**Agricultural and Ecosystems Subcommittee**

**PATHWAY E – Economies: Grow and connect local and sustainable natural and working lands’ economies, markets, and food systems while ensuring and providing equitable access to said economies, markets, and food systems for Vermont's people.**

 A clear co-benefit of thriving and resilient natural and working lands is our ability as citizens to benefit in reciprocal ways from sustainable stewardship. In our current frameworks economies tend to trump all to the detriment of our natural resources. We instead choose to envision a future where a sustainable and robust working lands economy is feasible due to practices, harvesting, and methodologies rooted in the Indigenous tenants of reciprocity, responsibility, respect, reverence, and relationships. In layman’s terms, if we take care of nature, nature will take care of us.

Additionally, though we do acknowledge that the Farm to Plate process was a learning experience and further endeavors will need to be pursued through the lens of the Just Transitions Subcommittee’s *Guiding Principles,* the resulting *Farm to Plate Strategic Plan: 2021-2030* is a valuable resource from a multi-stakeholder lens regarding how we might move forward to pursue a just and equitable agricultural economy. To that end you will find that we have pulled multiple actions from the plan into our work that we felt complimented or elevated our pathways and strategies.

**STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

1. **Develop, expand, and sustain local markets specifically for food, agricultural, and forest products in ways that ~~ensure local food access and the alleviation of food insecurity:~~ ensure food sovereignty and provide for all Vermont’s peoples.**

The further development, expansion, and creation of robust and innovative local markets has both the potential to reduce GHG emissions from food waste and food miles, as well as build out more just and sustainable livelihoods for those living and working within our farm and forest sectors. It is critical that moving forward to take the time to fully understand where we are and where we wish to go. We see the 2021-2030 Farm to Plate Strategic Plan as a good starting place and highly recommend the development of an equivalent Forest strategic plan and the mapping of Vermont’s agricultural land base and production capacity to better understand where we are and how we build just and equitable policies moving forward.

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| *Preliminary Assessment of Strategy against Criteria* |
| *Impact:* High impact, potential to reach entirety of state  |
| *Equity:* Were the true language of food sovereignty applied as we move forward positive implications for a more just and equitable future are huge. Within the context of funding, TA access, market, food, and land access there are massive amounts of work necessary to repair the damage of historic and present day harms to our most impacted communities.  |
| *Cost-effectiveness*: Moderate? Similarly, to the necessary transitions in the energy sector, the upfront cost is more, but the benefits in the long term pay for themselves.  |
| *Co-Benefits:* High: Both from a mitigation and adaptation/resilience standpoint investing in this strategy could advance numerous components of broader societal benefit; public health, equity, economic prosperity, biodiversity, and workforce opportunities.  |
| *Technical Feasibility*: Yes |

**Example Actions:**

1. Support robust funding for Working Lands Enterprise Initiative and prioritize funding to businesses that have climate/low carbon goals
2. Develop a strategic plan for the forest economy, modeled on the Farm-to-Plate strategic plan but improved to better incorporate impacted stakeholders and principles of equity, as well as examining our current language and approach to forest management.
3. Develop supply chain substitutions which better support local products
4. Support research and development efforts, and expansion of new markets and opportunities for local wood products processing and manufacturing in Vermont
5. Develop alternative markets for low-grade wood, focusing on cellulose insulation, bioplastic composites, or biofuels
6. Research the efficacy of food hubs as public infrastructure (like libraries - again idea from last night)
7. Map Vermont’s agricultural land base and production capacity, including geographic data about predicted climate change impacts, aggregation and distribution infrastructure, and regional dietary needs (as written in the 2021-2030 F2P Strategic Plan pg. 32)
8. Support the growth of VAAFM Meat Inspection and Agricultural Development programs, which help expand Vermont products into the national marketplace and develop consumer education and public awareness campaigns around the steps involved in getting meat products from farm to table. Suggested: two FTE positions, estimated cost: $200,000
9. Fund a pilot aggregation and sales system that effectively serves both the charitable food system and institutional and other market channels, through a structured partnership among established processors, aggregators, and gleaners. The pilot would include data collection on specific marketable surplus food products. Potential partners include Center for an Agricultural Economy, Deep Root Organic Cooperative, Salvation Farms, and the Vermont Department of Corrections. Estimated cost: $100,000 per year for four years.
10. The Vermont Legislature should fund the Vermont Farm to School Network with $500,000 of annual base funding or Farm to School infrastructure grants, technical assistance, and training to grow FTS in all counties.
11. The Vermont Legislature should fund an appropriation of $500,000 a year to enable organizations in the charitable food system to source food directly from Vermont farmers (e.g.,Vermonters Feeding Vermonters).
12. The Vermont Legislature should create a Local Food Access Funding Program, with an appropriation of at least $250,000 a year, available to multiple organizations to support program needs
13. Develop a distribution and logistics infrastructure investment plan to guide strategic transportation investments with the express purpose of improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of in-state and regional food distribution. Include a business plan analysis for a public/private Vermont wholesale terminal market that would provide cross-docking, cold storage, and logistical service between Vermont producers and regional wholesale buyers. Examples include the Wisconsin Food Terminal, the Ontario Terminal Market, and New York City’s Wholesale Greenmarket. Cost: $100,000.
14. Using the infrastructure study as a guide, increase public-private investment in intermediated market distributors to improve operational efficiencies and overall sales through improved marketing, infrastructure, route optimization and shared transportation-management software, and access to logistics professional development and consulting. Cost: $500,000-$1,000,000 over three years.
15. **Promote workforce development in all working lands sector along all points of the supply chain:**

So often in our quest for farm or forest business viability we are pursuing infrastructure investments. We need our focus to shift slightly: from *farm* viability to ***farmer*** viability, business viability to land, water, and forest viability. As we have observed, public investment in infrastructure (manure pits, water quality projects) without an equal investment in farmers and farmworkers loses farms. Our workforce is ready to rise to the challenge but they have been capitalized into these systems and they will need to be capitalized out of them. We need to create a society where becoming a farmer or farmworker, a forester, a logger, a truck driver, a server in a restaurant, a logistics manager at a food hub, any and all of these options can provide a viable career path for our next generations.

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| *Preliminary Assessment of Strategy against Criteria* |
| *Impact:* This strategy could have a high impact, particularly in our rural communities and natural communities. Resourced people are able to care for our natural and working lands far better. Additionally as a state we all benefit from increased clean water efforts, food security, and more circular local economies.  |
| *Equity:* A workforce well resourced and equipped to steward our lands into the future will be critical. Particularly given costs of higher education building out options to “earn while you learn” offer new pipelines to education and viable careers. Any new policies implemented should be created using the Just Transitions *Guiding Principles* and equity screening rubric.  |
| *Cost-effectiveness*: Though it will require investment, existing revenue streams could be redirected and prioritized differently, with a climate resilience and equity lens to accomplish some of these goals.  |
| *Co-Benefits:* Immense. A state where the working lands economy sustained just livelihoods would result in massive net benefits for all; could provide for an entirely reinvigorated work force, enhanced circular economies, keeping more dollars in state, and the enhanced resilience of our natural and working lands and therefore our people.  |
| *Technical Feasibility*: Yes |

**Example Actions:**

1. Develop, endorse and implement fair trade and equitable labor practices and just livelihoods for the natural and working lands sector
2. Develop additional affordable and accessible training programs such as apprenticeships, certificates, stackable credentials, and concurrent degrees.
3. **Strengthen all aspects of working lands’ supply chains and the associated infrastructure to support them:**

Similar to above, but focused on the necessary infrastructure investments and upgrades that will associate our working lands’ sector to build out their production, distribution, and logistical capacity. Again, as we determine our methodologies for siting and development we need to be transparent about potential impacts and harms and frame our new projects within the *Guiding Principles.*

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| *Preliminary Assessment of Strategy against Criteria* |
| *Impact:* Moderate to High.  |
| *Equity:* Though siting and development of infrastructure/processing would need to be implemented using the *Guiding Principles* equity screening rubric, building out our local supply chains and distribution cuts down on our upstream emissions and inequitable impacts in other places in the globe. The more we can source here, the less we emit, the less we degrade the environment’s resources in other places though clearly our regulations a |
| *Cost-effectiveness*: High ? |
| *Co-Benefits:* If build out utilizing the *Guiding Principles* the co-benefits of these investments are high.  |
| *Technical Feasibility*: Yes |

**Example Actions:**

1. Make significant investment in storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure in order to enhance product innovation and quality across all Vermont food products.
2. Support product-specific value chain development through facilitation of producer, distributor and buyer matchups and supporting producer-driven aggregation, distribution, and marketing enterprises.
3. **Ensure equitable access to local foods, culturally relevant foods, land, funds, grants, and technical assistance for people who have been historically marginalized and come from impacted communities:**

The reality of Vermont is no different than anywhere else in the United States. The land we now know as Vermont is the ancestral and unceded homelands of the Abenaki people and additionally holds the realities of racial trauma and harm as evidenced in our modern day migrant farmworker populations and the redlining and inequity that denies our BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabled, and low income communities from accessing land, homes, loans, technical assistance, culturally relevant foods and access to just and dignified lives.

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| *Preliminary Assessment of Strategy against Criteria* |
| *Impact:* High. The ability of all of Vermont’s people to become resilient and adaptive is imperative to our shared future. Additionally, so many of the practices and tenants that we embrace as regenerative, organic, or sustainable can be directly attributed to global Indigenous traditions and it is incumbent upon us to restore both the appropriate attribution of these practices and the ability of our BIPOC communities to practice them.  |
| *Equity:* Any endeavors that are pursued must be done so as directed and informed by the communities for whom they are created. Our typical power dynamics and structures must be flipped and the sovereignty of our BIPOC communities to self determine the direction with which they nourish themselves, their land, and their communities must be the goal.  |
| *Cost-effectiveness*: Moderate – High.  |
| *Co-Benefits:* Repairs harms, sustains lands and communities, heals trauma and builds deeper connections for communities to land and their ability to sustain.  |
| *Technical Feasibility*: Yes |

**Example Actions:**

1. Build out and utilize TEK to build out connections to our Tribal and Indigenous communities in the development and utilization of traditional products, e.g. birch syrup, sumac spices, etc.
2. Uplift and resource the work of the Vermont Releaf Collective and other BIPOC led organizations
3. Improve funding opportunities and create equitable access for BIPOC organizations and BIPOC owned businesses by developing multi-year, unrestricted BIPOC centered grants and loan programs.
4. **Develop a Vermont food security plan, centered around a thriving food system, and inspired by community-based responses to food insecurity and disruptive events:**

1 in 3 Vermonters are food insecure and additionally we know that many of our frontline and impacted communities face massive barriers to access when trying to sustain themselves and their families, including many of the very people who produce food for others. As was witnessed during COVID the brittleness of our food systems impacts our people quickly. The ability of our state to feed its people will be imperative as climate change and its realities take further hold.

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| *Preliminary Assessment of Strategy against Criteria* |
| *Impact:* Particularly for our most vulnerable communities this  |
| *Equity:* Actions in this realm must be undertaken utilizing the *Guiding Principles.* The traditional power dynamics and control must give way to the voices of those who are most impacted by food insecurity and disruptive events. Community engagement will be paramount and the needs expressed will need to be addressed vs. Our more traditional pejorative approach. How do communities wish to access food? What do they need? Where do they want it? These questions apply to Strategy 4 as well.  |
| *Cost-effectiveness*: Could be done in very cost-effective ways, but would need funding for compensation for community members asked to participate and lend their expertise.  |
| *Co-Benefits:* Food is a fundamental right, ensuring Vermonters are fed, particularly our children, is a moral obligation.  |
| *Technical Feasibility*: Yes |

**Example Actions:**

1. Involve food insecure individuals as well as farmers in the planning, and investigate questions including, but not limited to, affordable housing, health care, transportation, siting of retail grocery stores, food distribution, and ensuring the continued production of food in Vermont.
2. Work to adopt state and regional level policies, procedures, and plans to ensure that the Vermont food supply is sufficient to withstand global or national food supply chain disruptions caused by climate change and other disasters.