

# LOCAL AGRICULTURE: YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

The first farmers in New England, colonists from Europe faced many difficulties including lack of usable fertile land and extreme winter weather, which shortened the growing season considerably. These first farmers concentrated chiefly not on profiting from their work but on feeding their families.

Even as world demand is increasing the region's farms are struggling due to incredibly stiff competition. Small farms can hardly compete with the huge farm-businesses (also known as factory farms) that can produce far more product and thereby reduce their prices while still profiting. According to the New England Farm Defense Initiative, 2 acres of farmland are lost every minute worldwide due to urban sprawl. All total, New England has lost 600,000 acres of farmland since 1982, according to a report by the US Department of Agriculture.

Agriculture in New Hampshire and Vermont has changed incredibly over the years. As times have changed farms and businesses have diversified to offer a wider variety of goods and services. Many enterprises have shifted from traditional crops to meet popular trends, such as organic farmers have done. Many more farmers than ever before concentrate on specialty items, cheeses, syrup, cider etc. to be exported around the world.

As it stands now, some 3,100 individual operations qualify as commercial farms in New Hampshire, managing over 150,000 acres of cropland plus 250,000 additional acres for such uses as pasture and maple syrup production. Internationally, New Hampshire exports over \$134 million annually in food and agricultural products.

Vermont agriculture contributes \$556 million to its economy annually from its 6,700 farms statewide. There are 1.34 million acres of land devoted to agriculture in Vermont.

**Ornamental Horticulture:** One of the fastest growing segments of New Hampshire and Vermont agriculture includes greenhouse and nursery production, flowers, turf, landscape materials and services, etc. **\$438 million** annually in New Hampshire. Vermont alone has nearly 750 individual greenhouse, landscape, and nursery businesses that account for **\$100 million** annually.

**Dairy:** Over 40 million gallons of milk are produced each year on 174 New Hampshire dairy farms. Purebred cattle are sold all over the world. **\$51 million** annually. There are over 152,000 dairy cows in the state of Vermont on nearly 1,500 dairy farms these farms produce 2.6 billion pounds of milk each year which is used to create 100 million pounds of cheese in the state annually. **\$400**

million annually.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Through direct-to-consumer outlets such as farm stands and markets, as well as regional supermarkets, New



**Beekeepers diversify and maximize their profits by providing pollination services for other enterprises in addition to their primary efforts of producing honey.**

Hampshire growers provide a large variety of fresh, quality vegetables to local consumers. **\$18 million.** New Hampshire orchards produce about one million bushels of apples annually that are sold throughout the Eastern U.S. and Europe. In addition, apple cider has become a major product line for many orchard operations. **\$8 million** annually. Vermont also utilizes farm stands and other outlets to create **\$23 million** dollars in sales annually from a wide variety of produce.

**Livestock:** Vermont is first in New England in beef production; it is the states second largest industry earning **\$60 million** annually. Beef, sheep, swine and poultry are among the types of livestock raised for home food supplies and commercial markets. Specialty livestock such as angora goats and rabbits, llamas and sheep are grown for wool and specialty fiber markets. Farm-raised fish and game including deer, bison and elk are gaining markets in restaurants and other outlets. New Hampshire egg and turkey products are favorites among local consumers looking for fresh, native foods. New Hampshire research farms have developed poultry strains that have influenced flocks worldwide. **\$15 million** annually.

**Christmas Trees:** New Hampshire and Vermont grown Christmas trees, including Balsam and Fraser Fir and other species of pine and spruce, are harvested from across each state. **\$6 million** in New Hampshire **\$9 million** in Vermont annually.

**Maple and Honey:** Vermont is first in the nation in the production of maple syrup, nearly 500,000 gallons annually, accounting for more than one third of all the nation's maple

syrup. An average of 75,000 gallons of maple syrup is produced each year in New Hampshire from over 400 maple operations. Beekeepers raise bees for honey and to provide impor-

tant crop pollination services for other farmers. **\$3.5 million** annually.

The future of farming in this region is uncertain. Fewer people are farming now than ever before in this country. In Vermont for example, agriculture provides 11% of the state's products but only 1.5% of the state's citizens work in agriculture. According to a study conducted by Cornell University the specialties in the implementation of five specific tools: business

successful future of farming assistance, entrepreneurship support, diversification, adding value at the farm and beginning farmer support.

Management assistance is crucial because while farmers are experts in their chosen crops they must also learn the skills of managing a successful business in order to compete and succeed. Entrepreneurship helps farmers develop new plans for dealing with increased competition while diversification will allow a wider variety of products to be produced and sold. Adding value to a farm is a matter of realizing the land and the businesses potential in small and large ways. A good example is the fact that many orchards sell not only their highest quality apples but cider made from those of lesser quality thus increasing their products and profits. No matter how much current farmers increase their efforts they simply can't do it alone and encouraging new farmers is essential to ensure agriculture's future.

Agriculture may continue its decline in coming years but it will always be an important part of the area's past and an important aspect of its future.

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