

OCTOBER 2023

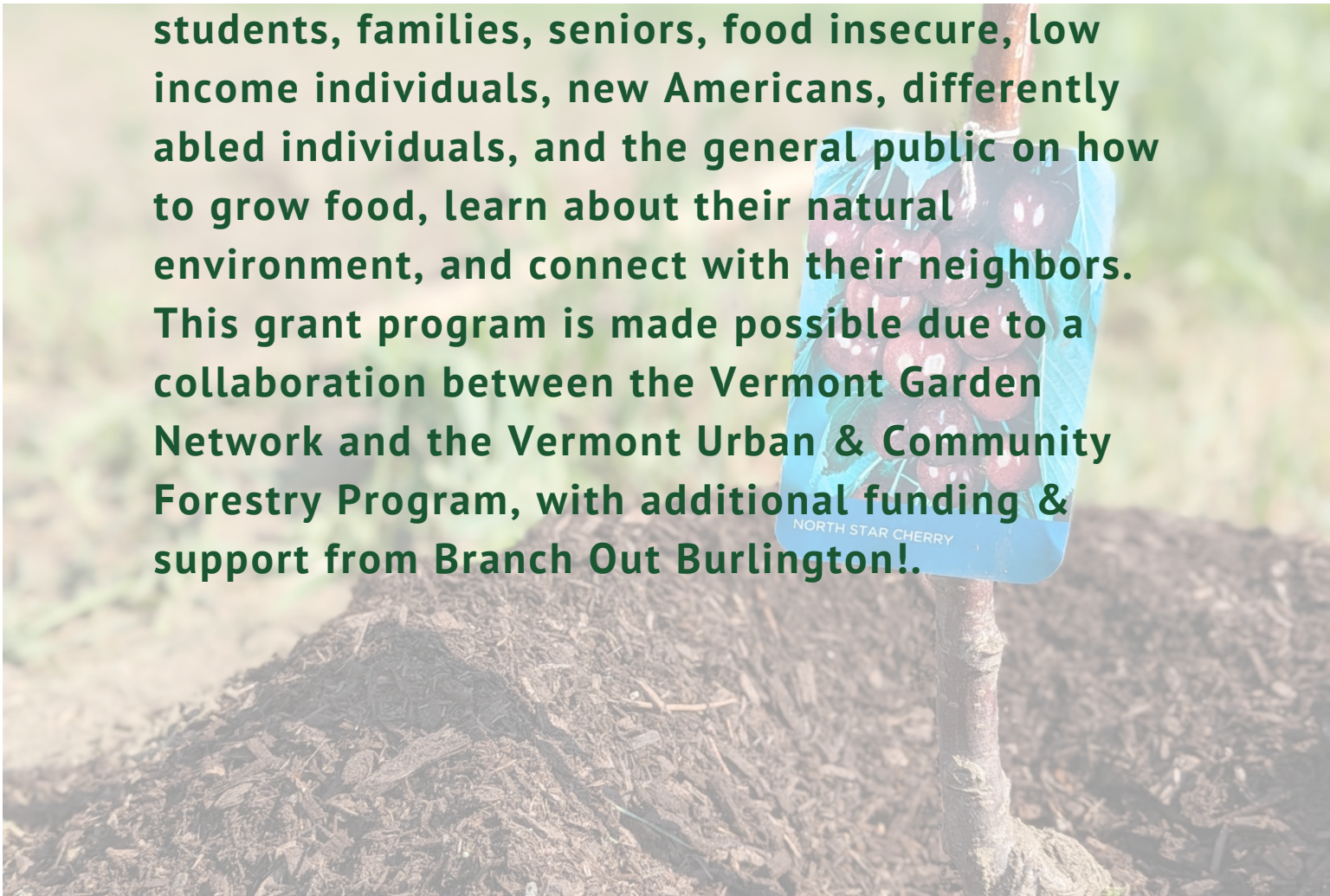
# **FRUIT & NUT TREE GRANT REPORT '23**

**A FUNDING AND TECHNICAL  
SUPPORT PROGRAM OF VERMONT  
GARDEN NETWORK AND VERMONT  
URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY  
PROGRAM WITH ADDITIONAL  
SUPPORT FROM BRANCH OUT  
BURLINGTON!**

**Prepared by: Angela deBettencourt  
Partnerships and Engagement Manager**

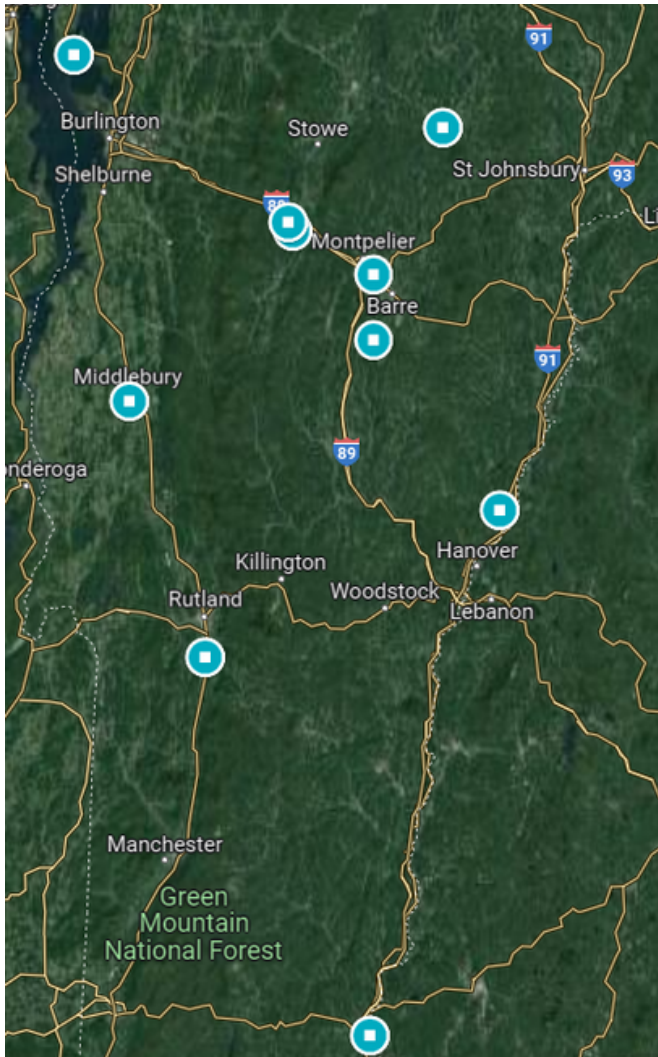
## OVERVIEW

The Vermont Fruit & Nut Tree Grant supported the purchase and successful planting and care of fruit & nut trees for 10 grantee groups at 10+ community growing sites across the state of Vermont. These sites—schools, community gardens, educational centers, affordable housing communities, private residences—help to educate students, families, seniors, food insecure, low income individuals, new Americans, differently abled individuals, and the general public on how to grow food, learn about their natural environment, and connect with their neighbors. This grant program is made possible due to a collaboration between the Vermont Garden Network and the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program, with additional funding & support from Branch Out Burlington!



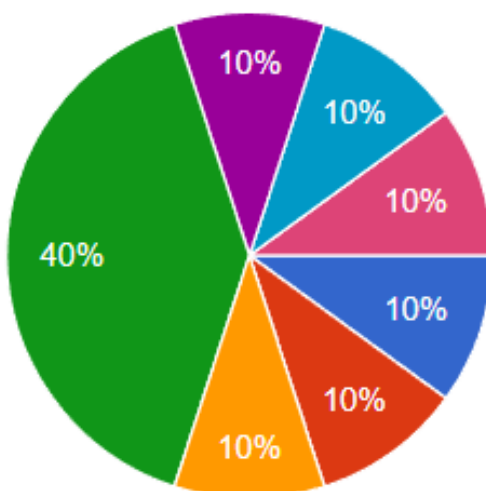


## 2023 GRANTEES



- Mill River Union HS
- Hardwick Community Garden & Orchard / Center for an Agricultural Economy
- Thetford Academy School Garden
- CVSU Center for Integrated Permaculture
- Folsom Learning Garden / South Hero Land Trust
- Edible Brattleboro
- Montpelier Community FEAST Farm / Montpelier Parks and Trees Dept
- Town of Waterbury Community Gardens
- Crossett Brook MS Gardens
- Middlebury Tree Committee / Middlebury Teen Center

## REPRESENTED COUNTIES



- Rutland
- Caledonia
- Orange
- Washington
- Grand Isle
- Windham
- Addison

## PROGRAM IMPACTS



ABOVE- FOLSOM LEARNING GARDEN



*More than **350** individuals (students, teachers, parents, community volunteers, residents, garden members, and staff) planted an estimated **165** fruit and nut trees.*

Grantees planted a variety of trees including apples, pears, peaches plums, cherry, gooseberry, serviceberry, viburnum highbush cranberry, jostaberry, juneberry, elderberry, blueberry, raspberry, chestnut, hazelnut, basswood, black walnut.

**77%** planted apple trees making those the most popular tree planted



## PROGRAM IMPACTS CONT



PHOTOS- MONTPELIER FEAST FARM



*At the close of their first season, the sites saw a 66% survival rate of all trees planted*

**22%** - all trees/shrubs are alive and well

**44%** - all trees/shrubs are alive, but some are in fair condition

**33%** - one or more trees/shrubs did not survive the season

Grantees said loss was due to the July flood and excess rain. One grantee reported that even though they lost trees 75% of their overall planting survived.

Tree species that did not survive include hazelnuts (2), gooseberries (3), cherry tree (1), plum (1), Toka plum (1) and a few others that were not identified.

## GRANTEES' GOALS

*These fruit and nut tree stewards set out to:*

- **educate & engage** the community on how to plant & care for fruit & nut trees and learn about the history and culture of their presence in VT
- **provide or increase** free access to tree fruit and nuts through distribution at schools/food shelves, free dinners featuring tree fruit, and pick your own
- **support** pollinators by planting a diversity of species
- **create** a safe and comfortable place for people to enjoy nature by adding edible trees for shade, sound barrier, and to create an outdoor classroom



ABOVE-WATERBURY COMMUNITY GARDENS  
BELOW-HARDWICK COMMUNITY GARDENS





## GOALS BEING MET

*Even early in the life of these new trees, grantees shared that they have achieved some goals already, including:*

### **Education & Engagement**

*“The biggest success of the planting project was engaging volunteers of all ages and backgrounds in the physical planting. We planted over 2 or 3 beautiful spring days, and the volunteers had a wonderful, impactful time. A student from the Central Vermont Career Center commented that it was her favorite day of the spring and she felt her anxiety slip away.” -Montpelier Community Feast Farm*

*“Our biggest success was orchestrating the multi-step process of involving students in the vision, design and planting of the food forest.” -Folsom Learning Garden*

*“A success was having a group of 7th graders invested in the project and plant the trees in the spring. The biggest success was when they came back to school this fall they were so excited to check on their trees and help out with care of them.” - Crossett Brook MS Garden*

*“Our teens were able to plant the trees and keep them watered.” -Middlebury Teen Center*

*“We wanted to use this primarily as a learning opportunity for the local school kids and they came to help plant the new fruit trees & bushes so that was really successful!” -Hardwick Community Garden*

### **Students making connections between the planting project and classroom learning**

*“We were fortunate to connect with two teachers who were enthusiastic about this project and they were gracious enough to incorporate this project into their curriculum. Overall we engaged students through two in-class activities, two recess activities, and two afterschool event open to the public. We also helped the teachers co-design an activity packet that the students worked on between sessions, which was tied into their ongoing math, science, and art learning goals.” -Folsom Learning Garden*

*“The biggest success of this planting project was how excited and engaged students were to take a leadership role in creating this orchard. This project helped students access deeper learning and understand the more scientific and technical aspects of 'orcharding.' They are so excited to try to graft apple trees with an expert community member in the early spring!” -Thetford Academy School Garden*

## GOALS BEING MET CONT.

### **Persevering through environmental adversity**

*The fact that everything survived, despite the flood in mid-July which put our community garden (and parts of the orchard) under multiple feet of water.” -Hardwick Community Garden*

*Unfortunately, the July 10th flood severely impacted the Feast Farm. The fruit trees were inundated in flood water, and their roots were ripped up. After the flood, we rescued them as best we could, and have plans to transplant them at the site of the new Feast Farm. About 6 or 7 of the ten trees seem to have a chance of surviving well; we will wait until spring to see if they bud.”-Montpelier Community Feast Farm*

### **Excitement for more community access to fresh fruit of their choice**

*“Our goal is to have fruit/nut trees and berry bushes in locations all over town where passersby can help themselves to the bounty. We have reached half that goal with the placement of 64 fruit/nut trees and berry bushes at 30 sites.” -Edible Brattleboro*

*“Our teens...are so excited to have fruit right outside our door.” -Middlebury Teen Center*

*“Our goals for the project were to expand the community orchard at the city-run Feast Farm with ten new fruit tree plantings. Initially, we were on track to meet our goals. We selected sites for the fruit tree along the edge of our tree nursery, with enough room to grow, and provide shade and sustenance for those working on the nursery/farm.” -Montpelier Feast Farm*



PHOTOS: HARDWICK COMMUNITY GARDEN



# CHALLENGES TO LEARN FROM

## *BASED ON FEEDBACK WE RECEIVED FROM GRANTEES*

- **Site & species selection**

Four grantees expressed challenges with species selection and site assessment.

**Solution:** Ask Jacob to lead a webinar on site/species selection and tree plant/care guidance. If possible, VGN could provide site visits to assist with site selection.

- **Ordering trees in time**

Five grantees expressed challenges with ordering trees in a timely manner.

**Solution:** Process grants in time for grantees to order their preferred trees. Once awarded, encourage grantees to get their orders in ASAP. In the list of nurseries, include when trees tend to sell out.

- **Environmental pressures- pest & flood**

Three grantees experienced challenges with the July flood and pest pressure.

**Solution:** Continue to offer additional funds for pest management materials such as fencing, cages, etc. Provide compensation or allow grantees guaranteed access to next grant cycle if trees were damaged due to climate disaster.

- **Maintenance and care**

Grantees experienced concerns about maintaining plantings once they were planted. Most significant challenge was watering. Grantees found water gators helpful.

**Solution:** Continue to offer additional funds or water “gators” or similar tools. Include a resource page on maintenance tips and tricks.



ABOVE/BELOW- WATERBURY COMMUNITY GARDENS



BELOW- CROSSETT BROOK MS GARDEN



## GRANT SUPPORT

*Overall grantees rated the grant structure positively, answering I agree to- application was clear and easy to complete, VGN staff were responsive to questions and requests along the way, technical support and/or resources offered met their needs for successful tree planting and care.*

- Two grantees answered mostly agree to -funding adequate for setting up a successful project- but did not provide any further details or suggestions on this topic.
- Three grantees answered mostly agree or disagree to -the timeline for receiving the funds worked for the project timeline- noting that they did not receive funds in time to purchase their preferred trees.

When asked what resources they found useful when planning and caring for their plantings, grantees overwhelmingly noted the webinar recording from Jacob Holzberg-Pill on tree selection, planting and care as well as, the follow-up Q & A session where questions from grantees were answered by Jacob and Jeanie Bartlett.

### ***Suggestions from grantees on further grant support:***

“It could be helpful to have more **time to connect with other projects** and talk with other teachers to see what they have plans for.” -CBMS Gardens

“Continuing a live Q&A...I would also like to have more **resources** offered on holistic IPM and maintenance (pruning, fertility, etc.) **for the future years of the tree.**”-Thetford Academy School Orchard & Nursery

“A **site visit from VGN staff** or perhaps a core volunteer (maybe a master gardener?) could be beneficial to workshop ideas and have a fresh set of eyes on the project.” -Folsom Food Forest

“It would be helpful if the process could be completed by early December so that we could have the funds in hand before the WCNRC plant sale announcement is sent out. Another option would be to **have two application periods.**”-Edible Brattleboro



ABOVE- MILL RIVER UNION HS  
BELOW- FOLSOM LEARNING GARDEN





## GRATITUDE FROM GRANTEES



ABOVE: FOLSOM LEARNING GARDEN

BELOW: CVSU CENTER FOR INTEGRATED PERMUCULTURE

"It was a great experience and we look forward to the future fruit!" -CBMS Gardens

"On behalf of everyone at Folsom School, South Hero Land Trust, and the greater South Hero community - Thank You!"-Folsom Learning Garden

"You guys rock - thank you!" -Hardwick Community Garden & Orchard

"We are saddened by the July 10th flood, and also heartened by the possibility of applying all our learned lessons to our new farm/orchard site. Thank you for your support!"- Montpelier Community Feast Farm

"The teens were so excited to see tiny apples! We have a lot of outdoor traffic now, between the trees and our little garden. Parents stop by with their kids to show them things, older gardeners stop in to ask what were up to, etc. It's made our space feel more friendly. And we have birds now, and bugs! And a very happy squirrel."  
-Middlebury Tree Committee / Middlebury Teen Center

Thank you SO much!!! The students are so exciting to watch this project grow!!!!- CVSU

