

RURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Research news and notes from the Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont • Vol. 3, No. 1 Winter/Spring 2009



Developing indicators of downtown health

CHIP SAWYER

SENIOR OUTREACH PROFESSIONAL

CRS has partnered with Smart Growth Vermont, the Vermont Downtown Program, and Preservation Trust of Vermont to create a list of indicators to quantify downtown health.

These indicators will be used to assess the health of downtowns in terms of urban form, economic viability, livability, cultural identity, and regional context. They will be collected and evaluated in five downtown case studies.

Communities in Vermont are able to access financial resources and special permitting concessions by seeking special designation for their downtown areas and growth centers with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. These designations are intended to promote compact housing and economic development and the preservation of historic buildings. However, the State does not have a standardized system for collecting quantitative data on the health of downtowns so it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of state resources allocated for downtowns.

What we learn in terms of indicator suitability and feasibility could represent a significant contribution to economic development and growth management in Vermont.

For more information, contact Chip Sawyer at wsawyer@uvm.edu.



UVM researchers, representatives from food and farming organizations, and other stakeholders discuss research priorities at the Food System Research Collaborative meeting held Feb. 6 in Berlin, Vt.

CRS convenes Food System Research Collaborative

JESSICA HYMAN
RESEARCH SPECIALIST



Representatives from local and regional food and farming organizations, statewide agricultural networks, UVM, and the Agency of Agriculture met in early February to discuss their work and research priorities.

The convening was sponsored by the UVM Center for Rural Studies (CRS), in partnership with the Intervale Center and the Sustainable Agriculture Council. It marked the launch of the Food System Research Collaborative at CRS. The primary goal of the collaborative is to join on-campus and off-campus organizations in efforts to further food system research and enhance connections in Vermont and beyond. The collaborative will provide for more direct links to the resources and knowledge at UVM and leverage the strengths of participating researchers and organizations toward research, grants, publications, and outreach.

The collaborative is an evolving organization that builds on existing work and is a piece of the ongoing state-wide discussions about the future of agriculture and food systems. “The time is right. We’re the researchers and we can help,” said CRS Co-director Jane Kolodinsky. “The question is how can we work together?”

Participants shared information about their current food system work, mapped research activities, and discussed points of common interest and research gaps.

The majority of current research being done by those in attendance at the Feb. 6 meeting is in processing, production, distribution/sourcing, and consumption. The group identified the priority research areas as consumption, processing, and distribution/transportation and discussed the importance of outreach and education.

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About CRS

The Center for Rural Studies is a non-profit, fee-for-service research organization that addresses social, economic, and resource-based problems of rural people and communities. Based in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Vermont, CRS provides consulting and research services in Vermont, the United States and abroad. The research is divided into five main areas:

- Food Systems
- Human Services and Education
- Program Evaluation
- Rural Community and Economic Development
- Vermont Community Data

CRS has a wide variety of clients – small businesses, academics, UVM Extension and other UVM offices, community organizers, health and social service organizations, planners, town governments, and state and federal agencies.

CRS works routinely with the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau through the State Data Center Program. Its data resources include more than 40 social and economic indicators for every town in Vermont and the Vermont Community Data Bank.

The Center for Rural Studies is fully supported by fees for our services, grants and generous contributions. Visit us online at <http://crs.uvm.edu> for more information about our consulting and research services.

RURAL DEVELOPMENTS Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter/Spring 2009

Rural Developments is published three times a year by the Center for Rural Studies. The newsletter is available online at <http://crs.uvm.edu>.

If you would like to receive CRS updates electronically, subscribe to our listserv at <http://crs.uvm.edu/listserv>

Newsletter Editor: Jessica Hyman



Project Updates

Focus groups inform rural mobility study

In a recent series of focus groups, the Center for Rural studies discussed issues of rural mobility with residents of northern New England. The focus groups were conducted as part of a study on the impact of seasonality on mobility and livability.

We found that the effects of season are magnified by other factors such as congestion, vehicle condition, experience, and physical challenges. Living in an urban or job center makes for a very different transportation

experience than in a rural or residential area, but overall people like where they live and report a high quality of life, despite transportation or weather challenges.

The results of the focus groups have informed the development of a year-long panel survey slated to begin in April. This research is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Transportation through the University of Vermont Transportation Research Center.

— Erin Roche, Research Specialist

CRS, WNRCD to produce Local Growers Guides for Chittenden and Washington counties

The 2009 Chittenden and Washington counties Local Growers Guides are a joint project of the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District and the UVM Center for Rural Studies. The guides will be resources for consumers interested in purchasing local agricultural products and will include farms, value-added producers, CSAs, farmers mar-

kets, and farm stands, in Chittenden and Washington Counties. Print and online versions of the guides will be available in early summer.

For more information, call Ashley Lidman at Winooski NRCD, (802) 865-7895, Ext.104, or Jessica Hyman at CRS, (802) 656-9897.

— Jessica Hyman, Research Specialist



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Specific research questions that came up at the meeting include:

- How do you make the food system more robust?
- Can an increase in marketing and education drive the system forward?
- What are the food system constraints?
- What are the leverage points for change (i.e. local, regional, state)?
- How do we remove barriers for people who want to enter the field?

- How do we change the perception of farming as a low-value economic sector?

The Food System Research Collaborative has set up a listserv to facilitate the exchange of research ideas, activities, and results, and to discuss plans for a wiki platform to expand the conversations and information.

To join the listserv, go to: <http://crs.uvm.edu/food/list>

Want to learn more about CRS projects?

Sign up for the Rural Listserv at <http://crs.uvm.edu/listserv>



Project Updates

CRS evaluates Button Up workshops

CRS is analyzing evaluations from 1000+ Button Up Vermont workshop participants for the Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC).

The education program utilizes town energy committees and other community groups to coordinate efforts within each participating town. The

program has conducted workshops in 99 communities across the state.

Participants learn the fundamentals of how buildings lose energy and do-it-yourself opportunities for saving energy, including behavioral changes and low-cost weatherization measures.

— Erin Roche, Research Specialist

Special focus groups held for Census Bureau

In our Vermont State Data Center capacity, CRS has been doing outreach around Vermont on the Census Bureau's new American Community Survey (ACS) program and what changes we can expect in community, county, and state data.

In December of 2008, at the specific request of the director of the U.S. Census Bureau, we held special focus groups for local planners, decision-makers, and others who use local community data. Several Census Bureau staff came to Vermont from D.C. to learn from these groups. Here is some of the input received:

- Focus group participants agreed that they would continue to use the ACS data and associated statistical information in planning, policy making, grant writing, etc.
- However, participants advised that general data users will require much



more outreach from the Census Bureau and Vermont SDC to understand the issues associated with the unique ACS data, margins of error, and changes in how data is collected.

- There was a general consensus among participants in support of less frequent data releases if it would result in higher data reliability (e.g. lower margins of error).
- Participants saw the benefit of having >2-month seasonal residents in the ACS sample but expressed concern over how their inclusion could skew economic data for local communities.

Community-level data will be released in early 2011. CRS will continue its ACS outreach and monitor the latest concerns and development concerning data frequency and reliability and the >2-month residence rule.

— Chip Sawyer, Senior Outreach Professional

Commuting incentive study featured at TRB

The paper titled "Estimate of the inelasticity of incentive demand for non-motorized commuting" authored by CRS staffer Erin Roche, Co-Director Jane Kolodinsky, and University of Vermont Transportation Research Center Director Lisa Aultman-Hall was selected to be presented as a poster at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the

Transportation Review Board. The study calculated the elasticity of demand of an incentive program designed to increase (and reward) bike and walk commute trips. The results showed that demand is inelastic. Other factors that affect the probability of commuting by bike/walk include gender and season.

— Erin Roche, Research Specialist

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Project Profile: Growing Vermont Student Store

The Growing Vermont student-operated store is in its fourth semester of operation in the Davis Student Center. The store's mission is to contribute to the sustainable, community-based economic development of the state by supporting Vermont's current and next generation of entrepreneurs.

More than 130 students from six Community Development and Applied Economics (CDAE) courses have used the Growing Vermont program to incorporate hands-on, service-learning projects into the classroom experience. Growing Vermont has also benefitted from the direct participation of an additional 19 students outside of course-based projects and presentations. These students include federal work-study, independent-study, academic credit-earners and volunteers from all academic years and representing a diversity of departments and programs across campus. Five independent study students have participated in marketing campaigns, financial analysis, marketing



Project Manager Michael Moser and Store Manager Gwen Pokalo serve a customer at Growing Vermont.

research, a product advisory board and a vendor impacts survey.

Growing Vermont has worked with nearly 100 vendors from around the state. One way the Growing Vermont program acts as a resource for Vermont's small business entrepreneurs is by providing a "retail incubator" space to test-market products and business skills. This exposure has proven useful for many of our vendors

as they make decisions about the next steps for their business.

Store Manager Gwen Pokalo was hired in May 2008 after completing her B.A. in CDAE. She has instituted several key processes, such as hiring a staff of 10 and instituting the student-run Product Advisory Committee. She has developed a series of human resources data collection tools, including the employee contract and intake forms, and is responsible for monthly tax preparation, weekly cash transmittals, vendor relations, and invoicing.

Project Manager Michael Moser is a CRS staff member with an M.S. in CDAE. He has seen the Growing Vermont project from concept through reality. Michael works directly with CDAE faculty and vendors to identify student-vendor projects and ensure productive interactions for these parties.

To learn more, visit www.uvm.edu/~growvt/home/

CRS Symposium marked three decades of community partnerships

ANNA MASOZERA
COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

From the Age of Aquarius to the Information Age, the Center for Rural Studies has been a steadfast ally of rural Vermont and beyond. On October 4, 2008 current and former CRS staff, partner organizations, and friends celebrated three decades of CRS with more time spent planning for the future of rural Vermont than reminiscing the past. The public all-day event included presentations and panel discussions on Vermont's civic culture, food systems, and communicating with rural communities.

Preparation for the symposium included tracking down former staff members and students, sorting through the hundreds of photo slides crowding the office of CRS Co-director Fred "Fritz" Schmidt and sifting through newspaper clippings. As Schmidt's expansive professional networks were contacted, many former colleagues offered messages of congratulations to CRS. These are available at <http://crs.uvm.edu/30years/scrapbook.html>. Those who would like to add their congratulations can

do so at the same web site.

One former CRS staffer who made the trip across country to participate was Dan Gillmor, director of a Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University and director of the Center for Citizen Media. Gillmor, a 1981 UVM alumnus, who is noted for giving CRS its first computer in the early 1980s, moderated a panel discussion on the changing ways of communicating with rural communities. Video of sessions from the day are available through CCTV Channel 17's website: www.cctv.org (search for Center for Rural Studies).

By popular demand, attendees did get a chance to toast (and roast) Schmidt for his unending enthusiasm and commitment to rural Vermont and beyond. Bob Paquin from Senator Patrick Leahy's Office delivered Schmidt an official letter of congratu-



Photo by Sally McCay

Vermont Secretary of State Deb Markowitz moderates the panel discussion on Vermont's civic culture with, from left, Paul Gillies of VIG, Paul Costello of VCRD, and Fred Schmidt of CRS.

lations to CRS from Senator Leahy as well as a flag flown over the US Capitol Building.

Many thanks to all who contributed with their words, time, and participation for the 30th Anniversary Symposium, and for partnership with CRS over the last three decades.

CRS anniversary T-shirts



ONLY \$10

E-mail amasozer@uvm.edu for info