

# Focus Group on Climate Action Tracking Tool

*Hosted by ACORN (Addison County Relocalization Network), Climate Action Office (Vermont Agency of Natural Resources), and Eastern Research Group, Inc.*

*February 12, 2025, 5:30-7:00 pm*

*ACORN Food Hub, Middlebury*

## Full group discussion

- A lot of the metrics talk about things and physical infrastructure. Is there a way to make it more people centered? To show how these things impact people's lives, experiences, and behavior?
    - Follow up idea from another participant: stories could be linked to certain priorities or metrics to bring in that human perspective
  - Data on people is sensitive, handle with care
  - Other plans that could be relevant to review are the [New England Feeding New England](#) and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund/Farm to Plate's [Roadmap to Food Security & Strategic Plan](#), look at [30x30 Biodiversity Bill planning thus far](#)
  - It would be helpful to have information about VT-specific data/trends on climate emergencies and weather patterns (e.g. how many floods has VT had, when did they occur, how bad were they). Understanding that this tool will not be how the data is *tracked*, nonetheless it would be helpful information and context-setting for the user.
  - What is the 'why' of people coming to the tool – Can it help people make choices? Such as 'Should I build' or 'Should I grow my business here'?
  - Can the tool capture 'extractive' moments? As in, not everything you track needs to be positive or 'increasing'. For example, it would be helpful to track how much topsoil we are losing to floods.
  - Important that the tool is not just bragging "here's what we/the state did"
- 

## Small breakout group A: Farmers and local food eaters

- Can we utilize this tool in the classroom? Is that being considered?
- Most of this stuff touches on emissions. In agriculture, other things affect the climate (pesticides in the field, neonics). That does not seem particularly touched upon in this plan. What about the unexpected things (foam used to weatherize that is damaging to the environment)? We need to account for things outside of emissions.
- I wanted to see something about biodiversity indicators. From a beekeeping perspective, the state's native beekeeping populations are in rapid decline. Biodiversity should be a metric to measure the health of the greater system.

- For the built environment, Vermont has always been really kind to refugee populations. Going forward, we might have a lot of climate refugees. It would be nice if we could provide these climate refugees with housing.
  - Can we grow more trees?
    - Audubon used to give out free trees
  - Concerned about electric cars that blow up, unrecyclable wind turbines, and solar panels. What do you do with all this stuff when it is done?
  - Electric cars are expensive, the chargers run on coal
  - They are making a fortune by putting chargers up everywhere
  - We have hydro energy in Vermont. The amount of agricultural land has decreased in Vermont. A lot of the land grew out and turned into forests.
  - Food insecurity – is there any talk about getting people to grow their own food? In some states, they had programs where they helped you to grow gardens.
  - I live in a unit that will help you set up gardens. Where are the numbers for community gardens? Before Farmacy (local food access program), I never got vegetables in the winter.
  - I am wondering about the lexicon of climate action. There are words being used by just a few people, those who are super engaged with this work. How can we get more people educated on these terms?
  - How do we educate people that sustainable farms and small farms are linked? There was a study showing that for people in New England, sustainable food is important, while small and family-owned farms are not.
  - People think that organic food is more expensive and that they do not have the money to buy it. The term organic throws people for a dollar value.
  - Is anything being done about chemtrails?
- 

## Small breakout group B: Organizations

### **How does climate change factor into the issues your organization is concerned with?**

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity:

- Public transportation access - ex: ability of an aging population to access food shelf
- Increasing walkability - ex: sidewalk project for Exchange Street

Liberation Ecosystem:

- Focused on amplifying voices of Vermonters of color within the areas of land, environment, agriculture, and food. Those who already experience marginalization/oppression/systemic injustice are more impacted by climate change, makes it harder to prepare, respond, and recover

### **Do the climate priorities of the tool match those of your organization?**

- Public Health sector would be an important priority for those who may be one climate emergency away from food insecurity or housing insecurity
- Agriculture and Food Access – support for public dollars being spent on this tool. “Everybody eats!” – food resonates with everyone
- Highlighting a just transition in this tool will be important. And meeting people where they are
- NOFA-VT and Rural Vermont hold a general wariness around carbon markets and payment for ecosystem services. Caution against focusing on carbon and carbon sequestration as the only reflection of environmental health when so many other factors (biodiversity, water cycle) are important
- Natural and Working Lands priority: track biodiversity, preservation of old growth, wildlife corridors, how connected are forests/ecosystems
- Consider centering natural systems alongside economic systems when discussing equity. Can 30x30 be used for this?
- Concern around national data on weather and climate potentially being lost (NOAA)
- Is there capacity for GIS mapping for weather events?
- Tool would be useful at municipal level – town planning and city data
- [VNRC Parcelization tool](#) could be helpful for data on conservation/forests and land use including compact settlement patterns

### **Response and Recovery Sector feedback**

- Emphasize long-term thinking
- Could the tool capture the *quality* of response to emergencies/disasters – is the response a quick fix/band-aids vs long term solutions
  - Ex: Are we replacing a culvert or bridge as it was, or are we building the new culvert or bridge to withstand the climate of today and the future)
- Loss of agricultural lands (topsoil), employment, housing, health, etc. after floods
  - Ex: Are we moving farms out of flood plains? Who plans or decides? Individuals? Donors to NOFA-VT’s Farmer Emergency Fund are weary. Who holds responsibility or risk around climate emergencies - VT state, philanthropic donations, insurance companies, individuals?
- Land use in settled areas and moving out of hazard areas – how is that happening
- Can farmers’ livelihoods and vulnerability be considered? Not just the land.
  - Ex: Access to healthcare, did they have to fire employees, did they have to shut down their business or some part of it permanently or temporarily
- Internet access, cell phone towers (implications for disaster/emergency response)