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1-1-2016

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Erin Allgood

New Hampshire Food Alliance

Melissa Groves

New Hampshire Food Alliance

Erin Hardie Hale

New Hampshire Food Alliance

Jessica Newnan

New Hampshire Food Alliance

Jennifer Wilhelm

University of New Hampshire, Jennifer.Wilhelm@unh.edu

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Recommended Citation

Allgood, Erin; Groves, Melissa; Hale, Erin Hardie; Newnan, Jessica; and Wilhelm, Jennifer, "NH Food Alliance: Growing connections to support farms, fisheries, and food enterprises in the Granite State" (2016). *Sustainability Institute Briefing*. 25.

<https://scholars.unh.edu/sustainability/25>

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NH Food Alliance: Growing connections to support farms, fisheries, and food enterprises in the Granite State

Three River Farmers Alliance (Three River), a farmer-owned food distribution company in the New Hampshire Seacoast, is working to meet the growing demand for local food by providing a “one-stop shop” for ordering everything from vegetables to meats. This new marketplace offers retailers and restaurants a weekly delivery from multiple farms, lowering the cost of distribution for producers and making it economical to offer even small amounts of food to local communities. “This collaboration is about forging the relationships we are going to need to move toward a stronger local food system. It is about the people—the farmers, the chefs, and the many partners we are finding along the way. Working together is the way we are going to move forward,” says Andre Cantelmo, one of the founders of Three River.

“Working together is the way we are going to move forward.”

-Andre Cantelmo, Three River Farmers Alliance

Innovative, collaborative efforts like the Three River Farmers Alliance are helping to grow a strong and vibrant local food system in New Hampshire. The NH Food Alliance seeks to nurture these collaborations and spark new ideas by connecting people, ideas, and resources across the state. A growing network of people from all corners of New Hampshire, the NH



Food Alliance is working to build a food system that is good for people, businesses, communities, and the environment. As relationships develop and deepen, network partners share resources, create common goals and collaborate more effectively. The NH Food Alliance is a network consisting of relationships and connections across food system sectors and regions, which increases our collective impact (1), ultimately leading to more effective action and lasting change.

Farm, Fish, and Food Enterprise Viability Initiative

In November 2015, the NH Food Alliance launched the Farm, Fish, and Food Enterprise Viability Initiative (2), the network’s first strategic effort since it began in 2013. The Viability Initiative is the result of over two years of network building, listening to

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the concerns and hopes of hundreds of New Hampshire residents, and synthesizing dozens of food system reports. The common thread emerging from this work is that thriving local businesses are at the heart of the New Hampshire food system and can create cascading benefits for the entire state.

We consider an enterprise to be viable when it profitably delivers value to its customers in a way that is sustainable for all of its stakeholders, while contributing to healthy families, communities, and the environment.

-NH Food Alliance

upon the work already being done by connecting individuals, businesses, and organizations across the state with a common framework. This framework guides our collaborative work, so that we can more successfully address challenges and meet shared goals. Addressing

viability through a network approach will allow the NH Food Alliance to share information, align work and infrastructure across food system sectors, and learn together. This collaborative network approach promotes a growing, healthy food system that benefits all residents in New Hampshire.

Opportunities for Change

The Viability Initiative is designed to strengthen food enterprises throughout the state by focusing the network's efforts within four main opportunity areas: *Education, Market Development, Food Accessibility, and Land and Sea Resources*. Within each opportunity area, challenges, goals, potential approaches, and suggested indicators of progress are outlined and are designed to inspire larger conversation and action.

- 1. EDUCATION:** Consumers who understand the impact of their food choices, and business-savvy food producers, can stimulate business development, which can ultimately increase revenue flowing through the food system and greater economy.
- 2. MARKET DEVELOPMENT:** Fostering connections with institutions, wholesalers, and retail buyers will allow local producers to increase operations and profitability.
- 3. FOOD ACCESSIBILITY:** Improving access to local food for all people in New Hampshire will help grow the overall market, a benefit for both consumers and food businesses.
- 4. LAND AND SEA RESOURCES:** Long-term food security is strengthened when farmers have access to and can afford productive farmland and fishermen can earn a living from their enterprises.

The Viability Initiative is designed to catalyze conversation and collaboration around viability; it is not a rigid plan to be followed but a first step toward creating positive, lasting change for enterprises,



Ben's Sugar Shack in Temple, NH, is an entrepreneurial success story. Owner Ben Fisk was able to increase his inventory and refine his business model by working with a financial consultant provided by the NH Community Loan Fund. Both have set his business up for more growth and financing in the future. "The Loan Fund is tremendous to work with. They will provide whatever assistance you need—financial or business-related—to help guide you toward bigger growth opportunities," says Ben. Today, Ben's Sugar Shack is a diverse operation offering much more than syrup. The Viability Initiative will connect more entrepreneurs, like Ben, with the financial and entrepreneurial resources and skills they need to succeed.

Despite growing consumer demand for local food, many food enterprises across New Hampshire struggle to survive. By focusing our first initiative on farm, fish, and food enterprise viability, we can help support the entrepreneurial backbone of the food system, and at the same time address key issues related to food access, healthy communities, and natural resources.

Numerous groups and initiatives exist in New Hampshire to help support farms, fisheries, and food businesses. The Food Alliance is building



Thanks to a partnership between the New Hampshire Food Bank and Wholesome Wave, New Hampshire Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) recipients can now receive extra funds for the purchase of fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets. Called Granite State Market Match, the program matches SNAP dollar for dollar (up to a \$10 cap in some locations) at participating markets. This is a great example of how a systems approach to addressing one problem—limited accessibility—leverages resources to enhance another aspect of the system—increasing farmer income. In addition, eating a healthier diet translates into “price-less” benefits for consumers and reduced health care costs for us all. By focusing on food accessibility within the Viability Initiative, we can respond to challenges and opportunities across food system sectors.

Alliance will ensure that the goals and approaches identified in the Viability Initiative are enacted, monitored, evaluated, and adapted on an ongoing basis.

The success of the Viability Initiative ultimately depends on a healthy network characterized by strong communication, connectivity, collaboration, learning, research, diversity, equity, and transparency. The NH Food Alliance will continue to nurture a healthy network by providing ways for participants to communicate and interact regularly, stay up-to-date on current events and research, share stories of success and inspiration, and develop relationships and strategic connections while working toward shared goals.

Food is a powerful driver of economic development, public and community health, and vibrant working landscapes. When we work together to strengthen food enterprises – the entrepreneurial backbone of the system – everyone wins.

References

1. Kania, J. and Kramer, M. 2011. Collective Impact, Stanford Social Innovation Review. Winter: 36-41.
2. NH Food Alliance, 2015. Farm, Fish, & Food Enterprise Viability in New Hampshire: A Roadmap for the NH Food Alliance 2015. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute. www.NHFoodAlliance.com.

communities, and residents in New Hampshire.

Putting the initiative to work, together

To advance the Viability Initiative, the NH Food Alliance has created a Viability Working Group (VWG). The VWG, with leadership from two facilitators, will work to adapt and coordinate implementation of the Viability Initiative. In a network, leadership and action are distributed across many groups; a robust, well-connected NH Food

Authors

This briefing was written by the New Hampshire Food Alliance team: Erin Allgood, Melissa Groves, Erin Hardie Hale, Jessica Newnan, and Jennifer Wilhelm. Photographs taken by John Benford. The NH Food Alliance envisions a food system that works for all in New Hampshire: people, businesses, communities, and the environment. The NH Food Alliance is coordinated by the UNH Sustainability Institute. Learn more at nhfoodalliance.com