

# RURAL VERMONT 2024 COURSE OF ACTION 11/20/23

*2024 priorities for organizing, education, advocacy & action: an overview of some of the issue areas we work on & support. Learn more at [ruralvermont.org](http://ruralvermont.org), follow us on social media, & subscribe to our emails.*

**Federal On-Farm Slaughter Amendment:** With national partner organizations, we'll continue working to protect States from arbitrary and capricious decisions by USDA officials in relation to "equal to" status of meat inspection programs and to clarify the personal-use exemption language to explicitly allow livestock owners to slaughter their animals on the farm they were raised or to hire an itinerant slaughterer. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets supports more clarity on this issue.

**Neonicotinoid Pesticides:** As members of the "Protect our Pollinators" coalition, we are working towards legislation which will further reduce & restrict the use of neonicotinoids in the environment, including phasing out neonicotinoid treated seeds in VT, while advocating for supporting farmers in transition.

**Cannabis:** We'll continue our work with the VT Cannabis Equity Coalition for an agriculturally accessible, economically equitable, & racially just market. Some goals include: addressing barriers related to agricultural status, supporting individual producers with challenges navigating regulations, investment in communities disproportionately harmed by criminalization, and ensuring direct market access for producers & the public.

**Healthcare:** In collaboration with grassroots & other healthcare advocates, we'll continue to offer farm(work)er specific training opportunities around healthcare access, amplify agrarian voices in healthcare, & work in coalition with healthcare advocates towards publicly funded universal access to healthcare for all.

**Market Development & Rules for Composting Food Residuals On Farms:** With the Protect Our Soils Coalition, we are working to secure markets for on-farm and community scale composting of food residuals by advocating for regulating PFOS/PFAS in agriculture and depackaging technology, and strengthening the source separation requirement and the hierarchy for organics management. As part of the Food Cycle Coalition, we're working on a Required Agricultural Practices rule revision to include specifics about composting food scraps on farms - the release is coming in 2024.

**Land, Capital, and Housing:** Long term secure access to land, capital, and housing are some of the most pressing issues faced in the agricultural community. The Biodiversity Bill (Act 59) will roll out a public engagement process in 2024 to shape a Conservation Plan that includes visions and policy recommendations for keeping working lands open. Simultaneously, the Home Act charges all local planning commissions to set goals for housing development. We are working nationally and locally to ensure that U.S. farmland stays in the farmers' hands. We will continue to monitor & communicate the work of groups such as the Land Access and Opportunity Board & Milk with Dignity which focus on housing, land, & equitable access & distribution.

*More information & additional areas of work on our website. Are we missing something? Let us know!*

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**Agricultural Program Development and Opposing Carbon Market Development:** We're uplifting farmer-led needs to improve existing programs' visibility, access, scope, funding and project turnaround.

**La Via Campesina supported Agroecology and Movement Building School:** We are part of a collective effort to build an agroecology & movement building school in Vermont in collaboration with local, national and international partners. This emerging and itinerant effort highlights farmer to farmer training models, popular & political education, and seeks to uplift the many farmers & farmworkers already leading this work.

**Workshop Series:** We'll continue food sovereignty workshops, partnering with farmers & other members of the agricultural community to teach cooking of farmed, foraged, and wild foods; slaughter & processing of poultry, rabbits and livestock; growing & processing cannabis; & food scrap composting (new!).

**Solidarity:** Food sovereignty & food justice are grounded in human rights, territorial rights, the right to food & culturally appropriate food, freedom from oppression, dignified lives & livelihoods, & solidarity. We stand in solidarity with communities around the world seeking self-determination, & work to influence policy towards anti-imperialism and a just peace.

**Quarterly Member Forums & Ongoing Grassroots Engagement:** Member forums discuss particular issues affecting farms or communities, and what we are currently working on. Additional feedback sought from members and allies on an ongoing basis through 1:1 meetings, community conversations, surveys, & more.

**Small Farm Action Days:** We'll continue to co-host events at the Statehouse throughout the legislative session for activists to become familiar with the Statehouse & legislative process, take action on active issues, meet with representatives, or testify about issues impacting them.

**Amicus in Land Use Cases:** It can be helpful in land use disputes for courts to hear from advocacy groups and others about the laws and policies affected. Rural Vermont was denied the right to file an "Amicus brief" in early 2023 during a member's Accessory On-Farm Business case regarding an Act 250 permit. In 2024, we're spearheading legislation to clarify the ability to file amicus briefs in land use cases in law.

**Monitoring/Researching/Nascent Issues:** We'll continue watchdogging at the Statehouse for issues that are relevant to our community. We are further exploring: the sale of uninspected parted poultry, revising "cottage" food production laws, protecting the farming community from potentially harmful ordinances, equitable taxation, scale appropriate regulations for meat processing licensure, & more.

**Farm To Plate:** We'll continue our seat on the Farm to Plate Steering Committee & participation in a number of groups within its new organizational structure, including: the Policy Priority Strategy Team (co-creating a "policy roadmap"), Meat Slaughter & Processing Priority Strategy Team, the Food Cycle Coalition, & more.

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