



Farmland Conversion Trends in Vermont



American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

VT Farm to Plate Network Gathering 2025

Burke Mountain Resort, E. Burke, Vermont
November 21, 2025

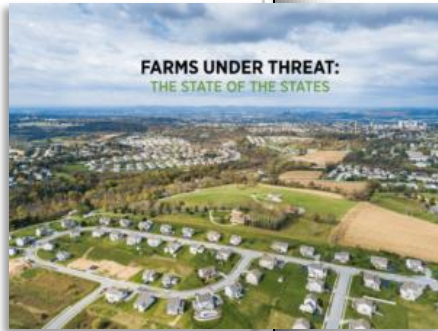
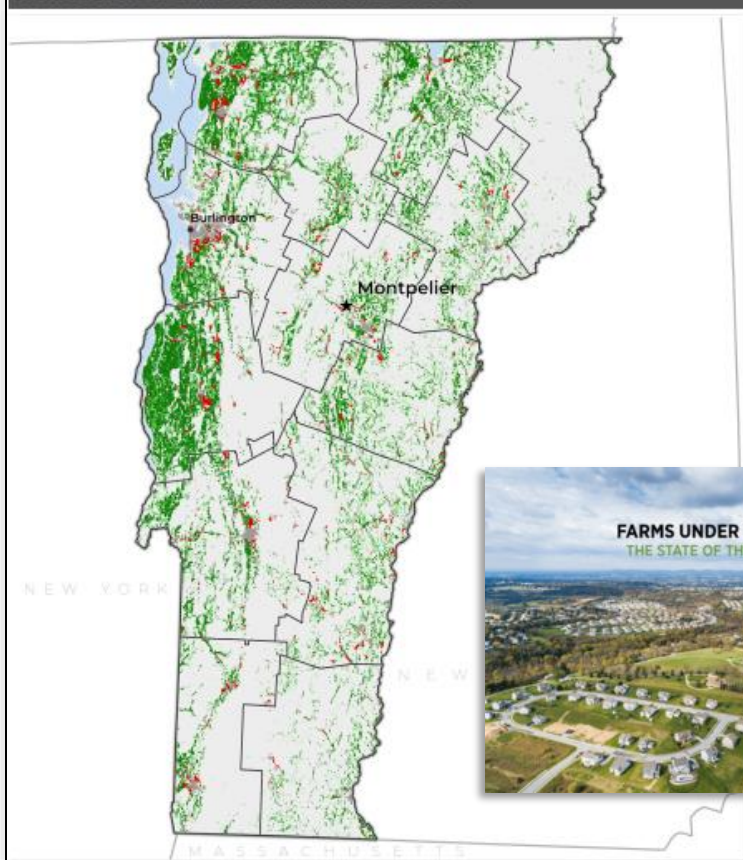
Jamie Pottern

Senior New England Program Manager
American Farmland Trust



Figure 2. Urban and highly developed (UHD), low-density residential (LDR), and rural land uses exist on a continuum from high-density urban areas to low-density rural areas. The UHD category encompasses dense urban cores, suburbs, and highly developed areas like warehouses. UHD transitions into LDR in residential areas where house lots exceed 1-2 acres. The LDR category also encompasses very large-lot residential areas, which might appear rural at first glance but are primarily used for housing, not for production agriculture.

AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2001-2016



LDR PAVES THE WAY FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural land in LDR areas in 2001 was

5 TIMES MORE LIKELY

to be converted to UHD by 2016, compared to other agricultural land.

3,600 acres

17%

of conversion was to UHD

17,800 acres

83%

of conversion was to LDR

CONVERSION AFFECTED ALL TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND



CROPLAND: 8,400 acres
PASTURELAND: 5,600 acres
WOODLAND: 7,300 acres

From 2001-2016, 21,400 acres of VT agricultural land were developed or compromised.



Projected agricultural land conversion from 2016-2040 in the *Business as Usual* scenario.

Projected Conversion (2040)

Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

Land Cover (2016)

Farmland* Other lands Urban areas
Forestland Federal (no grazing) Water

*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future: 2016-2040

WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

How Vermonters choose to develop will shape the future of farming. The scenarios in *Farms Under Threat 2040* show the impacts:



Business as Usual: Development follows recent patterns. Poorly planned development and low-density residential sprawl continue to rapidly convert farmland and ranchland.

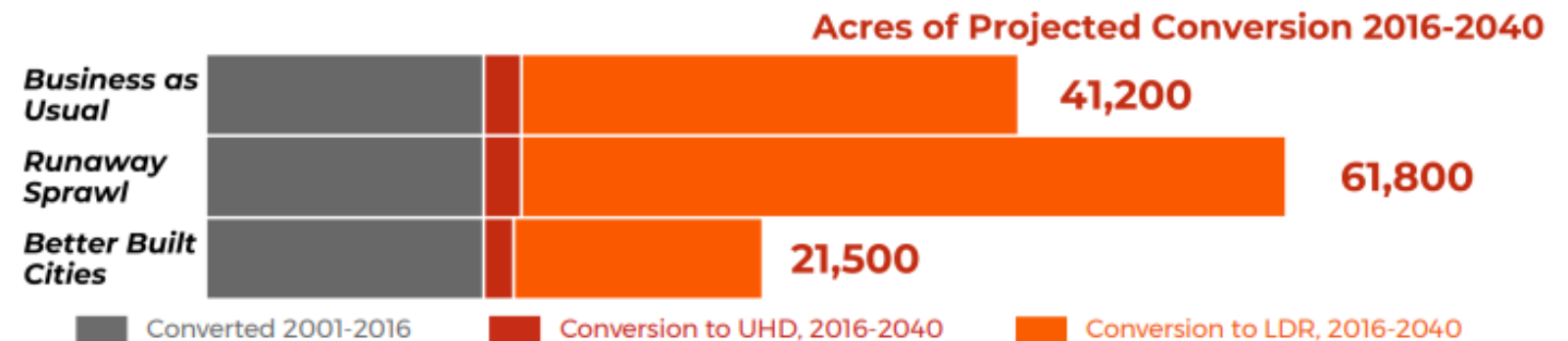


Runaway Sprawl: Development becomes even less efficient than in *Business as Usual*. Low-density housing sweeps across the countryside, displacing farmers and ranchers.



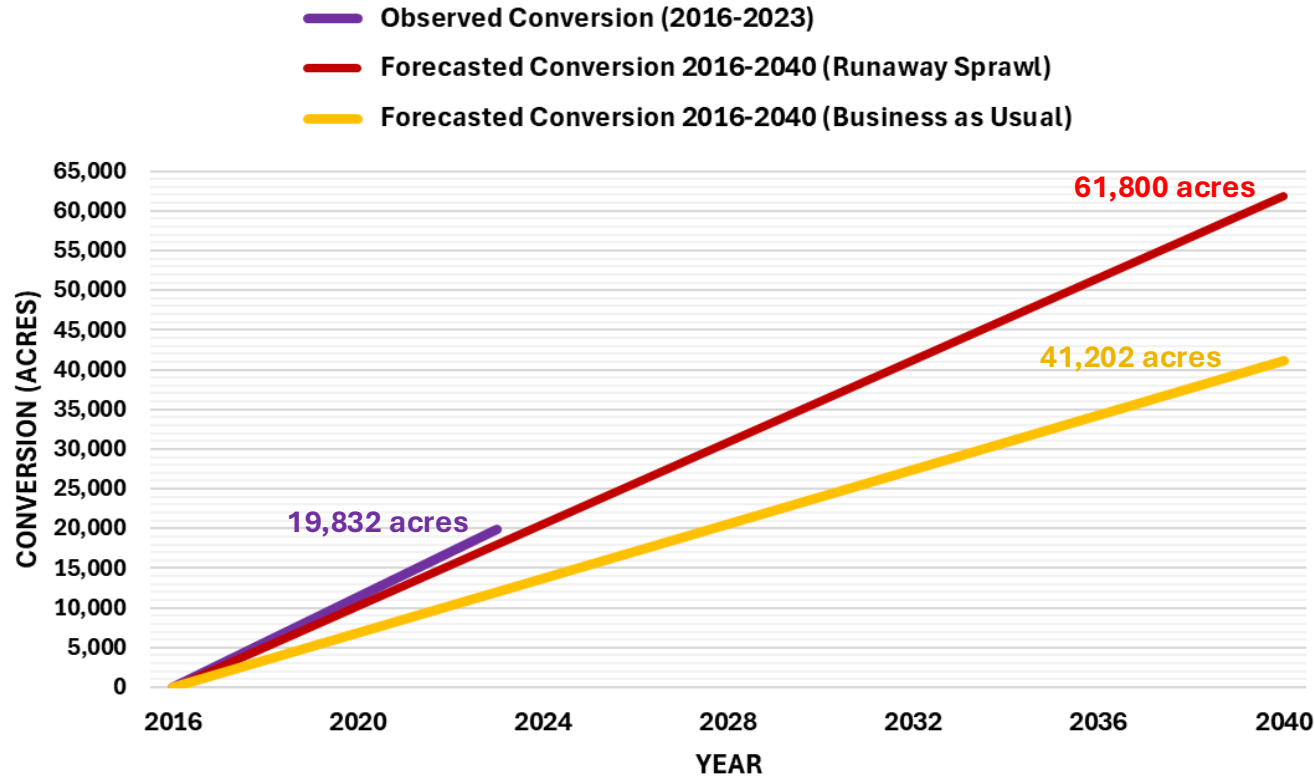
Better Built Cities: Policymakers and land-use planners promote compact development and reduce sprawl, saving irreplaceable farmland and ranchland from conversion.

COMPACT GROWTH CAN SAVE FARMS



State	Acres of agriculture in 2016	Business as Usual		Runaway Sprawl		Better Built Cities	
		ACRES	%	ACRES	%	ACRES	%
Vermont	1,320,300	41,200	3.1	61,800	4.7	21,500	1.6

Farmland Conversion in Vermont



Forecasted Conversion (BAU, 2016-2040)

-1,717 acres/year

Forecasted Conversion (RS, 2016-2040)

-2,575 acres/year

Observed Conversion (2016-2023)

-2,833 acres/year

Observed Farmland Conversion (2016-2023)	Forecasted Farmland Conversion (2016-2040)	% Forecasted Conversion Already Converted
19,832 acres	BAU: 41,202 acres	48%
	RS: 61,800 acres	32%

State	Acres of agriculture in 2016	Business as Usual		Runaway Sprawl		Better Built Cities	
		ACRES	%	ACRES	%	ACRES	%
Vermont	1,320,300	41,200	3.1	61,800	4.7	21,500	1.6

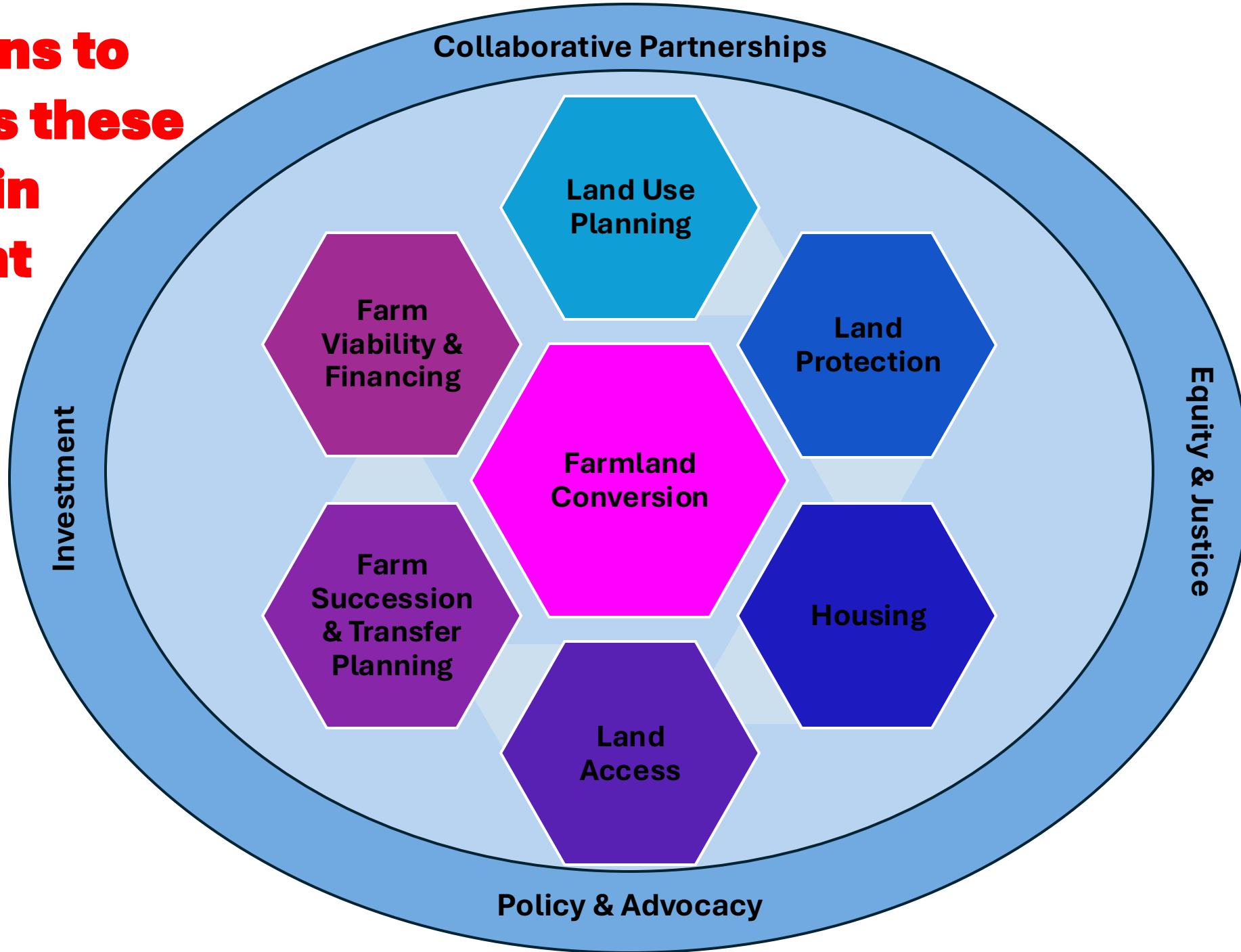
Talking Points:

- We have already converted 48% of what we forecasted to lose by 2040 under Business as Usual (1.5% of all VT farmland).
- This conversion is happening **65% faster than forecasted under the BAU scenario, and 10% faster than under the Runaway Sprawl scenario.**
- As of 2023, **Vermont was hitting conversion projections ~5 years ahead of the BAU schedule.**

Takeaways from data & trends

- 1. Farmland conversion is happening faster than projected**
 - The vast majority of conversion is to Low Density Residential (LDR)-type development
 - It is happening on the outskirts of cities and towns, primarily on hayfields, woodlands associated with farmland, and pastureland.
- 2. Farmers are aging and many don't have successors lined up**
- 3. Next generation farmers struggle to afford farmland and housing**
- 4. Increasing economic and climate threats further impact farm viability**
- 5. Only ~15-20% of VT agricultural land is permanently protected**

Solutions to address these trends in Vermont



Vermont Farmland Conversion: What's at Stake and What We Can Do About It

Framing the Issue:

- VT has made incredible investment in farmland conservation
- With that being said- Farmland is being lost at an alarmingly higher rate than predicted
- Holistic approach across sectors is needed with farmland being at the center

Group Insights:

- Ag should be the end goal, tying everything together in land use planning
- Planning tools exist to support development practices that reduce development on farmland, but local communities need to be supported in adopting these, and state need to prioritize farmland
- Housing needs and land use patterns have changed dramatically, easements and other tools need to reflect that in the best way they can

Next Steps:

- F2P group to share the role/tools of Regional Planning commissions
- F2P can help with narrative development to improve communication and understanding across sectors including distribution and access of data
- F2P network works to support communities to advocate for policy change at the statewide level that would facilitate farmland protection through planning
- Work and build relationships with Housing folks to desilo conversations

Understanding Climate Resiliency and Policy

Framing the Issue

- Farmers are adapting to escalating climate impacts, but repeated shocks strain financial and labor capacity.
- Technical assistance helps, but land insecurity and limited capital constrain long-term resilience.
- State frameworks (CAP, RIS, S.60) signal growing support, but ag/food systems remain under-resourced.

Group Insights

- Financial viability and fair pricing determine whether farms can adapt and invest in climate resilience
- Land access & security is a missing backbone of climate preparedness and limits soil and water stewardship
- Farmers are key climate innovators—policy must recognize and integrate their expertise

Next Steps

- Elevate and integrate farmer expertise into resilience planning and policymaking
- Mobilize support for significant, rapid-response funding (e.g., S.60 Farm Security Special Fund)
- Prioritize pathways to long-term land security across service providers and partnerships

Ways to Support the Farm Security Fund S.60

The Farm Security Fund will provide farmers with immediate financial assistance to recover from the impacts of extreme weather. (Read a summary of the bill [here](#).) We have the opportunity to pass legislation in 2026 that will ensure farmers have the support they need to recover from extreme weather and climate impacts.

How it would work:

- simple to apply for
- payments within 30 days of application
- flexible and proportional to meet Vermont farmers' needs
- permanently and predictably funded over time
- farmers will be reimbursed for up to 50% of uninsured or otherwise uncovered losses (up to \$150k)
- administered by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets in collaboration with a review board

How You Can Help

Submit a comment to Governor Scott in support of S.60.

1. Click this link: <https://finance.vermont.gov/about-department/contact-us/public-comments-budget-process>
2. Fill in your contact information.
3. Choose PROTECTION as the “area of comment” in the drop-down menu.
4. Write your comment and include the following:
 - "Please appropriate \$20 million for the Farm & Forest Operations Security Special Fund envisioned in S.60 for FY2027."
 - In 1-2 sentences, say why YOU PERSONALLY support this request.
 - Feel free to use some of [these talking points](#)!
5. Please send a quick email to Maddie Kempner (maddie@nofavt.org) and let me know you submitted a comment! Our goal is to get 50 comments submitted.

Sign on to support as an organization: Please use [this link to sign our organizational sign-on letter](#).

Sign on to support as an individual: Please use [this link to sign our petition](#).

How Do We Scale Regional Food Production & Infrastructure to Achieve Regional Self-Reliance?

Framing the Issue:

- Lots of opportunity for the region to become more self-reliant in produce, grains and dry beans
- We haven't articulated an approach for close to retirement age big producers to create long term supply chain stability
- For produce/grains, producers tend to "make" - vertically integrate – but supply chain services (opportunity to "buy") are emerging

Group Insights:

- Need "sticky" and durable demand to lower risk, and risk of large investments, for farms. farmers take on the most risk with the least profit
- Market demand across market channels is softening, and local is becoming "stale" - need to reinvigorate/evolve the messaging
- A lot of money goes into certain stages of the supply chain but not others – infrastructure and equipment is great, but need marketing support too

Next Steps:

- Grain industry needs a roller mill for all purpose flour production
- Explore more forward contracting/longer-term commitments with retailers that care (e.g., coops)
- Market and supply chain flow charts for farmers/producers to enable better decisions and planning

Collaboration, Joy, & Policy to make VT Food Secure by 2035

Framing the Issue:

- Government ensures food security for all in Vermont
- Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient
- Communities have the tools to support food security

Group Insights:

- Importance of shared message framing
- Strengths and challenges to collaborative policy work
- Lessons learned from working as a Coalition

Next Steps:

- Join the FSC as an Ally Organization!
- Engage in your local Food Security Council Network to align community level work with the Roadmap
- Familiarize yourself with the 2026 FSC Policy Slate

Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity Through This Crisis (and the next)

Framing the Issue:

- Mutual aid disrupts systems that disconnect us from each other and our environment. Systemic strategies are important, but need to happen in concert with mutual aid organizing.
- In friend groups, it isn't hard to do mutual aid. In cross-class groups, it is harder, because you have to make the relationship. Who is willing to organize mutual aid across difference and in imperfect allies?
- There are lots of ways to get involved in organizing for mutual aid, and lots of tools and models that can be applied in any community. It all starts with and grows from being in increasing relationship.
- Solidarity is horizontal
- Tending and befriending vs. competition
- Mutual aid vs. charity
- Pleasure and Joy

Group Insights:

- Interest in organizing in mutual aid efforts with imperfect allies – understanding how to work across difference
- How important trust is in building mutual aid networks, and how important it is to be vulnerable and open enough to developing trust in new relationships – especially across class
- Desire to know more about what's happening in our regions and communities and to tap in

Next Steps:

- Interest in staying connected to one another through a Signal chat