

What is the Farm Viability Program?

The Farm Viability Program provides Vermont farmers with business planning services combined with technical assistance. A \$75 enrollment fee is charged to farmers participating in the Program.

Who is Eligible to Apply?

Vermont farmers who own or lease farmland are eligible to apply. Applicants should also have at least 3 years prior farm experience and \$10,000 or more of gross farm income in the previous year. These criteria may be waived in special cases.

What Services Are Available?

Business planning and targeted technical assistance are provided. Business planning is a tool that is used in much of the business world to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, to strategize for success, and to inform prospective lenders and investors about an enterprise. Now, more and more farmers are discovering the advantages of business planning.

What's Involved?

Applicants must be willing to devote time to a series of meetings with a farm business management consultant and with selected technical specialists. Meetings occur on the participant's farm. Applicants need to write down goals and objectives, provide data to the management consultant, and help him or her to make a complete assessment of the farm business. Farmers who have already identified possible directions for the farm business can often benefit most from the process.

On the front: Tony and Christine Brown of Randolph Center worked with the Intervale and NOFA-VT to develop business and marketing plans. They constructed a second greenhouse for their vegetable and ornamental business, which complements their small dairy. Bob Eddy photos

The process begins with setting goals and identifying management problems or opportunities. A complete set of farm financial data is assembled from the owner's records. From there, the process may focus on production, markets, efficiency, infrastructure, or any other aspect of the farm operation. The final product is a written document that describes how the farmer expects to meet the identified goals and be profitable in the foreseeable future.

Here's How to Apply

A two-page application form is required of all applicants. Applicants are enrolled quarterly with application deadlines on February 28, May 31, August 31 and November 30. After submitting an application, you may be contacted and asked to provide additional information. The application form is available from the service providers listed at right, or by contacting the Program at the address below. The form is also available on the website: www.vhcb.org/viability.html

“What I like about the Viability Program is that it's one-on-one. You can formulate a plan that's custom-tailored, so I think the money is more efficient in helping, and the long-term effect is better. Now I can concentrate on quality.”

— Christine Brown

Please call, write, or email with any questions:
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Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program
58 East State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05602
telephone: 802-828-2117
email: ela@vhcb.org
website: www.vhcb.org/viability.html

Who are the Service Providers?

The Vermont Farm Viability Program contracts with a variety of service providers to work with farmers enrolled in the program. Subject to availability, a farmer who is accepted into the program may work with a consultant suggested by the program director including independent farm business consultants or business advisors at:

Intervale Center

**Northeast Organic Farming Association-VT
UVM Extension**

Working Landscapes (based in Massachusetts;
available mostly in southern Vermont)

Other Grants and Services

Additional Technical Assistance

Once enrolled in the Program, a participant may opt for additional assistance from professionals or farmer mentors who can help with strategies developed in the business plan. The Viability Program will pay for these services up to certain limits.

Implementation Grants

Farmers who have completed business plans with the program are eligible to apply for Implementation Grants to help complete business plan projects. Implementation grants for capital improvements and expenditures range from \$2,000–\$8,000.

Agricultural Processing,

Distribution and Marketing Grants

Competitive grants are available for agriculture-related businesses providing processing, distribution and marketing for Vermont agricultural products. Annual grant rounds may focus on specific types of proposals. Call or email for more information.



Liberty Hill Farm in Rochester. The Kennetts have a 160-cow registered Holstein herd and run an agri-tourism bed and breakfast at the farm. The family utilized business planning services from the Viability Program.

The Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program

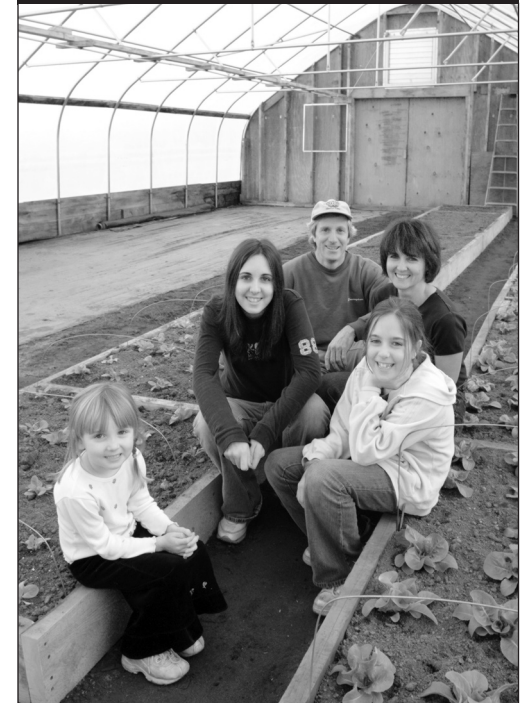
In response to concerns over the changing economics of Vermont agriculture, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets started the Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program in 2003. Since its inception, the Program has assisted more than 230 farmers to complete business plans.

The Vermont Farm Viability Program is funded by VHCB, which is supported by the Vermont Legislature, as well as by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and private foundations such as the John Merck Fund. VHCB makes grants of state and federal funds to conserve agricultural and recreational land, historic properties, and natural areas and to develop affordable housing for Vermonters. Since 1987, in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and private land trusts, VHCB has funded the purchase of development rights to conserve more than 128,400 acres on 500 Vermont farms.

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and employer.*

Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program
58 East State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

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Helping Farmers Plan for Business Success

*A program of the
Vermont Housing &
Conservation Board
in collaboration with the
Vermont Agency of
Agriculture, Food and Markets
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USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service
USDA Rural Development
John Merck Fund
& other private foundations*