



## **Rural Vermont Issue Statement: Healthcare**

December 2019

Locally and nationally farmers and members of our rural communities have identified healthcare as a significant issue affecting their farms, livelihoods, and communities. In the 2017 HirednAg National Farmer and Rancher Survey, 72% of respondents wanted the USDA to represent them in national health insurance policy discussions. In Rural Vermont's 2018 Issues Survey - in which respondents were asked to prioritize a number of pre-identified policy and / or organizing opportunities we could focus on, Healthcare ranked highest in over 200 responses. In Vermont, health insurance premium rate increases for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont plans on VT Health Connect will have risen by 52.4% since 2014 (on average) as of January 2020. We understand that not only are these rate hikes unaffordable for most Vermonters, but that the care and coverage people receive is often inadequate as well. It is our intention to honor the voices of farmers and other community members locally and nationally, and to work alongside others to organize agricultural, food systems, and rural economic development organizations (among others) to understand healthcare as an integral issue for their members, to advocate for their communities, and to help bring their voices to conversations about the future of healthcare in Vermont, the greater northeast, and nationally.

Healthcare starts at the farm. It starts with how farmers and land managers care for the land, the soil, and the water in order to produce healthy places, nutrient dense foods, timber products, fibers, and more which contribute to the wellbeing and sustenance of our human and non-human communities. Rural Vermont recognizes the need to assure just healthcare not only in terms of medical treatment, but also in terms of supporting community-scale agriculture and equitable access to the preventative care of nutrient dense foods, clean water, thriving landscapes, and the healthy communities they produce.

### **ACTION**

*Rural Vermont is collecting stories from farmers and others in the working lands about their experiences with healthcare, and working with other organizations within and outside of agriculture to strategically develop momentum. Please be in touch with Graham and Mollie if you would like to share your experiences, ideas, etc.*

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