

# farm to plate

## NETWORK

### OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

The purpose of the [Farm to Plate Network](#) is to enable coordinated collaboration among organizations across Vermont to achieve the [25 goals](#) of Vermont's [Farm to Plate Strategic Plan](#) and to enhance the participating organizations' ability to meet their goals.

The three overarching outcomes of the F2P Strategic Plan, as authorized by the Vermont Legislature, are to:

- increase economic development in Vermont's food system
- create jobs in the food system economy
- improve access to healthy foods for all Vermonters

In 10 years, as a result of our collective efforts, Vermont will be the national leader in food system vitality, equity, sustainability, and innovative best practices that become ubiquitous across agriculture and food systems in the United States.

#### OUR SHARED VALUES

**Equity**— We strive to build a food system where fresh, healthy, local/regional food is accessible, available and utilized by all Vermonters.

**Interdependent and collaborative**—The F2P Network is built on the strength of relationships and trust within the Network and is inherently interdependent. The Network recognizes that collective impact is greater than the impact any organization can achieve alone.

**Decentralized shared leadership and accountability**—The F2P Network recognizes the need for shared leadership and responsibility across many organizations to accomplish the broad set of strategies needed to achieve the F2P Goals.

**Transparent and inclusive**—The F2P Network values open communication and includes a diverse array of organizations.

**Systems thinking**—We live in a world of linked systems—from local to regional to global. The F2P network values understanding the “whole” while others are moving the “parts” forward.

**Data driven**—Our strategies and action plans are based upon analysis of data and on-the-ground experience; indicators of progress are tracked and reviewed by the F2P Network so that our programs and initiatives can be evidence based and best practices can be replicated.

**Deliberate**—We value intentional and ongoing reflection and performance evaluation to ensure we stay focused, relevant and adaptive to changing conditions in the marketplace.

## Farm to Plate Network Structure: Accelerating Collective Impact

The F2P Network was adapted from the network governance model first developed by [RE-AMP](#) and the [Collective Impact](#) research findings of John Kania and Mark Kramer as discussed in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. The “five conditions of collective impact” are:

- **Common agenda:** the F2P Strategic Plan articulates a shared vision and identifies ways to strengthen Vermont’s food system over the next ten years.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** the F2P Network reflects and supports existing programs, projects, and organizations; and seeks to advance new ideas in a coordinated fashion.
- **Continuous communication:** the F2P Network and the Vermont Food System Atlas provide new opportunities for communication and collaboration.
- **Shared measurement:** The F2P Goals and measurements described in Chapter 2 link the analysis of the Plan with the actions and progress of the Network.
- **Backbone support:** VSJF provides logistical support to coordinate the F2P Network and maximize the collective impact of the F2P Strategic Plan, maintains the Vermont Food System Atlas, and publishes annual indicators of progress.

## Joining the Farm to Plate Network

Membership is open to all farms, food enterprises and food system related trade associations, coops, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, private funders, and community groups. To ensure a high degree of accountability within the Network, individuals cannot become members. Members function at the “boots on the ground” level and are the entities responsible for working to implement the strategies identified in the F2P Strategic Plan. Members continue to maintain their own autonomy and decision making authority and are responsible for their own organizational needs (e.g., funding, staffing).

F2P Network members agree to work towards the F2P’s 25 goals, share information, respond to inquiries and requests from the Network Coordinator, and participate in at least one Working Group, Task Force or Cross-Cutting Team. Members are encouraged to designate a point person to go through network development and results based accountability training, and aid communication within the Network, especially through the [Vermont Food System Atlas](#).

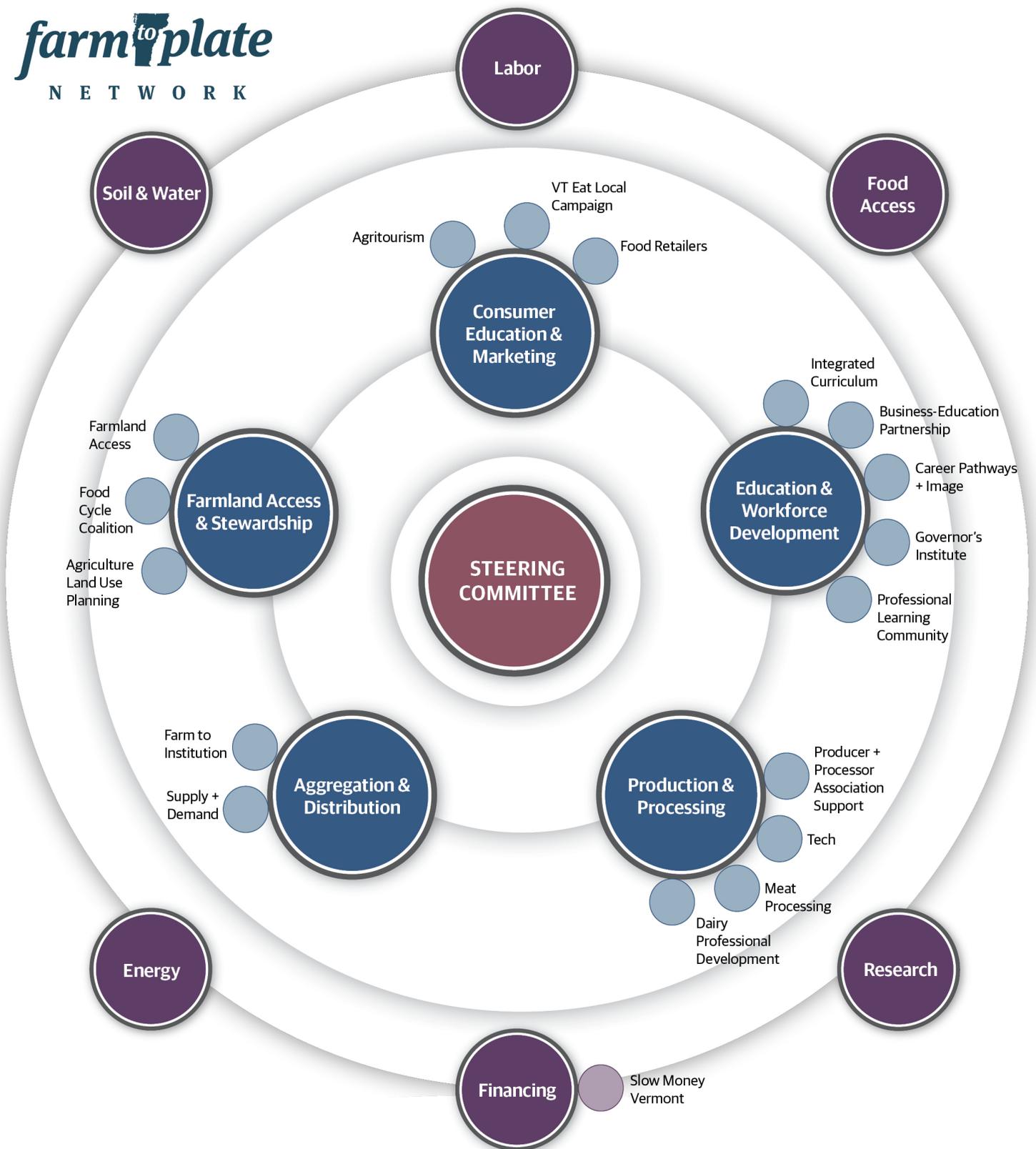
## COMMON AGENDA: Farm to Plate Strategic Plan

The [Vermont Food System Atlas](#) features thousands of food system resources, including stories, videos, job listings, tons of data, a searchable map, and all sections of the [F2P Strategic Plan](#). Network members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with sections of the Plan that are most relevant to their work.



### Farm to Plate Network Guiding Principles:

- 🍓 The Network builds on the strength of food system stakeholders and does not create a new organization
- 🍓 It provides ample benefits to members, including greater connection between organizations, accessing shared information and resources, and helps organizations accomplish their own goals (e.g., increasing food security, increasing the number of food system jobs)
- 🍓 We acknowledge that strategies are accomplished by nonprofit organizations, for-profit private businesses, and state-led programs and initiatives "on the ground"
- 🍓 It is built upon the principle that form follows functions and maintains a 'for the greater good' perspective
- 🍓 It is nimble and adaptive (able to evolve and change form over time, as needed); the Network and our work would not collapse if the political leadership of the state turned unsupportive
- 🍓 We engage together in disciplined reflection to ensure that the F2P Network is operating efficiently and effectively towards reaching the F2P goals and is able to take advantage of emergent opportunities
- 🍓 Working in a networked way expands the pie of capital available throughout the food system rather than slicing the existing pie thinner; the F2P Network should not detract from members ability to obtain capital for their own organizations / businesses / farms
- 🍓 Our funding partners recognize that the F2P Network serves as vital, connective infrastructure for all member organizations working to implement F2P goals and that the F2P Network needs sufficient, predictable, multi-year funding in addition to financial support of its individual members
- 🍓 Members have ample time to build relationships and enjoy collaborating with one another; we're not just about being serious in our meetings together!



F2P Network Coordination

F2P Network Fund



Special Convenings & Trainings

Learning & Implementation Progress Report

VSJF as Network Coordinator: Backbone Support Structure for the F2P Network

## REINFORCING ACTIVITIES: Working Groups (WG)

Working Groups (WG) are at the core of the F2P Network. WGs function at the 15,000 foot elevation level. All F2P implementation efforts are coordinated through these groups—one for each major lever which will enhance Vermont's food system and help reach F2P's 25 goals. Each WG takes responsibility for a set of goals, strategies and indicators from the F2P Plan to further develop, implement and monitor annually. Working groups may add to or subtract from these strategies in order to adapt to changes in the marketplace and/or new information about the feasibility of a given strategy. Each WG devises its own annual work and funding plans and identifies potential resources for their selected high impact strategies.

Organizations and business representatives may join any number of Working Groups, but they must commit to being active participants. WGs meet 4 times per year, or as often as each WG decides for itself. WGs identify which organization(s) are already taking a 'boots on the ground' leadership role in advancing a particular strategy so as not to duplicate efforts. If a particular strategy does not yet have a champion, the WG will decide how best to proceed with implementing the strategy. In consultation with the Steering Committee, working groups may be added as new priority levers are identified or disbanded as food system changes are achieved.

Each WG selects a chairperson, who helps set the agenda and coordinates work among participants. Staffing for the WG will change whenever a new WG Chair is selected. This ensures that the leadership is distributed across the network and that resources are going to member organizations rather than only funding one organization to do it all. As funding allows, the chair of the WG will receive some level of funding to help cover the expenses associated with the administration and program needs of the WG.

The F2P Network currently consists of five Working Groups:

- 🍏 **Consumer Education and Marketing**: key issues for this WG include educating Vermonters about the health, economic, and other benefits of shifting a portion of their food dollars to locally and regionally produced food; making local food more accessible to Vermonters of all income levels; helping Vermonters learn how to grow and cook fresh food at home; developing creative marketing initiatives and online platforms that tell the story of Vermont food products.
- 🍏 **Education and Workforce Development**: key issues for this WG include developing a life-long learning continuum that is accessible, seamless, rigorous, coordinated, and supports the development of skillsets necessary for a 21st century food system.
- 🍏 **Production and Processing**: key issues for this WG include developing a more coordinated, collaborative, rigorous, accessible, and geographically dispersed technical and business assistance continuum of services, appropriate to the stage of development, scale of operation and market outlets of Vermont producers and processors. It also focuses on identifying ways to support the continued development of the dairy industry and diversified producers interested in scaling up their operations to sell into wholesale and retail markets locally and regionally.

🍌 **Aggregation and Distribution:** key issues for this WG include developing a more regionalized, smaller scale, adaptive, affordable, and accessible storage and distribution system in order to enhance and expand the distribution of food within the region, especially to large institutions and locally owned retailers.

🍌 **Farmland Access and Stewardship:** key issues for this WG include enhancing the suite of existing and emerging programs for conserving land and expanding access to land, including conservation easement programs, cooperative land management arrangements, expanding composting infrastructure and farm incubator programs.

## REINFORCING ACTIVITIES: Working Group Task Force (TF)

Working Groups may form any number of Task Forces (TF) in order to implement various strategies and high impact action projects, at the ground level. They can be tasked with specific strategies and indicators to further develop, implement and monitor. Pre-existing multi-stakeholder groups (e.g., VT Farm to School Network, VT New Farmer Network, Dairy Marketing Council, Regional Food Centers Network, Sustainable Ag Council) may serve as logical TFs within a given Working Group. TFs will meet as needed. TF members do not necessarily need to be WG members, but they do need to be members of the F2P Network. TFs are created and disbanded as needed.

## REINFORCING ACTIVITIES: Cross-Cutting Teams (CCT)

Cross-Cutting Teams (CCT) provide outreach to and involvement of specific constituents, serve as a liaison between the F2P Network and other statewide networks, and function at the 7,500 foot level. CCTs can serve as "community of practice" groups to share best practices and information across the network. CCTs will play a consultative role to the F2P Network and act as liaisons to various WGs and individual stakeholder groups – both within and outside of the F2P Network. So far six CCTs have formed – **Financing**; **Research**; **Food Access**; **Soils & Water**; **Labor**; and **Energy**. Most CCTs meet 2 - 3 times per year.

## REINFORCING ACTIVITIES: Steering Committee (SC)

The **Steering Committee** provides overall network governance and functions at the 30,000 foot level. It is responsible for maintaining F2P's systems perspective by identifying gaps in strategies, developing processes for learning, organizing the annual F2P Network Gathering, approving mini-grant requests from the Farm to Plate Network Fund, and shaping the evolution of the network infrastructure over time. It is comprised of 10 members, including the five working group chairs, the chair of the Food Access Cross-cutting Team, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, a representative of the VT Agriculture & Forest Products Development Board, and a representative of the VT Food Funders Network. Additional members representing other CCTs may be added at a later time. The Steering Committee also acts as a mediator if there is disagreement within WGs or between WGs about tasks, roles, responsibilities, and activities.

## CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION: Vermont Farm to Plate Website

The [Vermont Farm to Plate website](#) (also known as the VT Food Atlas) is an online platform that enables information sharing and collaboration. It houses all the elements of the F2P Strategic Plan. Working groups each have pages to populate with updates, shared files, and other information. The list-serve function sends out rapid communication to group members. Members are able to upload documents, news and events, videos and job postings. It also contains a robust, GIS-based mapping function. The website also serves as a state-wide clearinghouse to host information and data collected at the local level (e.g., town planning commissions, local food groups, schools, etc.), and at the regional level (e.g., regional planning commissions, economic development agencies, food hubs, etc.).

## SHARED MEASUREMENT: Results Based Accountability

The Farm to Plate Network is using Results Based Accountability (developed by Mark Friedman) as our shared measurement framework. The RBA framework distinguishes between results for whole populations (i.e., population indicators) and results for particular programs, organizations, or services (i.e., performance measurements). A F2P Network Progress Report annually tracks activities across the Network. An annual report of F2P Plan progress and outcomes to date is also provided annually to the Governor, Vermont Legislature, and F2P Network members.

## NETWORK COORDINATOR: Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

The Network is supported by staff based at the VSJF to provide overall Network Coordination. The VSJF does not have a formal seat on the Steering Committee but rather provides a range of services to the Network each year. The Network Coordinator provides administrative support to the Steering Committee, attends meetings and supports the WGs, TFs, and CCTs, gathers data and reports on indicators of progress to the Legislature each year, revises the F2P Strategic Plan as needed, develops and maintains the Farm to Plate website, organizes the annual F2P Network Gathering and other network related trainings over time, and assists with major fundraising efforts that support the work of Network members and strategy implementation.

**The F2P Network Fund** supports time sensitive WG, TF or CCT projects which will lead to high impact projects being implemented. Decisions on which projects to support are made by the Steering Committee. Once high impact projects have been fully scoped out and full project costs have been determined, project stakeholders, philanthropic funding partners, the State of Vermont and others will work together to secure project funding.

**The F2P Network Gathering** is an annual 2-day strategic planning retreat for Network members. It provides an opportunity for members to dive deep into emerging issues and celebrate the accomplishments of network groups and member organizations over the past year.

**Special Convenings and Trainings** are periodically be scheduled as the need arises.