

## **Location**

Hardwick, Vermont

## **Funding**

\$1,500,000 Economic Development Administration Grant *from ARRA*

\$50,000 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant *for a feasibility study to select location*

\$500,000 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant *for equipment*

\$191,849 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant *for initial staffing of Center for Agricultural Economy*

\$800,000 HUD Community Development Block Grant through Vermont Community Development Program

\$450,000 Senate Appropriations Grant

## **Partners**

Northern Enterprise, Inc.

Center for Agricultural Economy

Vermont Small Business Development Center

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

Vermont Housing Conservation Board

Northeastern Vermont Development Association

## **Abstract**

Through a partnership between non-profit organizations and local food producers, Hardwick, Vermont is investing in the area's local and regional food systems. In 2012, Hardwick opened a new site of the Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC), a food incubator for value-added and specialty food products. Supported in part by USDA, the VFVC supports the processing and business needs of local food producers as a means to strengthening the sustainable agricultural economy of Hardwick.

## **Project Description**

Beginning in 1781, early residents of Hardwick, Vermont were invested in the land through agriculture. Hardwick's economy, like many small towns across the United States, ebbed and flowed through industry changes from its transition out of agriculture to resource extraction to its later transition to manufacturing. In recent years, the economy of Hardwick has been struggling - unemployment was 40% higher than the state's average and incomes were 25% lower than the Vermont average.

Reacting to the economic troubles of the area, Hardwick residents have chosen to return to their agricultural roots and create a local food economy. The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE), a non-profit education organization, opened in 2004 in downtown Hardwick. CAE creates resources and programming that supports local and regional food systems. The food movement in Hardwick has been highly successful in revitalizing this small town – creating 175 jobs in just three years.

The CAE and local food producers have worked together to create a strong, sustainable food economy in Hardwick. In 2007, Northern Enterprises' Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC) was looking for a new location. As a food venture center, the VFVC operates as a food business incubator for value-added and specialty food products. Agricultural entrepreneurs use its processing facilities to turn primary agricultural commodities into something more valuable. For example, a tomato farmer could use the

VFVC to produce, can, market, and distribute a tomato-based product. The Vermont Food Venture Center was highly successful at its original location in Fairfax, but the facilities had limited processing capabilities.

In a partnership with Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), the CAE conducted a feasibility study to identify a new location for the VFVC. With the financial support of a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant, the feasibility study determined that Hardwick would be the best location because of its proximity to a manufacturing and agricultural economy. Since the multi-purpose processing facility required 15,000 square feet, NVDA and CAE chose a one-acre lot in an existing industrial park within a three minute drive of downtown.

In the facility planning phase, an anchor tenant was identified that would set-up a cheese-making apprenticeship program. NVDA and CAE then secured funding for the construction of the new VFVC in Hardwick. The VFVC was funded by a \$1,500,000 Economic Development Administration Grant, an \$800,000 CDBG Grant through the Vermont Community Development Program, and a \$450,000 grant directed by Congress through an appropriations bill.

The new VFVC in Hardwick was completed in January 2012. A \$500,000 USDA Rural Business Grant was used to purchase equipment for the facility, and a \$191,849 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant was used for the initial staffing of the Vermont Small Business Development Center housed at the VFVC. The Vermont Small Business Development Center provides business advising in the form of marketing planning, preparation of loan packages and other business related planning to the clients of the VFVC. Additionally, the new facility includes larger storage capacity and the ability to accommodate meat-processing and cheese-making.

The long-term economic impacts of the VFVC are still unclear, but the short-term impacts have been significant for the downtown and local economy. The CAE intentionally spent their funding locally during the construction of the VFVC, hiring local electricians, plumbers, and construction employees were hired. CAE and VFVC employees eat at the downtown restaurants and encourage visitors to stay in local bed and breakfast establishments. Since its opening, the VFVC estimates that 1,000 people have visited the Center and spent money in the area. Additionally, 19 jobs have been created or retained because of the support of the VFVC.

The VFVC in Hardwick is a key to implementing this small town's plan for a stronger, more sustainable economy. The community capitalized on existing resources, federal investment, and a unique local food economy to enhance Hardwick's present and future economic competitiveness.

### **Livability Principles Addressed**

- Enhances economic competitiveness.
- Supports existing communities.
- Coordinates and leverages federal investment.
- Values communities and neighborhoods.

### **Lessons Learned**

Finish short-term and long-term RESEARCH BEFORE COMMITTING to the project. Think about if the synergy in the community exists for the project.

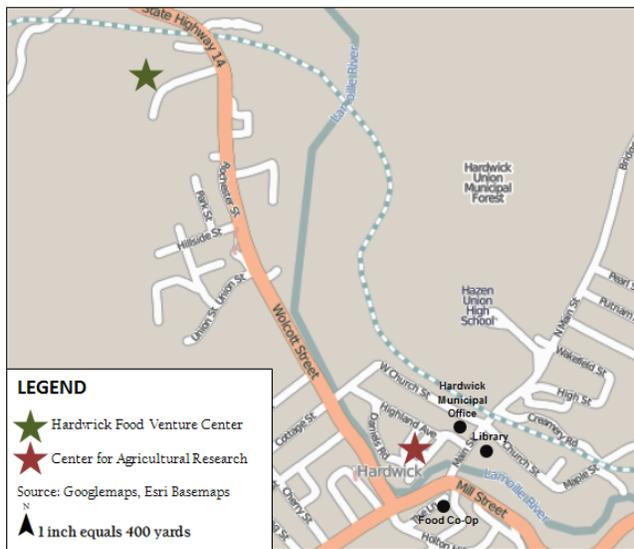
PARTNERSHIPS are crucial to the holistic development of the program's clients.

## Pictures and Maps



Description: Context Map

Source: Esri Basemaps, ArcGIS online database (all layer packages by Esri)



Description: DowntownMap – Hardwick, VT

Sources: GoogleMaps, Esri Basemap



Description: Exterior of the Vermont Food Venture Center

Source: <http://vermontfoodventurecenter.org/about/facility-2/photos/#jp-carousel-270>



Description: Hanging to sign on the exterior of the new Vermont Food Venture Center

Source: <http://vermontfoodventurecenter.org/about/facility-2/photos/#jp-carousel-323>



Description: The Cheese-Processing Equipment at the Vermont Food Venture Center  
Source: <http://vermontfoodventurecenter.org/about/facility-2/photos/#jp-carousel-319>

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