



Strengthening Food Systems in the Northeast Kingdom

Exploring community led resilience planning and farmer to farmer learning

November 21, 2025

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Farmer panel: Emma Ricci, Eric Skovsted, Evan Perkins

Session Overview

- 1) Project Overview
- 2) RCFS Process
 - a) Research design
 - b) Peer-Peer Cohort Learning
- 3) Tabletop Exercise
- 4) Farmer Panel



Resilient Community Food Systems: Northeast Kingdom, Vermont



Phase 1

Phase 2

Transition

**Vision**

Develop coalition | Build trust
Begin interviews | Assess assets
and sectors

**Research**

Brainstorm vision, mission and core
values | Gather secondary data
Continue interviews

**Input**

Confirm vision, mission and core
values | Host public input sessions |
Compile snapshot

**Prioritize**

Analyze priority project suggestions
| Determine priority projects
Create systems evaluation plan |
Determine project teams

**Project**

Quick Win

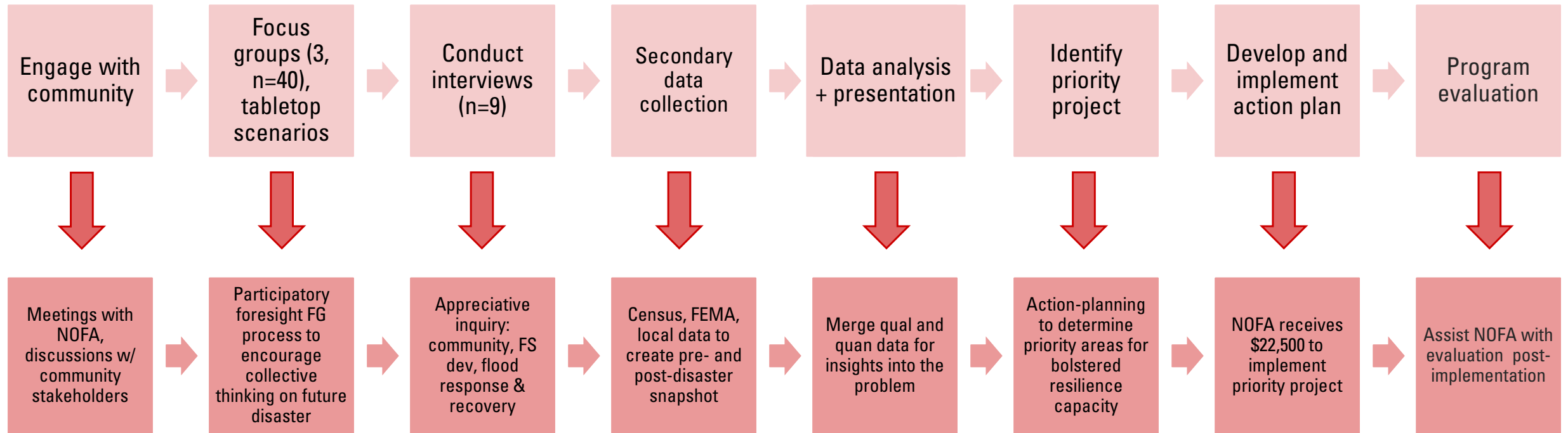


Intermediate



Long Term

Project design: Participatory research



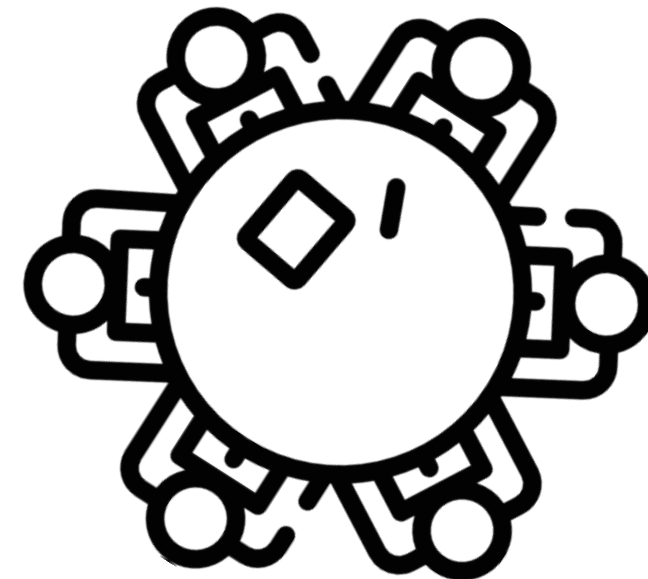
Foresight Focus Group and TableTop Activities

Foresight Focus Group

- Guided discussion to help participants anticipate future shocks, draw on past lessons, and identify strategies to strengthen community resilience
- Guiding questions on flooding impacts on business and community, perceived recovery, what went well, what did not, and what should happen in the future

TableTop Scenario

- Group tabletop exercise using flooding scenario
- Guided questions on preparedness, response, and recovery
- Groups by role or scale (farm, service orgs)
- Timeline prompts:
 - 2 weeks out
 - 2 days out
 - Event hits
 - Post-crisis
 - Extended recovery



Adaptive Food System Resilience

Ability for a place-based community food systems to withstand shocks and pressures while maintaining basic structures, processes and functions of and within the supply chain and ensure continued access to food for community residents.

Includes:

- Ability to absorb and react to disaster;
- Adaptive capacity to work through disaster over time;
- Ability to transform and build back /build back better from disaster

“The ability to become strong, healthy or, successful again after something bad happens...returning to its natural shape” (Webster Dictionary)

Is this what we want? To go back to where we were, or is it something else?



Northeast Kingdom Community

Strengths

- Strong agricultural community [Agriculture]
- Strong self-sufficiency [Independence]
- Networks and Relationships [Social Capital]
- Scenic and beautiful region [Environment]
- Care and Stewardship of the land [Protection]

Challenges

- Lack of trust in the system (government)/ and of “outsiders” [Trust]
- Development and conflict with agriculture and land use [Priorities]
- Built infrastructure, transportation, and land use [Planning]
- Ego and individualism - not seeing big picture [People]
- Personal Isolation [Isolation]
- Change in weather patterns [Climate]
- Place-based needs vs. state protocols [Policy]

Northeast Kingdom Food Systems

Strengths

- Seeing increased interest and awareness
- Generational knowledge on production practices
- Have diversified production
- Direct-to-consumer
- Wholesale
- New market opportunities starting
- Education and Technical Assistance opportunities

Challenges

- Challenge to source local food as a consumer
- Aggregation and Storage
- Decreasing # of farms
- Agriculture is a small margin business
- Lack markets for culturally relevant foods
- Labor access and safety

Disaster Impact

Primary Disasters/ Crises:

- Natural
 - Flooding
 - Compounding floods- occurring frequently
 - Drought
- Political
 - Land management
- Human
 - COVID

Secondary impacts:

- Erosion
- Soil runoff
- Insurance access/ affordability
- Loss of farms
- Job market/loss
- Mental health and trauma

Anticipated Future Risk – FEMA Risk Index

	Caledonia County		Essex County		Orleans County	
Disaster	Risk Index Rating	Expected Annual Loss	Risk Index Rating	Expected Annual Loss	Risk Index Rating	Expected Annual Loss
Riverine Flooding	68.9 - relatively low	\$921,391	37.6 - relatively low	\$213,456	79.0 - relatively moderate	\$1,537,180
Cold Wave	71.7 - relatively moderate	\$209,859	54.4 - relatively low	\$68,304	70.0 - relatively moderate	\$194,110
Winter Weather	64.1 - relatively moderate	\$83,849	34.2 - relatively low	\$23,634	70.3 - relatively moderate	\$109,232

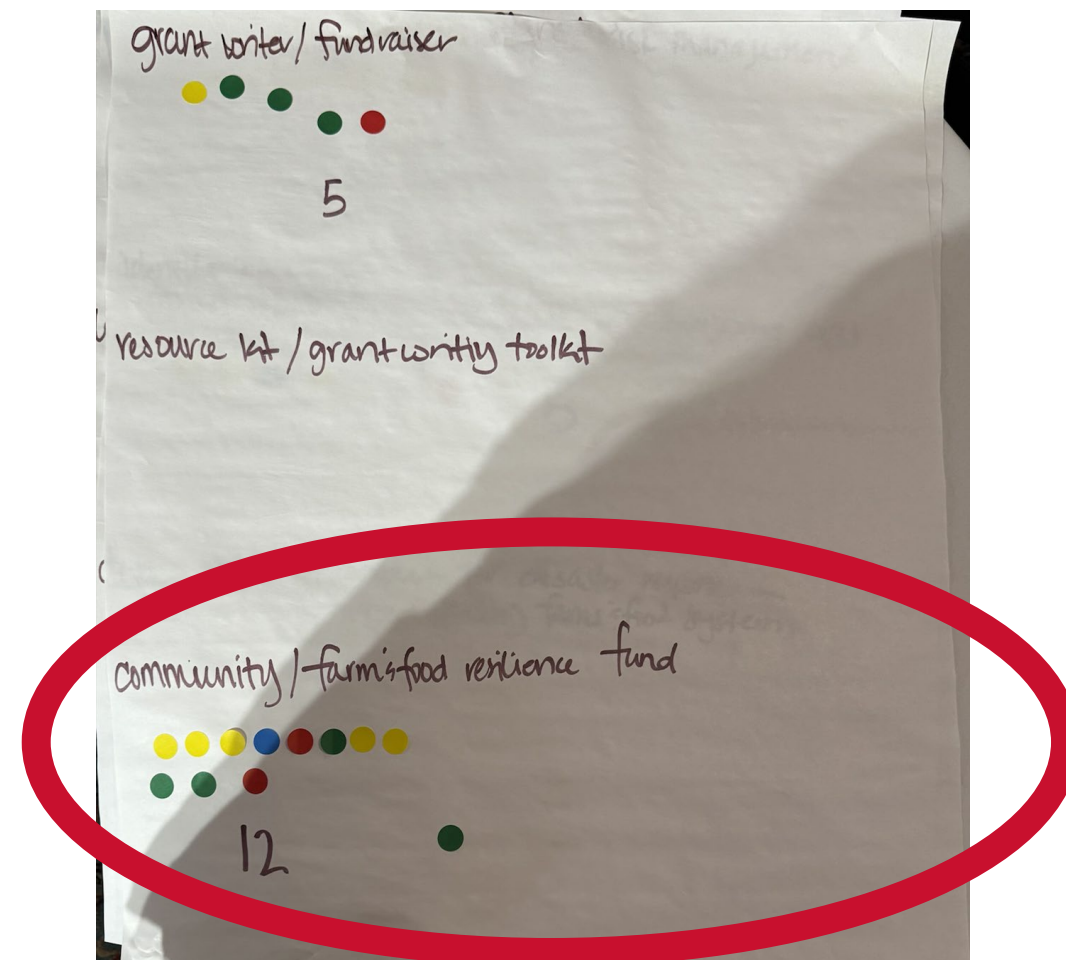
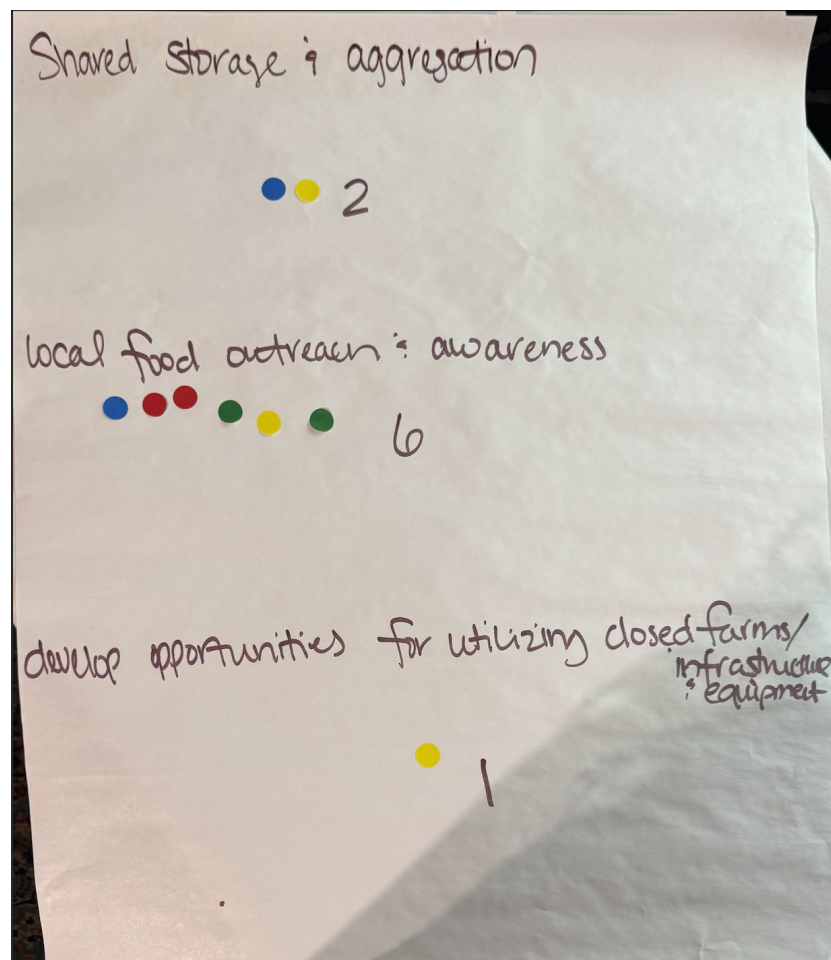
<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map>

- NEK counties overall have a relatively very low risk ranking at 22.84 in Caledonia, 3.05 in Essex, and 26.57 in Orleans.
- Community resilience varies across the Kingdom at 66.9 in Caledonia (relatively high), 35.5 in Essex (relatively low), and 72.2 in Orleans (relatively high).

Suggested Priorities



— Prioritization Activity



NEK Farmer Resilience Cohort

- 26 farms across the NEK
- 3 on farm gatherings
 - Farm financial resilience
 - Social resilience
 - Ecological resilience
- Practical tools & regional network
- Identify regional needs and how to use this collective momentum to meet them



Join fellow NEK farmers for 3 on-farm evening gatherings to collaboratively explore ways to strengthen farm and community resilience in northeast VT.

Together, expand your toolkits for building resilience, share and learn with your neighbors, and strengthen a network of peer support.

COHORT SESSIONS

FARM FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Sweet Rowen Farmstead

AUGUST 6

Glover, VT

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Breadseed Farm

SEPTEMBER 3

Craftsbury, VT

CLIMATE RESILIENCE PLANNING

Joe's Brook Farm

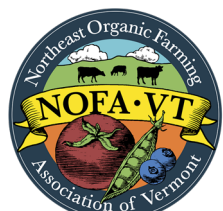
SEPTEMBER 17

St. Johnsbury, VT

Cohort members will receive financial compensation

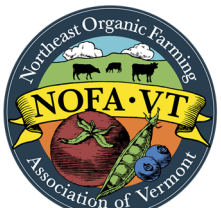
One meeting	\$200
Two meetings	\$450
All three meetings	\$725

To join or learn more:
email kevin@nofavt.org



Core Principles of Farmer-to-Farmer Cohort Learning

- Peer - peer knowledge transfer
- Community focused learning
- Co-created with participants
- Experiential & on-farm
- Regionally specific



Participatory and Action Oriented Methodology



Farmer Co-creation of Knowledge



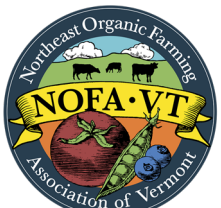
Scaling from Farm to
Community Action



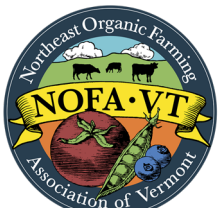
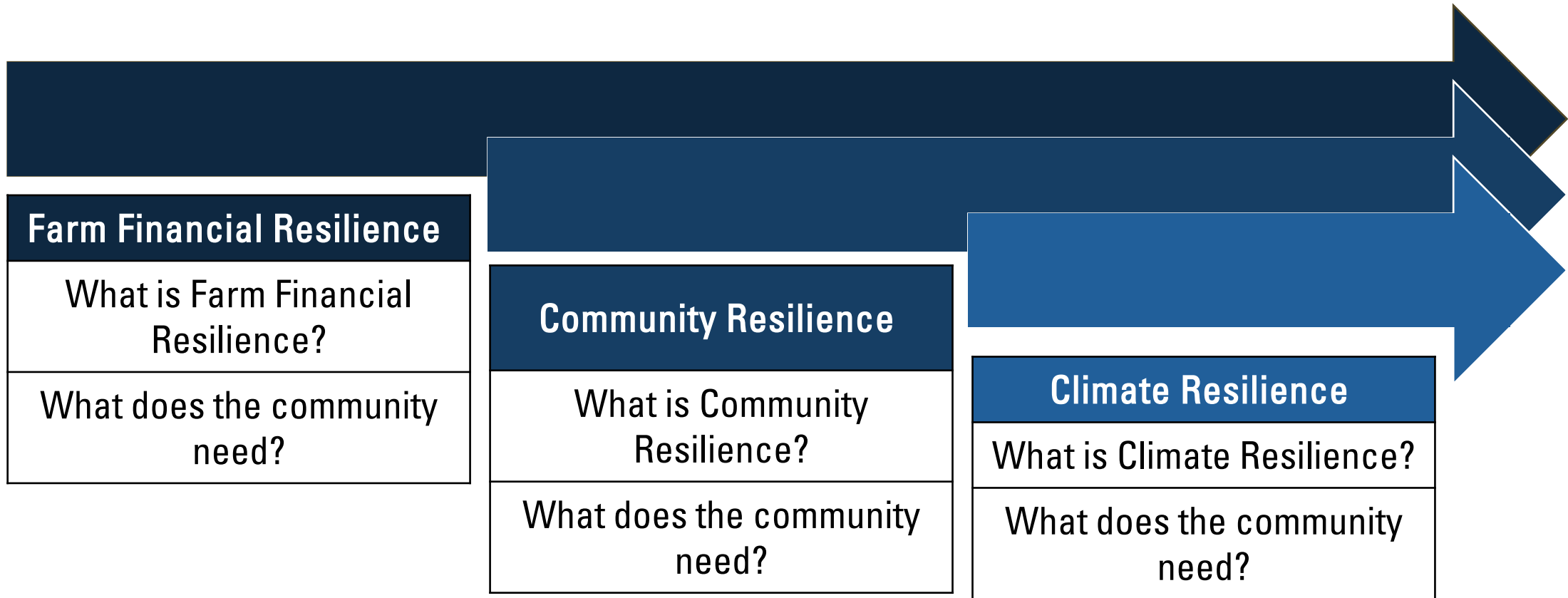
Building Trust, Community and
Collective Power

Meeting Structure

Timing	Activity
10 minutes	Greeting and community forming activity
10 minutes	Collective defining of core concepts
40 minutes	Farm tour
30 minutes	Shared meal
30 minutes	Breakout groups
10 minutes	Sharing back to the full group
10 minutes	Synthesizing themes and scaling to community needs
5 minutes	Closing



Cohort Series Structure



Tabletop Exercise

- Creating Teams and room set up
- Developing a case study / injects
 - 2-3 days before
 - Time of crisis
 - Hours after

TableTop Exercise modeled from North Carolina Drinking Water Incident Response Toolkit: Sample TableTop Exercise: Flooding Incident

- www.drinkingwater.sog.unc.edu

Tabletop Exercise

It is mid-August and due to a La Niña weather pattern, the area received well over its normal share of rain during the last 60 days. Creeks and rivers are at capacity and the ground is saturated. An additional 5 to 15 inches of rain are forecast to fall throughout the state over the next 5 days.

Inject #1 – 48 hours pre-flood event

At 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday morning you receive notification that your community has been placed under a flood watch for the next 48 hours, with the expectation of receiving an additional 12 inches of rain.

Discussion:

- What are you doing on your own site to prepare?
- Who do you need to connect with to ensure support?
- What organizations need to be activated?
- Is there a plan for harvesting product, moving livestock, etc. before river floods. Where will products go and be distributed?

Inject #2 – flood event

As of 8:00am Thursday morning, your area has received 10 inches of rain. Many rivers have breached and flooding is occurring on farms and throughout community areas. Power is out throughout most of the region and has been out for roughly 8 hours. Generators at water treatment plants are running out of fuel and have stopped functioning in many cases. Local officials have shared there are numerous private drinking water wells that have flooded and the local utility's drinking water distribution system has been impacted due to the prolonged power outage and numerous broken mains.

Discussion:

- What are you doing on your own site to respond- check on family, livestock, etc.?
- Are you evacuating? What areas of concern do you have for safety?

Inject #3 – post flood event

An additional 5 inches of rain occurred from Wednesday evening through Friday at 12 p.m. The rain has now subsided and standing water is starting to recede. Residents, Farmers, and businesses are able to get back to their sites to check in on property. Additionally, there is public concern around water safety and transportation as water recedes

Discussion:

- What are the first things you are checking on at your business as your get back on site?
- Do you have plans and procedures for drinking water post-incident recovery? What are they?
- Which agencies and organizations are you coordinating with to recover as quickly as possible?

Group Discussion

- General discussion:
- What was a surprise from the conversation?

Farmer Panel:

Reflecting on Community Resilience Planning and Farmer-Farmer Learning

Emma Ricci

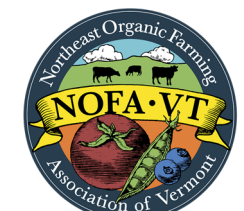
Cloud Brook Farm

Eric Skovsted

Joe's Brook Farm

Evan Perkins

Small Ax Farm



Resilient Food Systems Certificate

Certificate Process

- 3-day applied training on building resilient community food systems
- Integrates multiple disciplines and theories into one cohesive framework
- Emphasizes facilitation, collaboration, and experiential learning
- Includes foresight focus groups and table-top resilience scenarios
- Supports participants to co-develop actionable projects for their communities
- Provides tools and techniques transferable to various settings
- Culminates in a Certificate of Completion recognizing learning and participation

Toolkit

Consulting

Publications

- Resilience and Emergency Management Tools
- Scenarios
- Tabletop Exercises
- Foresight Focus Group
- Resilient Food System Assessment
- Interviews and focus groups
- Secondary data
- Analysis
- Final report
- Resilient Food Systems Process
- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Design Thinking
- Feasibility

Modules

- Mapping and Visualization
- Story maps
- Mapping 101

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach



Thank you!

Questions and Discussion

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