: Explore possible efficiencies in how recovered food from farms and supermarkets moves throughout the region.

What this is and why it is important	A sizeable portion of the population in St. Albans City is food insecure. Recovering wholesome food from farms (gleaning) and from supermarkets before it is discarded helps to reduce food waste and provides a much-needed resource for residents. Under Vermont’s Universal Recycling Law, food waste will be banned from disposal in trash and landfills after July 1, 2020, increasing the supply of recovered food. Although there are multiple programs for food recovery, this action tries to ensure that they operate as efficiently as they can, minimizing the amount of food that spoils before reaching consumers.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting to explore options occurs. • Existing gaps in the charitable food system are identified.
Timeframe	Fall 2019
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) • Robert Ostermeyer (Northwest Family Foods)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Barbara Weinstein
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermont Food Bank • Gleaning grants (foundation)

Goal 4: Build a culture supporting local producers and food entrepreneurs by incorporating local food into downtown plans, branding, and events.

Downtown St. Albans City has achieved considerable success with recent revitalization efforts, with many new businesses, frequent events, and improved infrastructure attracting tourists and residents to frequent the area. However, few of these initiatives have explicitly incorporated food or built on the city’s agricultural heritage. This action is about incorporating local food across all of the city’s efforts as a way to build broad support among residents for the idea that local food is an important part of the city’s future.

Action 4.1: Establish a vehicle for marketing local food and producers in Franklin and Grand Isle counties.

What this is and why it is important	In Good Taste is an annual event sponsored by Northwest Healthy Roots that showcases specialty cuisine, regional wines, beers, and spirits, all locally sourced, grown, or manufactured. This event raises the visibility of local producers and establishments, attracts people to the community and demonstrates the interest in local food. However, outside of this event, most St. Albans businesses do not advertise that they sell local food. Vermont Fresh is currently used throughout the state to identify local products. This action entails determining whether use of Vermont Fresh would work for St. Albans City or whether broader use of the Healthy Roots Collaborative logo could help establish the city as a local food destination for the region. One consideration is the criteria that Vermont Fresh uses for inclusion.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement reached on a brand/logo for local food in St. Albans City • Number of people who recognize the brand. • Number of participating businesses that use the brand.
Timeframe	6 months to decide on a brand and begin marketing it to businesses
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Koi Boynton (Northwest Healthy Roots) • Chip Sawyer (City of St. Albans)
Supporting cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Albans City Downtown Board • Lisa Marie Charlesworth (Chamber of Commerce) • Northwest Healthy Roots Advisory Committee
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding – USDA Agricultural Marketing Program Local Food Promotion Program • Social media coordination • Networking

Action 4.2: Build the celebration of local food and procurement into city and regional plans as they are created or revised.

What this is and why it is important	St. Albans City has the opportunity to better integrate support for the local food system into city and regional plans. A clear indication that local food is part of the area's culture and worthy of nurturing would help to ensure that as programs, policies, and projects are developed, they incorporate local food.
Measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of plans that specifically support the local food system
Timeframe	TBD
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chip Sawyer (St. Albans City) • Bethany Remmers (Northwest Regional Planning Commission)
Supporting cast	
Needed resources and possible sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time

Other actions under goal 1:

- Include high school students in the design and creation of marketing and education materials on local food.
- Develop internship programs for local high school students, engaging them in the local food system—farms, restaurants, and service providers.
- Connect youth (especially at-risk youth) to farm internships by posting on a jobs-volunteer board in town, at school, at a community garden site, or at the co-op.
- Find local schools farm to school programs (allow for line items in the budget).
- Broaden the impact of or institute farm to school programs.
- Institute community learning gardens.
- Identify and create a network of food and farm educators that can deliver food education at schools and in communities.
- Identify who is not accessing local foods and reach out to them to find out what would they like to see in a market/co-op so that they would use it.
- “Reverse distribution”—figure out when/where people without access to healthy food go and supply there, e.g., at health clinics.
- Increase school’s farm to school programing and nutrition education curriculum at every grade level.
- Establish intergenerational committees to address food insecurity.
- Reach parents by promoting healthy food through their kids, e.g., more school programs.
- Develop Healthy Roots Collaborative shares program – use heath coaches/professionals to provide education—train the trainer for hospital staff.
- Provide meals and childcare for families to make this work more accessible.
- Extend an invitation to Abenaki Tribal Council to participate in the Local Foods, Local Places process.
- Educate and market the economic and community benefits of buying local—through schools, businesses, hospital, events, etc.
- Raise visibility of the facts of food insecurity as necessary to understand the reality of the community.
- Add curriculum for value-added food processing to culinary program at Northwest Tech school.
- Develop and implement a food systems curriculum in area high schools/tech centers.
- Create a 10-15 person steering committee to continue exploring the establishment of a food co-op in St. Albans.
- Put up community voice boards to get ideas from everyone about needs and what they want to see.
- Increase resources for backyard gardens for dairy farmworkers who live on-farm, especially immigrants (UVM Extension does some of this already).
- Direct education funding and donated/gleaned fresh food to Missisquoi Abenaki food shelf in Swanton.
- Start with younger kids—day cares, pre- and middle schools—with more local food access and money to do so. Visits to farms/hands-on activities.
- Establish facilitated, ongoing community conversations designed to reveal social and economic barriers to secure local food systems.
- Hold periodic gatherings of those who use the food shelf to share and eat a local food recipe and check in on their opinions.
- Build community gardens/greenhouses outside of Food City.
- Create a giving tree so people can purchase a CSA for a family for the holidays.

- Increase free and low-cost cooking classes offered by Norther Tier Centers for Health and anyone else already offering them.
- Host cooking classes during the farmers market using products from the market.
- Provide regular community cooking and preparation classes.
- Create a community kitchen/resource to teach food preparation skills/strategies to anyone interested. Partner with Healthy Roots? Hospital? Department of Health/WIC?
- Secure funding for the hospital's prescription CSA program. Somehow get CSA shares to low-income families.
- Establish a "Pay what you can" or a "Give or take" produce pantry at Martha's Kitchen, at other community spots, and school programming events.

Other actions under goal 2:

- Collect statewide distribution data to identify support services that already exist or could be built upon.
- Identify all the current small and mid-sized distribution systems and their needs and opportunities.
- Identify strategies to grow existing distribution channels.
- Work with Vermont Fresh Network and regional waste districts to link restaurants with farmers and food waste processors.
- Make existing commercial kitchens (possibly at schools) available to rent by food entrepreneurs.
- Expand utilization of kitchen space at Martha's Kitchen.
- Create and incubator kitchen for local producers and food entrepreneurs to create value-added projects.
- Develop a supply chair for dairy/beef in schools.
- Market Rail City Market as a place to purchase local or hard-to-find food products; create a buyers club for items not stocked in the store.
- Use the rail trail as a place to sell and market local food products and businesses—an opportunity to reach new customers.
- Create a local growers association for centralized warehousing and distribution.

Other actions under goal 3:

- Have conversations with each outlet about what local food they would buy but can't find and what they would buy if money didn't matter.
- Financially incentivize producers to contribute to food security programs, i.e., nonprofits.
- Conduct a market assessment for locally produced food in St. Albans City.
- Increase the number of producers who accept SNAP.
- Work with statewide partners to support retail in layout, buying local, procurement in general, and marketing.
- Create a broker position to connect growers to Hannaford, Food City, and Price Chopper.
- Conduct in-person surveys at Walmart, Hannaford, Rail City, and Price Chopper to learn their barriers beyond price to purchasing or finding local foods.
- Connect with our community west of Main Street to assess interest in a food co-op.
- Create a committee to explore approaching Northwest Correctional Institute on expanding a farm connection for their food supply.

- Connect with the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and Annie Harlow who are doing education and matchmaking to independent growers.
- Begin serving whole milk in schools.
- Invest in the storefront and parking lot to make Food City more inviting to all shoppers.

Other actions under goal 4:

- Create a window decal program and map for businesses that sell food from the region.
- Create a cohesive ad campaign promoting food producers of Franklin County across Vermont and New England.
- Have a competition for a logo that brands eat/buy local Franklin/Grand Isle foods and have a rollout campaign where food assets display it.
- Create local food stories about what is working for traditional and social media outlets.
- Create a new marketing campaign that highlights availability of local food downtown.
- Work with the city to create local food marketing efforts.
- Build on existing ag events and cross promote events to establish food culture regionwide.
- Increase the presence/visibility of locally produced food at existing city events.
- Plan events that combine the celebration of local food and recreation. Keep this in front of mind when developing infrastructure, e.g., breweries and mountain biking, lake activity and food trucks, pick-your-own farms and hiking.
- Emphasize local grown/owned businesses during Maple Fest.
- Complete bike paths and develop a bike-based local tourism guide.
- Establish farm and producer tours.
- Bring CAP and GAP food certification training to St. Albans (UVM Extension).
- Launch a local currency (Franklin francs).

IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

In the first weeks after the workshop, work was already underway in St. Albans City to begin implementation of the action plan.

- Farm to School is launching a School Leaders Campaign, working with school boards in Maple Run and Franklin Northeast about committing a percentage of their procurement to local food and funding a regional farm-to-school coordinator (Action 1.3).
- Healthy Roots is continuing discussions with Pumpkin Village and The Abbey Group about distribution of local foods into the school system. There was a meeting about prices and volume. Healthy Roots is looking into grants for distribution (Action 2.1).
- Another buyer-seller mixer is scheduled for December 3 at Snow Farm Vineyard in South Hero (Action 2.2).
- Healthy Roots is providing technical assistance to Rail City Market and the farmers market.
- Johanna Setta connected with the Vermont Fresh Network about their database of producers and buyers and determined that this could be used regionally rather than building the infrastructure independently (Action 2.3).

- Rail City Market is getting a loan from the city for refrigerators as part of the infrastructure changes explored at the workshop to enable the market to stock more fresh, local food (Action 3.2).

APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Workshop Exercise Results
- Appendix B – Workshop Sign-in Sheets
- Appendix C – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix D – Community Data Profile
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – Reference