

RURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Research news and notes from the Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont • Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 2007

CRS State Data Center connects Vermonters and U.S. Census Bureau

WILL "CHIP" SAWYER
SENIOR OUTREACH PROFESSIONAL

For many years, the UVM Center for Rural Studies has acted as Vermont's representative and liaison with the U.S. Census Bureau's State Data Center network. This unfunded designation as the Vermont State Data Center operates in two ways. First, CRS advocates Vermonters' data needs to the Census Bureau through correspondence with Bureau officials and a presence at regional Census meetings. Secondly, and most importantly, CRS assists Vermonters in finding and using Census data by:

- Providing online data resources, such as the Vermont State Data Center site at <http://crs.uvm.edu/census>
- Answering data requests over the phone or e-mail
- Conducting workshops, presentations and trainings for various groups, including local and state officials
- Identifying the affiliate agencies and organizations around the state that make up the Vermont State Data Center network.

Go to page 6 for more on SDC activities.

Annual poll takes the pulse of public opinion on Vt. issues

Residents comment on broadband, support of the arts, agriculture and more

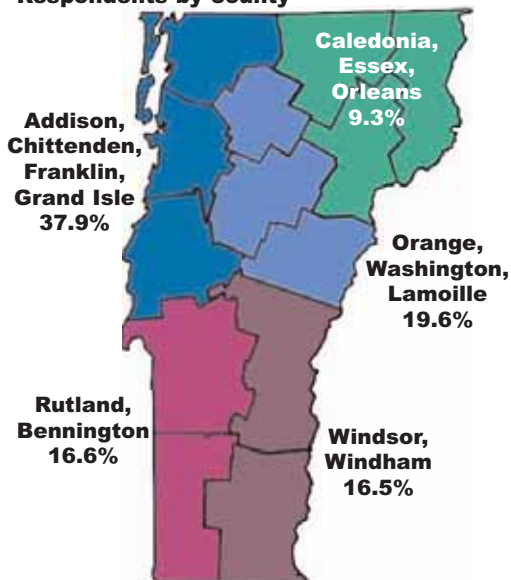
The Center for Rural Studies conducts the annual Vermonter Poll to gauge residents' opinions on current issues. The questions come from non-profit agencies, government officials and University of Vermont and external researchers.

This year, Vermonters were asked questions about their computer and Internet usage, sprawl, arts education, transportation and alternative fuel, agriculture, local food, hunger and Vermont secession.

The Center for Rural Studies conducted the poll in late February. The sample for the telephone poll was drawn through random digit dialing. Only Vermont residents over the age of 18 were interviewed. Based on county groupings, Figure 1 shows the distribution of the 1,193 survey respondents.

The results have a margin of error of +/- 4 percent at a confidence interval of 95 percent.

Figure 1
Respondents by county



A sampling of Vermonter Poll results

• The most important problem facing Vermonters in the coming decade:

Health Care	18.8%
Jobs/ Employment	10.2%
General Taxes	10%
Property Tax	7.6%
Education	5.8%
Environment	5.3%
Global Warming/ Climate Change	4.9%
Economy/ business	4.1%
Housing Affordability/ Cost of Living	3.6%
Aging Population/ Lack of Youth	3.6%
War/ Iraq	3.1%
Energy	3.0%
Urban Sprawl/ Growth Development	2.1%
Farmers/ Dairy	1.6%
Fuel/ Gas	0.8%
Poverty	0.7%
Other	9.5%
Don't Know	5.3%

(n=608)

• The likelihood that current trends in development and land use will lead to sprawl in Vermont:

Very Likely	28.2%
Likely	37.4%
Neither Likely nor Unlikely	9.5%
Unlikely	19.6%
Very Unlikely	5.3%

(n=589)

See pages 3-4 for more results from the 2007 Vermonter Poll.

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About CRS

The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) 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, the Center provides consulting and research services in Vermont, the United States, and abroad. The research areas are divided into five main areas:

- Agriculture
- 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.

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Educators, CRS consider state’s growing dependent population

FRED SCHMIDT
CO-DIRECTOR

Vermont’s demographics portend a troubled future for our state,” CRS Director Fred Schmidt warned the Vermont chapter of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences this spring. The group of some 50 Vermont professionals assembled in Montpelier to consider the dramatic aging of the state — potentially 1 in 4 residents by 2025 — as they considered the theme, “Moving beyond Poverty.” Schmidt noted a demographic “triple jeopardy” of declining youth, increasing numbers of elders and a concomitant increase in the number of residents on fixed incomes.

Understanding Vermont’s poverty represents a situation bearing careful monitoring and a good grasp of just

what the data show. 2005 federal poverty statistics show Vermont with 11.5 percent of its total population under the federal poverty line, while national figures are slightly higher at 13.3 percent. Familiarity with the poverty rates make the educators assembled at the March 29 meeting more informed and better advocates, Schmidt warned, but solutions to poverty also require a careful look at local employment, a livable wage and community quality of life. For example, location within Vermont is deemed a factor, noting that the Northeast Kingdom Counties of Caledonia (12.3 percent), Essex (13.7 percent) and Orleans (14.1 percent) constituted the highest counties in terms of high poverty rates compiled by the 2000 Census.

Livable wage out of reach for many

A study by the Vermont Peace and Justice Center revealed that in 2003 one out of four full-time workers earned less than what would be a livable income for a single person (\$24,086/yr). In addition, the following percentage of full-time workers did not make a livable income:

- 29% of single people
- 72% of single parents with one child
- 82% of single parents with two children
- 55% of families of four with one wage earner
- 35% of families of four with two wage earners

Source: Vermont Job Gap Study, Phase 8.

Visit the following Web sites for more information about poverty in Vermont:

Vermont Livable Wage Campaign: www.vtlivablewage.org

Voices for Vermont’s Children: www.childrensforum.org

Vermont Job Gap Study: www.pjcv.org/publications.htm

Center for Rural Studies: <http://crs.uvm.edu>

Using the Vermonter Poll to measure computer and Internet use and the Broadband Divide

WILL "CHIP" SAWYER
SENIOR OUTREACH PROFESSIONAL

For more than a decade, the Center for Rural Studies has been tracking household computer and Internet use with the Vermonter Poll. Generally, household computer ownership and Internet use has increased since measurement first began in 1993. The chart below depicts that the proportion of Vermont households possessing at least one computer has hovered around 80 percent for the last seven years. Of those households with computers, 96 percent had an Internet connection in 2007. Figure 2 shows that the overall proportion of households with an Internet connection has straddled 70 percent over the past 7 years and may even be on the rise.

Of those Vermont households with Internet connections, the proportion with high-speed broadband connections has been increasing rapidly – from 13 percent in 2001 to nearly 67 percent in 2007. However, CRS staff have been tracking a divide in broadband connections between rural and urban and suburban areas. In 2007, 55 percent of households with Internet connections that identified themselves as rural had broadband connections,

versus 84 percent in suburban or 86 percent in urban households. 2007 actually marks the first year that the Vermonter Poll has measured a majority of rural Internet household with broadband, however suburban and urban numbers have consistently matched the rural increase over time, maintaining the urban-rural divide.

The conventional wisdom is that the lower number of rural broadband connections is a result of less broadband availability in rural areas. Low rural consumer densities tend to discourage private service providers. Many state policies have targeted this broadband divide with goals of broadband availability for 100 percent of Vermont households. These policies aim at providing subsidies and infrastructure to bolster the low profitability of broadband provision in rural areas. The 2007 Vermonter Poll measured nearly 60 percent of respondents in favor of using state funds for statewide broadband availability but only measured a slim 51 percent majority in favor of state development and ownership of actual broadband infrastructure. Local government development and ownership of broadband infrastructure only received 36 percent support.

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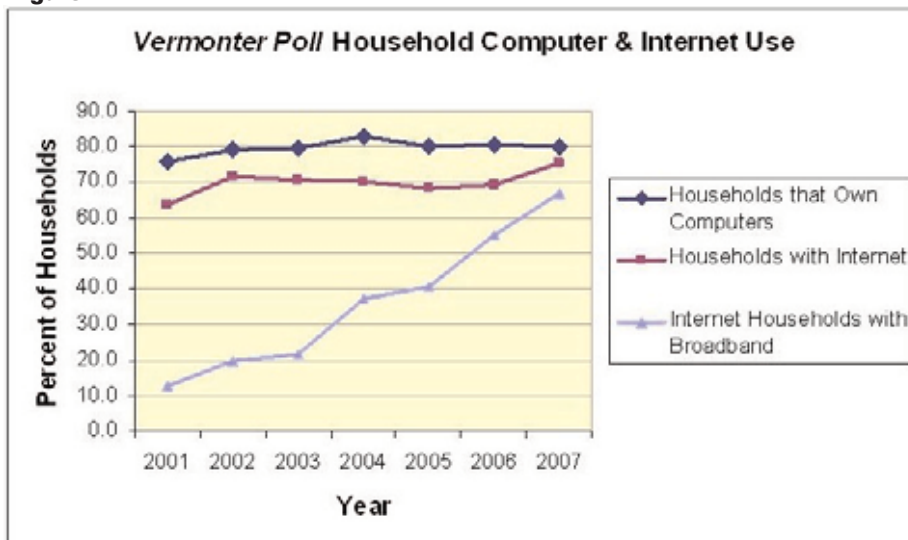
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Figure 2



Source: 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007. University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies, Vermonter Poll

Demographic profile of respondents

There were 1,193 respondents to the 2007 Vermonter Poll. The gender of respondents was almost evenly split between male (49.2) and female (50.8). The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 93 years with an average of 54 years (Std. 14.6) and median of 55 years.

Respondents had between one and nine members in their household, with a median of two members. Thirty-two percent of respondents had children in their household. Of those households with children, the number of children present ranged from one to five with a median of two children and mode of one child.

The majority of Vermonters surveyed (52.6 percent) had achieved an associate's degree or more education and 18.4 percent had taken some college courses. Fifty-four percent of those surveyed reported earning at or above the median income in Vermont (\$50,000 or more).

The number of years that respondents lived in Vermont ranged from 1 to 86 years, with an average of 35 years (Std. 19.9). Sixty-five percent of those surveyed said they lived in a rural area, 20 percent said suburban and 15 percent said urban.

- **63.2% of respondents would prefer to buy a single-family house in an outlying area rather than a smaller house of equivalent value in an urban area or village close to public transportation, work and shopping.** (n=554)
- **41.9% of respondents preferred to shop at a store located in a nearby downtown or village center; 35.3% preferred a store in their neighborhood; 11.2% preferred a "big box" retail store; 9.1% preferred a store in a shopping mall and 2.5% preferred a store along a major highway.** (n=563)

Awareness and support for the arts thriving in Vermont

Newer residents more likely to support state spending on the arts

MICHELE CRANWELL SCHMIDT
EVALUATION COORDINATOR

The Vermont Arts Council (VAC) has been successful in raising awareness of its existence, according to data collected in the 2007 Vermonter Poll. The majority of persons surveyed (85 percent) had heard of the council. Those living in the areas of southwestern Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom are more likely to have heard of the council. However, only 17 percent of those surveyed had heard of the creative economy, suggesting that more public relations, education and outreach are needed to increase awareness of this concept.

Regarding support for funding of the arts, Vermonters showed mixed results. Almost 40 percent of respondents think Vermont should place a high or very high priority on spending funds on arts education and other art programs and services and almost 50 percent would like the state to increase funding for the arts. However, when it comes to spending one's personal tax dollars, three-quarters of Vermonters said they would spend an additional \$1 to \$100 on arts programs and services, and 44 percent said they would spend between \$1 and \$50.

Having a higher level of education, being female, and having lived in Vermont for fewer years are main characteristics that predict a person's awareness of and support for the arts.

Having higher levels of education was a significant predictor of most variables tested, including being aware of the Vermont Arts Council and the creative economy, feeling that the state should place a high priority on spending funds on arts education and other arts programs and services and that the state should increase the amount of tax dollars spent on this cause. Females are more likely to have heard of the Vermont Arts Council, place a high priority on state spending for the arts and support an increase in tax dollars spent on arts education in public schools.

Those who have lived in Vermont for fewer years are more likely to have heard of the creative economy, possibly because this is a fairly new concept that has been introduced to the state. Living in Vermont for fewer years was also significantly related to placing a high priority on spending for the arts by state government, supporting an increase in state tax dollars to support arts education in public schools, and being willing to spend additional personal tax dollars to support the arts. Interesting, age was not a significant variable except that younger people were found to be more supportive of an increase in state tax dollars to support arts education in public schools. In addition, as one might expect, having more children also impacts one's support of increasing state tax dollars to support this cause.

13 percent of Vermonters polled favor secession

Although 60 percent of Vermonter Poll respondents said that the United States government has lost its moral authority, only 13 percent said they thought it would be a good idea for Vermont to secede. Of those, 84 percent said that the question should be

put before voters at town meeting.

The respondents who favored secession also strongly supported putting the question before the state Legislature and adopting it into law if two-thirds majority of both houses approved the measure.

Workshops help farmers add the Internet to their business recipes

JESSICA HYMAN
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Many farm-based business owners are unaware of, or intimidated by, the prospects of including e-commerce and information technology in their marketing and business practices. In response, CRS and the Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN) developed an e-commerce curriculum tailored to agricultural entrepreneurs.

CRS and WAgN held two pilot sessions – Nov. 1, 8 and 15 at the University of Vermont in Burlington and Feb. 17 and 24 at the UVM Extension office in St. Johnsbury – with a total of 14 participants.

Through presentations, group activities and guest speakers, the workshops emphasize overall business planning and illustrated how having an online presence can increase the visibility of a business, allow for more efficient order processing and improve the connection with customers – all without changing the flavor of the enterprise. Most importantly, participants are encouraged to think critically about the Internet and

e-commerce and determine what features – such as e-mail lists, online marketing and online ordering – are appropriate for their businesses.

Past participants have ranged from University of Vermont students who hoped to start farm-based enterprises to established business owners with no Web presence to those with Web sites at various stages of development.

All of the participants contacted three months after the first session had made some progress in developing or refining their Web presence.

The WAgN network represents a proxy for the larger audience of small and micro-businesses this project is meant to benefit. This workshop could be replicated for all types of entrepreneurs and tailored to different levels of experience.

CRS and WAgN will offer the next e-commerce workshop Oct 17 and 24 with an optional hands-on session Nov. 7. For registration information, contact Beth Holtzman at (802) 223-2389, or beth.holtzman@uvm.edu.

News Flash

• **Michele Cranwell Schmidt** presented the results of a study on the Vermont Community Action Agencies' Micro Business Development Program, "Developing a Program Success Theory Model" at the May 2007 annual conference of the Association for Enterprise Opportunity in Kansas City, Mo. This work was also recently published in the *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, May 2007, volume 12, number 1.

• **Jane Kolodinsky** recently completed a study for Opportunities Credit Union that investigated whether mortgage lending to buyers of manufactured homes poses a greater risk to lenders than does making a loan for other types of homes. Findings indicate that among manufactured home buyers, credit score is the main indicator of mortgage delinquency, not type of home. In the analysis, age and size of home, and household demographics were controlled for.

Compañeros Café supports Honduran farmers through coffee sales

MICHAEL MOSER
RESEARCH PROJECT SPECIALIST

We recently roasted another batch of our dark roast, fairly traded, certified organic, high-altitude, shade-grown Honduran coffee. The proceeds from this all-volunteer, non-profit project benefit community-initiated projects in Honduran communities.

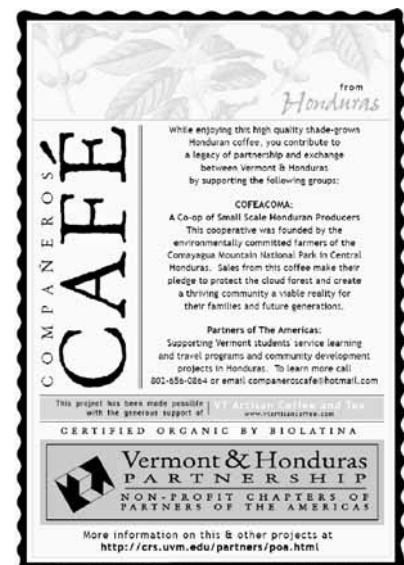
Compañeros Café is for sale now in 207 Morrill Hall on the UVM cam-

pus, or can be shipped/delivered to you. Pricing remains at \$10 per one-pound bag in our third year of operation. Discount pricing is available for orders of 10 or more pounds. Wholesale pricing is available to fundraising groups with orders of 50 pounds or more.

Contact Michael Moser at (802) 656-0864 or mmoser@uvm.edu for more information.

Compañeros Café is a project of the Vermont-Honduras chapters of Partners of The Americas (supported in part by the Center for Rural Studies).

To learn more about Compañeros Café and Partners of The Americas, visit our Web site: <http://crs.uvm.edu/partners/coffee/companeroscafe.html>



CRS helps towns comply with Census updates

WILL "CHIP" SAWYER
SENIOR OUTREACH PROFESSIONAL

It may be news to many that the Census survey we all know is not sent directly to individuals – it is mailed to or left at housing units. Only when you open your front door and pick up the survey does the Census even know that you live in that unit. Therefore in order for the Census Bureau to take a full reckoning of all of the people and housing units in your town in 2010, the next Census year, it needs to know the location of every housing unit in town. The Census lists can get quite out-of-date over the course of a decade.

The Bureau has made a request of all Vermont towns to update Census lists with the physical address of every housing unit in the community. This program is called the Local Update of Census Addresses or LUCA, and it is a tall order for many of our resource-strapped towns. CRS has responded by taking an active role in providing information, outreach and technical assistance to towns on the subject of LUCA. In addition to information workshops being held around the state for local officials, CRS has created a Web site and CRS's Chip Sawyer is available for any LUCA-related questions over the phone or e-mail. Sawyer reports that most town officials are reluctant to make a decision to participate LUCA right away but that the key at this point is just to make sure that they are informed of the program.

**The LUCA information
Web site is at**

<http://crs.uvm.edu/census/luca>

**Contact Chip Sawyer at
(802) 656-0892 or
wsawyer@uvm.edu**

Change in American Community Survey could affect state and federal programs

CRS investigates potential policy and research difficulties

WILL "CHIP" SAWYER
SENIOR OUTREACH PROFESSIONAL

CRS is active on a State Data Center issue that could have broad implications on the data that Vermonters get for their local communities. Traditionally most of the Census town-level income, poverty, disability, employment and housing cost/condition data have come from a component of the decennial Census called the "long form." Over the past decade the Census Bureau has been working on replacing the "long form" with an ongoing program called the American Community Survey (ACS), which will provide annual releases of data for our local communities beginning in 2010. However, there are many key differences between the new annual ACS data and the "long form" data that we have received every 10 years.

The difference that is receiving the most attention is that, with the American Community Survey, our town data will now include seasonal residents. This is because the ACS has a different residency rule for whether a person's information will be counted at a housing unit that receives the ACS survey. The current ACS residency threshold is two or more months. The decennial Census rule is six or more months. With the traditional Census's rule, data users could assume that the variables were for primary residents only, and many data applications have been built upon this assumption. The new ACS two-or-more-month residency rule makes it possible that seasonal residents will be included in the socio-economic variables for Vermont towns. The American Community Survey does not ask whether a respondent is a seasonal or primary resident.

There are positives to this. Highly seasonal towns in Vermont will have a clearer picture of the people living

there throughout the year. College town data will be less affected by college students.

However, it is possible that the higher incomes of mobile, seasonal residents will mask the lower incomes of immobile, lower income, primary residents. This latter group is the focus of many state and federal programs. It will be harder to measure their presence using Census data.

As of this time, feedback from sources in Vermont has hinted at many policy and research difficulties associated with the changes in ACS data. CRS has sent out an appeal to various agencies and organizations for answers to the following questions:

- What state/federal program funding/eligibility criteria do you know of that use Census income, poverty, employment, or disability data for Vermont towns?
- Which of those above programs assume that the data is for primary residents? Or rather, which programs are only focused on Vermont's primary residents?
- Do you know of any planned adjustments to the above programs based on the American Community Survey transition?
- What data sources do you know of that take stock of the incomes of Vermont's seasonal residents? This information may help in anticipating how much change we could see.

The results of this appeal will be compiled into a letter summarizing challenges and recommendations for submittal the U.S. Census Bureau, Vermont's Congressional delegation and other interested parties.

The state of out-of-school and after-school in Vermont

Almost two thirds of school-aged children attend non-athletic after-school or out-of-school programs

MICHAEL MOSER
RESEARCH PROJECT SPECIALIST

A commonly recognized trend for America's families is the transition to two working parents and a general increase in the number of hours parents work. As a result, children are often exposed to greater amounts of unsupervised time before and after school. There is strong research supporting the notion that students engaged in after-school and out-of-school activities volunteer more, are more physically active, use drugs less and are more successful in school.

The Vermont Out-of-School Time Network (VOOST) is a group of organizations working in partnership to build and support accessible, high quality, out-of-school and after-school opportunities for young people in Vermont. VOOST recently contracted with the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) to develop and administer a survey of out-of-school time (OST) and after-school time (AST) programs in Vermont.

The results of this survey and subsequent research conducted in the annual statewide CRS Vermonter Poll help to provide an initial glimpse at the

breadth of after-school and out-of-school programming in Vermont. This research revealed that 62 percent of Vermont's school-aged children attend some form of after-school or out-of-school program other than school sports. These programs include both school-sponsored and non-school-sponsored activities. Additionally, 31 percent of programs report having youth on waitlists. These data reveal a high demand for OST and AST programs in Vermont.

Of particular interest to VOOST's membership was the composition of Vermont's OST and AST programs, including their strengths and challenges. Here are some highlights of Vermont's OST and AST programs:

- 24 percent provide some form of academic, life skills, leadership, or enrichment programming
- 71.5 percent serve 1-3 three towns
- 53.5 percent have been operating for six years or less

One challenge facing these programs involved staffing levels. Thirty-

four percent of respondent programs had no full-time paid staff positions and of the 66 percent of programs with full-time paid staff, 67.6 percent had just one, full-time paid staff position. Limited staffing has proven challenging for programs engaged in fundraising, staff training and community outreach all while administering programming for a wide variety of youth.

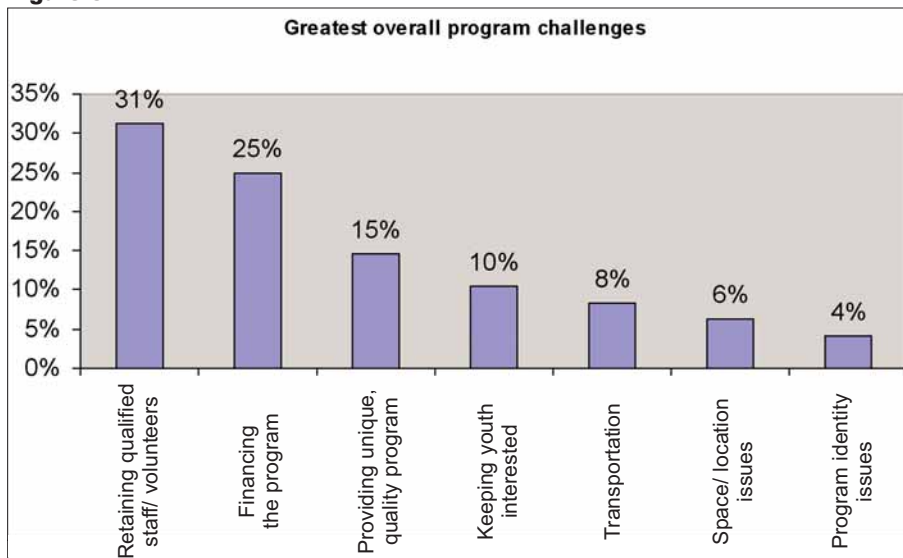
A clear picture of the strengths of these programs also emerged from this research. One such strength was the strong linkage these programs had within their communities. Vermont's after-school and out-of-school programs are place-based organizations strategically located within Vermont's rural landscape. Sixty percent of programs reported their service area as being within a town or county. The close connection to communities is also evidenced by strong community connections developed through programming, staffing, and fundraising efforts. Half of the programs report working regularly with either part or full-time volunteers. Additionally, nearly a third of programs reported fundraising sources that included grassroots, community and private businesses and individuals (presumably connected to these communities).

This research represents an initial attempt to map the breadth of out-of-school and after-school programs in Vermont. The VOOST network is using these findings internally to develop membership-strengthening activities and externally to educate, advocate and grant write at state and national levels.

For more information about this research, contact Michael Moser at mmoser@uvm.edu or 656-0864.

For more information about the VOOST network, go to <http://voost.org>.

Figure 3



Greatest overall program challenges faced by Vermont's out-of-school and after-school programs.

Winrock, CRS investigate benefits of rotational grazing

JON WINSTEN
RESEARCH ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Dairy and livestock farms in the Northeast are arriving at a fork in the road. One path leads toward larger, capital intensive, confinement feeding systems. The other is toward a lower-input, lower cost production system that is often based on the use of rotational grazing. Upon reaching this juncture, an increasing number of farmers are choosing to exit the industry due to a perceived lack of successful options.

The loss of these farms and changing structure of the livestock industry is having a profound impact on the Northeast's environment, economy, and rural communities. The use of rotational grazing has the potential to increase the financial viability of small- and medium-sized farms by reducing operating costs.

Additionally, rotational grazing may improve environmental quality, animal and food system health, and rural communities.

Winrock International and the University of Vermont are collaborating on a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary research effort to estimate the impacts of expanded adoption of

Rotational grazing is a system in which animals graze one section (paddock) of a larger pasture for a short period of time, often 12 or 24 hours. The primary goal of rotational grazing is to lower production costs by maximizing the amount of nutrients available to livestock from pasture forage.

rotational grazing in the northeastern United States. The project is focusing on three focal watersheds: the Missisquoi in Vermont, the Chenango/Upper Susquehanna in New York and

the Monocacy in Maryland and Pennsylvania. The project goals are to:

- Estimate the potential impacts of expanded adoption of rotational grazing on farm viability, environmental quality, and rural communities
- Understand the barriers to adoption of rotational grazing
- Create policy and program recommendations, based on the benefits and barriers, to facilitate the expanded adoption of rotational grazing
- Involve a broad coalition of stakeholders to help implement policy recommendations

The first step is to collect information on the barriers to adoption of rotational grazing. A survey of more than 4,000 dairy farmers in four states was distributed in the spring. Results from the survey will be available this summer.

CRS surveys farmers on land use and development pressure

JESSICA HYMAN
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT

The agricultural economy in Vermont is changing as farmers diversify their products and land use. Many have found economically viable niches in areas such as community supported agriculture (CSA), organic products, horticulture and specialty foods.

This winter, CRS surveyed members of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, Women's Agricultural Network and Vermont Fresh Network as well as farm stand owners. The farmers were asked about their current and anticipated land use and their perceptions of development pressure and local governing bodies' level of support for farmers and understanding of agricultural issues.

Here is a sampling of preliminary results from the 474 valid surveys:

- 72.5% own the land they use for farming; 8.2% lease their land 14.1% use a combination of owned and leased land.

- 38% grow vegetables, 23.9% produce dairy products and 19.2% grow fruit. Animal feed, beef, other meat animals and maple syrup were all in the 14.6 to 15.8 percent range and 14 percent of respondents identified flowers, plants or herbs in the "other" category.

- Nearly 40 percent of respondents said they produced a single type of product, while 50.9 percent identified two to four different product categories and 9.4 percent identified five or more different product categories.

- About 38 percent of respondents said they felt some pressure to sell or develop their land. Meanwhile, only 18.9 percent said they felt pressure from neighbors to change the way their farm operates.

- Almost 80 percent of respondents said their local boards had some degree of understanding of agricultural issues and support for agricultural operations. About 10 percent of respondents said

their local boards had no understanding of agricultural issues or support for agricultural operations. Slightly more respondents said their local boards supported agricultural operations than said their local boards understood of agricultural issues.

- Almost 40 percent of respondents said they plan to buy or lease more land. About half of those said the land would be adjacent to their current property.

- Of those who said they were not likely to purchase or lease more land, 43.7 of those said it was because they didn't need any more. However, 44.3 percent cited the cost of land, availability or a combination of the two as reasons that they did not plan to purchase or lease more land. Other reasons included age and plans to sell farm.

- About 29 percent of respondents said they planned to sell the land on which they farm and/or produce their products.