



# Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District

Strategic Plan - 2024 - 2026

# Mission

- ▶ The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District empowers and partners with land stewards and communities on the ground by supporting connections that benefit natural resources, water quality, soil health, and the working landscape in Franklin County and across Northwest Vermont.

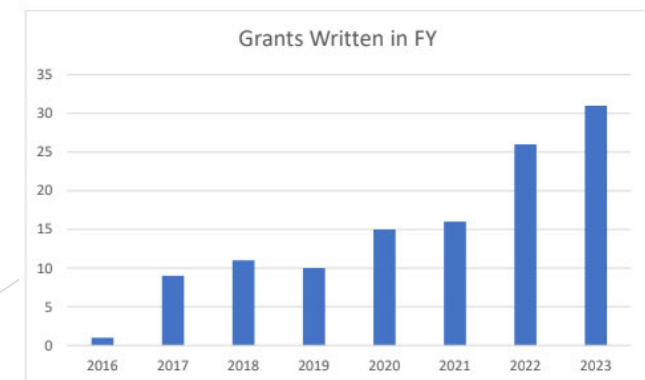
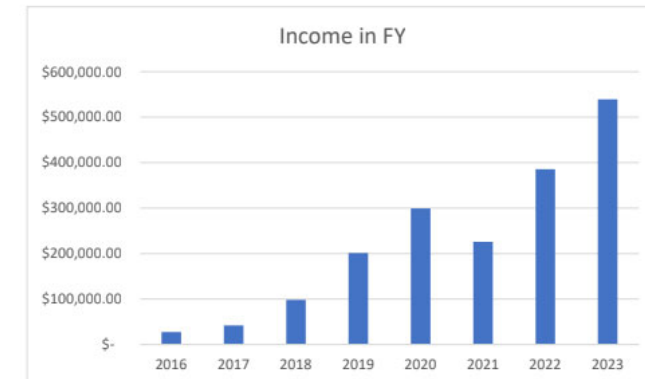
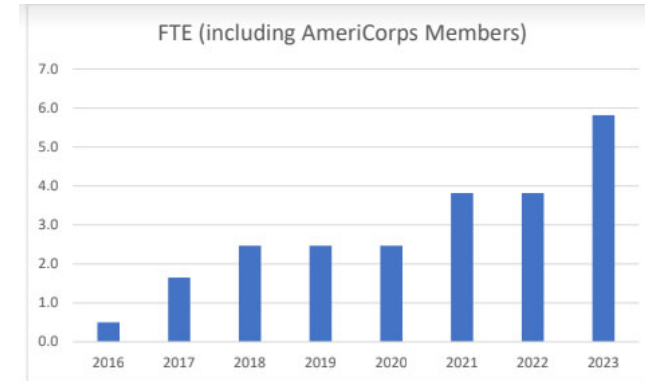
# Overview

- ▶ Where have we been?
  - ▶ Successes and Strengths
  - ▶ Areas where we work
  - ▶ Services Offered
- ▶ Where are we going?
  - ▶ Internal Work
  - ▶ External Work



# Successes and Strengths

- ▶ High grant application success rate and consistent quality of deliverables submitted on schedule (29 out of 31 funded in 2023)
- ▶ Strong teamwork among talented growing staff
- ▶ Relationships built with land stewards (>70 per year), communities, and partners
- ▶ Increase in knowledge and skills in:
  - ▶ Agriculture
  - ▶ Natural resources
  - ▶ Community engagement
- ▶ Effective role in implementing new programs or working in new areas
  - ▶ such as Pay for Performance for farmers, Stream Wise, and Bioblitz events
- ▶ Creating community resources
  - ▶ such as the Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers in Vermont, developing the Environmental Assistance in Northwest Vermont brochure, and presentations on rain gardens, stormwater, and Lake Wise
- ▶ Increasing access to existing resources for various communities
  - ▶ such as by meeting with community commissions, social media posts and mailed newsletters, public meetings and workshops, etc.



# Areas Where We Work

- ▶ Agriculture
  - ▶ Conservation BMPs
  - ▶ Soil health
  - ▶ Ecosystem services
  - ▶ Diversification
  - ▶ Viability
- ▶ Natural Resources
  - ▶ Floodplains - reconnection and restoration
  - ▶ Streams - restoration, strategic wood addition, water quality monitoring
  - ▶ Lakes - watershed health, lakeshore restoration
  - ▶ Dams - evaluation and removal
  - ▶ Tree Plantings + Stewardship
- ▶ Working Forests + Maple
- ▶ Climate Change



# Services Offered

- ▶ Agricultural producer support, including:
  - ▶ Nutrient management planning & soil sampling
  - ▶ Grant application assistance
  - ▶ Coordinating water quality and habitat improvement projects on farms (e.g. tree plantings or stream restoration)
- ▶ Natural resources (lakes, streams, floodplains, forests, buffers) project management through planning, design, and implementation phases
- ▶ Designing and hosting outreach and education events
- ▶ Grant application support for towns and other organizations with shared goals
- ▶ Connecting land stewards with technical and financial assistance programs to benefit natural resources
- ▶ Annual Tree and Trout Sales
- ▶ And More!

# Where are we going - Strategic Themes

## ▶ Internal:

- ▶ Improve office space and administrative systems
- ▶ Create a more stable and diversified income stream
- ▶ Manage staff with balanced, engaging workloads and compensation leading to improved retention
- ▶ Improve institutional knowledge and long-term viability

## ▶ External:

- ▶ Offer agricultural services that include serving all sizes and types of producers on the working landscape
- ▶ Pursue broader types of natural resources projects
- ▶ Select and develop projects strategically
- ▶ Maintain past projects effectively
- ▶ Strengthen relationships with partner organizations and clarify role of FCNRCD
- ▶ Expand public awareness and strengthen relationships with land stewards and communities

Accountability: FCNRCD will check in on Strategic Plan progress in May and November each year

## Internal: Improve office space and administrative systems to increase efficiency

2024

- Work with HR consultant to address administrative needs
- Update Handbook, trainings, checklists, policies, protocols
- Evaluate Franklin County Field Days new location for potential office space; or explore other office locations



2025

- Use new administrative systems
- Implement new timesheet system
- Create budget for long-term costs of moving to new office space to evaluate feasibility
- Move to new office space (if possible)



2026

- Use and evaluate administrative systems
- Move to new office space (if possible)



# Internal: Create a more stable and diversified income stream

2024

- Support initiative to increase legislative appropriations
- Use financial tools to earn interest on existing funds
  - Certificate of Deposit
  - Explore credit cards with benefits



2025

- Explore leasing/real estate income
- Research alternative grant funding sources
- Research funding models from NRCs in other states
- Explore additional sales or fee for service opportunities
- Use financial tools to earn interest on existing funds



2026

- Implement previously-researched funding approaches
- Continue to research alternative funding opportunities
- Use financial tools to earn interest on existing funds

## Internal: Manage staff with balanced, engaging workloads and compensation leading to improved retention

### 2024

- Create skills matrix
- Create job descriptions
- Continue Quarterly Check ins
- Review compensation and benefits offerings
- Create compensation philosophy
- Hire additional staff to share workload



### 2025

- Examine appropriate staffing size based on grants and office space
- Implement any new benefits policies
- Implement performance reviews
- Continually examine and improve workplace culture; quarterly check ins
- Ensure FCNRCD is fully staffed



### 2026

- Continually examine and improve workplace culture; quarterly check ins
- Ensure FCNRCD is fully staffed

# Internal: Improve institutional knowledge and long-term viability

2024

- Cross train staff on different programs (at least 2 staff can participate in each project)
- Implement standardized project tracking protocol
- Transition resources into usable location to which all staff have consistent access
- Transition to Trello for task management
- Create Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for repeated tasks



2025

- Cross train staff on different programs (at least 2 staff can participate in each project)
- Implement new tracking systems for projects and land steward and community relationships
- Succession planning for staff and board members
- Create, use, and review SOPs for repeated tasks



2026

- Cross train staff on different programs (at least 2 staff can participate in each project)
- Create, use, and review SOPs for repeated tasks

## External: Offer agricultural services that include serving all sizes and types of producers on the working landscape

2024

- Learn more about: larger dairies, farms of all sizes, diversification, agritourism, maple producers, logging, community-scale agriculture, agroforestry, economic viability, etc.
- Improve data management services for farmers
- Examine gaps and opportunities in current technical assistance landscape
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards
- Connect with Franklin & Grand Isle Farmers Watershed Alliance



2025

- Create agricultural community engagement plan
- Perform targeted outreach to producers
- Invest additional time into existing relationships with producers
- Explore benefits of having 1 NRCS Cons 1 Planner on staff able to perform NRCS work
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards



2026

- Perform targeted outreach to producers
- Invest additional time into existing relationships with producers
- Explore benefits of having 1 NRCS Cons 1 Planner on staff able to perform NRCS work
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards

# External: Pursue broader types of natural resources projects

2024

- Update Natural Resources Assessment
- Explore opportunities to assist with watershed and water quality projects



2025

- Improve understanding of wildlife in region
- Explore projects related to wildlife, recreation, air quality, etc.
- Identify new potential partners
- Explore opportunities to assist with watershed and water quality projects based on Natural Resources Assessment



2026

- Pursue funding and implementation for new project types
- Explore opportunities to assist with watershed and water quality projects based on Natural Resources Assessment

# External: Select and develop projects strategically

2024

- Use feedback from quarterly staff check ins to drive project/program directions
- Use project development funds to scope and strategize around new clean water projects
- Collaborate with partners to identify and prioritize projects
- Understand where our regular contacts and land stewards have decision making power
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards



2025

- Create checklist for review prior to grant/project applications
- Utilize past project development projects for future implementation
- Consider a geographic or project-type focus area
- Collaborate with partners to identify and prioritize projects
- Meet with partners to identify gaps and opportunities for shared strategies
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards



2026

- Use checklist before applying for grants/projects
- Utilize past project development projects for future implementation
- Consider a geographic or project-type focus area
- Collaborate with partners to identify and prioritize projects
- Engage with Local Working Group framework to better serve land stewards

# External: Maintain past projects effectively

2024

- Steward previous tree planting sites
- Purchase necessary maintenance tools
- Visit clean water projects and document any concerns; perform maintenance as needed
- Promote Johnsons Mill Dam Removal Monitoring Project
- Participate in CWSP O&M trainings
- Continue relationships with partners and land stewards
- Assist producers with Nutrient Management Plan updates



2025

- Apply for funds to continue maintaining past project sites
- Steward previous tree planting sites
- Visit clean water projects and document any concerns; perform maintenance as needed
- Continue monitoring Johnsons Mill Dam Removal
- Continue relationships with partners and land stewards
- Assist producers with Nutrient Management Plan updates



2026

- Apply for funds to continue maintaining past project sites
- Steward previous tree planting sites
- Visit clean water projects and document any concerns; perform maintenance as needed
- Continue monitoring Johnsons Mill Dam Removal
- Continue relationships with partners and land stewards
- Assist producers with Nutrient Management Plan updates

# External: Strengthen relationships with partner organizations and clarify role of FCNRCD

Primary Partners: USDA-NRCS, NRCDs, VACD/NRCC, VAAFM, VTDEC, NRPC, MRBA, UMATR, FNLC, FWC, UVM Extension, LCBP, VLT, FWA

Secondary/Newer Partners: USDA-FSA, CHC, TNC, Municipal Commissions, VTFWD, VHCB, USFWS, NOFA, Intervale Center, Healthy Roots, TSPs / Custom Applicators, VTFPR, VNRC, SHLT

2024

- Enhance partnership with VHCB and other farm viability organizations
- Work with Missisquoi Bay Partners to clarify roles and strategize around projects
- Pilot Farm Teams
- Connect with municipal commissions throughout county
- Coordinate VAWQP Northwest Region



2025

- Create targeted orgs/group engagement plan
- Continue cohosting events with municipal commissions
- Tailor Farm Teams to Franklin County region
- Coordinate VAWQP Northwest Region



2026

- Coordinate VAWQP Northwest Region
- Partner with municipalities on projects
- Expand Farm Team Impact



## External: Expand public awareness and strengthen relationships with land stewards and communities

### 2024

- Create toolkit for hosting public events
- Enhance social media presence
  - Paid Front Porch Forum subscription
  - Create Instagram account
  - Post more frequently on Facebook
  - Look into e-newsletter software
- Participate in more events hosted by others (tabling, give presentations, etc.)
- Have enough staff to adequately keep up with existing relationships



### 2025

- Improve branding - update brochures, handouts, etc.
- Implement more frequent e-newsletters
- Create communications and community engagement plan(s)
  - Focus on meeting people where they already are
- Cohost events with local partners (consider regular annual events / event series)
- Have enough staff to adequately keep up with existing relationships



### 2026

- Establish larger network of ambassadors to speak to FCNRCD's strengths and abilities
- Create communications and community engagement plan(s)
- Assist with events led by others
- Cohost events with local partners (consider regular annual events / event series)
- Have enough staff to adequately keep up with existing relationships