

separated by long distances, absence of large metropolitan centers, low-density settlement patterns, historic dependence on agriculture, continued population loss, outmigration, and economic upheaval.”⁴ These circumstances serve to create a distinct environment in terms of economic development. Two of the most specific USDA initiatives to revitalize the rural economy are Sustainable Rural Downtowns and Rural Economic Area Partnership Zones.

Sustainable Rural Downtowns: Sustainable Rural Downtowns is an initiative of the USDA comprised of several sustainable development projects across the country made possible through facilitated partnerships between community assets and USDA funding sources.⁵ The USDA has published detailed case studies for nine of these projects. One such case is that of the [Vermont Food Venture Center \(VFVC\) implemented in Hardwick, VT](#) in 2012.⁶ The project received \$3,491,849 in funding from six separate grants, over half of which came from the USDA.⁷ The VFVC functions “as a food business incubator for value-added and specialty food products,” meaning that agricultural producers use the VFVC’s facilities and resources to turn their commodities into a higher value product.⁸ For example, a tomato grower might use the canning apparatus at the VFVC in order to be able to market tomato sauce.⁹ It is too soon to determine the long-term development effects of the VFVC, however the project did promote some immediate economic improvements by hiring local workers and tradespeople during the construction phase.¹⁰ The VFVC also reports that since opening, it has attracted over 1,000 visitors to the Hardwick area and has generated 19 permanent jobs.¹¹ The projects described in the Sustainable Rural Downtowns initiative’s additional eight case studies are summarized in the table below.

Table 1.1 Sustainable Rural Downtowns Case Studies

Location	Project Description
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Adrian, Minnesota	Creation of a revolving loan fund that provides financial assistance to both new and veteran businesses throughout the community.
Gonzales, Texas	Restoration of the façade of the renowned Crystal Theatre downtown.
Tenino, Washington	Strengthened infrastructure in the form of new wastewater treatment plant and collection facilities in order to support urban growth.
Clendenin, West Virginia	Conversion of a vacant school building into affordable senior housing and a medical clinic.

Rural Economic Area Partnership: Beginning in 1995, the USDA established five Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zones.¹² This initiative seeks to address the particular set of rural circumstances put forth in the USDA’s analysis, but in a manner that focuses on the “disconnection from markets, suppliers, and centers of information” present in such rural areas.¹³ Designation as a REAP Zone is beneficial because it “gives applicants access to a reserved set of funds” within USDA funding programs.¹⁴ In 2000, a REAP Zone was established in the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) of Vermont. The USDA mandates that each of the five REAP Zones develop a strategic plan for community development.

The NEK REAP Zone’s strategic plan was updated in 2016 using material presented by an NEK Collaborative Report entitled “Ideas for the Future of the NEK.”¹⁵ This report presents “points of vision,” or “broad hopes that Kingdom residents aspire to,” developed over a series of public forums held in Newport, Canaan, and Hardwick.¹⁶ The authors then derive specific “Economic Development Ideas” from these points, as recommendations and “contributions to the strategic planning . . . or action by organizations and individuals for the collective good of the Kingdom.”¹⁷ These recommendations include the following:

- The building of funds in the Northeast Kingdom to support small business start-ups.
- Advancement of the regional food economy.
- Creation of a border commission.
- The demonstration of support for a dynamic and creative type of economy.
- Advancement of the broadband and cellular infrastructure.
- Improvement of water, sewer, and downtown infrastructures.
- The increasing of local energy generation.
- Changes in Vermont tax policy to remedy the unequal sales tax burden between Vermont and New Hampshire.

Establishing a private college in the NEK.

Creation of incentives and training programs to keep the younger population in the NEK.

The set-up of a kind of information clearinghouse to provide a centralized list of resources.

National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)

NADO represents a network of over 500 regional planning and development organizations that foster collaboration among programs at the federal, state, and local levels in order to promote the development of area communities and economies.²⁵ In 2016 the NADO Research Foundation, the organization's nonprofit research affiliate, published three case studies featuring diverse "economic development initiatives that build multiple forms of wealth, root economies in place with local ownership and control of assets, and intentionally include people at the margins of the economy as beneficiaries of economic development work."²⁶

The first case was Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center (BBTCAC), which three regional development partners founded in 2005 in Camden, Alabama.²⁷ The initiative serves 19 cou

The third case is the Region Five Development Commission in Minnesota, which is the sole regional planning body in the state that services economically distressed counties.³⁶ It has sponsored the development of Sprout, a regional food hub that provides several economic benefits to its counties.³⁷ Sprout seeks to build “the individual wealth of growers by offering training such as business planning, food safety, post-harvest handling, Good Agricultural Practices, and other topics that improve the growers’ bottom lines.”³⁸ The hub has also opened an indoor and year-round market for food and artworks that attracted 28 vendors and 300 consumers on its first day.³⁹ Sprout’s success has contributed to the region securing “\$850,000 in philanthropic investments and regional funding.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the program’s Choose Health model allows doctors to “prescribe” Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares to food insecure families; the families can then pick up CSA boxes of fresh produce from minority growers at weekly farmer’s markets.⁴¹

Vermont State Agencies and Organizations

Vermont State Agencies and organizations have generated a wealth of reports and recommendations. The tables below draw largely from three key documents: “The Governor’s 2002 Summit on Rural Economic Development: Final Report,”⁴² “Vermont 2020: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy”⁴³ (CEDS), and “Appendix E: Documents Review.”⁴⁴ The CEDS “Appendix E: Documents Review” discusses 34 documents and reports pertaining to issue-focused actions and strategies for economic development in Vermont.⁴⁵ This section also includes several additional reports containing specific recommendations for rural economic revitalization.

In Tables 2.1-2.5, the recommendations are organized into five themes: the working landscape, forestry, food systems, energy and climate change, and tourism and branding. Within each table the reports are ordered by specificity of the recommendations; the broadest report is listed first and the most specific report is listed last. While the recommendations may not be explicit to economic development, they contribute to the advancement of each sector and ultimately to the rural economy. Many of the reports referenced present overlapping recommendations; however, each source provides a distinct perspective on these reoccurring strategies. Key sections or page numbers that

³⁶ Carrie Kissel, “Choose Health: Economic Development, Local Foods, and Wealth Creation in Minnesota” (NADO Research Foundation, Washington, 2016), 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² “The Governor’s 2002 Summit on Rural Economic Development” (Vermont Council on Rural Development, Montpelier, VT, 2002).

⁴³ “Vermont 2020: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy” (State of Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Montpelier, VT, February 2016).

⁴⁴ “Appendix E: Documents” (State of Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Montpelier, VT, February 2016).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

contain specific recommendations are highlighted in the "Relevant Sections" column. A compiled list of the reports discussed can be found in Appendix 2.

Working Landscape

Vermont's working landscape is integral in efforts to revitalize the rural economy through "facilitating investments in agriculture and forestry that keep our natural resource based economy healthy and resilient, protect our increasingly unique pattern of alternating villages and countryside, conserve our important wildlife habitat, and bolster the state's resilience to flooding."⁴⁶ Table 2.1 presents recommendations that touch on these points.

Table 2.1: Working Landscape Recommendations

Report	Source	Published	Relevant Sections
Investing in Our Farm and Forest Future	The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership	September 2011	Pages 18-28

2010 Vermont Forest Resources Plan	Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation	2010	Pages 30-32 Goals and strategies for a legal, institutional, and economic framework to support forest conservation and sustainability.
Vermont Forest Products Council Blueprint for Action	Vermont Forest Products Council	2002	Pages 8-15 Twenty-one recommendations pertaining to marketing, economic development, education and training, and wood resources.
Vermont Wood Products Sector Strategic Plan Update	The Vermont Wood Products Marketing Council	2011	Pages 32-50 Thirty-seven action steps including brand development, promotion of value-added wood products, increased efficiency and competition in production, increased support for education and training of the workforce, and creation of a certification system.

Portions of the “Relevant Sections” column are sourced directly from the corresponding reports.

Food Systems

The general recommendations pertaining to food systems include strengthening agricultural policy on the state and federal levels, promoting agricultural diversification, increased marketing of Vermont agricultural products, supporting programs that facilitate a direct connection between local food producers and local consumers, and promoting efficiency in distribution and increases in production.

Table 2.3: Food Systems Recommendations

Report	Source
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Progress for Vermont:

water self-supply projects, and water removal system projects," upon relocating to a rural area.⁵²

The ARPI report recommends business models that target specific industries, chosen for their future viability and provision of high-paying jobs, such as: aviation and aerospace, energy, technology and electronics, manufacturing, digital business and media, operations centers, and motion picture and television production.⁵³ The report also describes how the Four Corners States are working to build a skilled workforce in their rural regions by "offering reimbursements and financial aid for workforce training," as well as to promote the creation of high wage jobs⁵⁴ and to aid smaller, local businesses in accessing helpful resources and information.⁵⁵

Kansas

There are 77 counties in the state of Kansas that have been designated as Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZ) by the Kansas Department of Commerce.⁵⁶ This designation allows counties to offer a set of financial incentives, including income tax waivers and student loan repayments, to residents who meet certain qualifications.⁵⁷ In order to be eligible for these incentives, a person must have "established residency after the date the

Indiana, Tennessee, and Washington

The states of Indiana, Tennessee, and Washington boast comprehensive webpages for rural economic development that are easily navigable and offer a variety of resources for rural businesses and organizations.

The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) organizes several programs that offer funding for the revitalization of rural downtowns and historic buildings as a means to promote rural economic development.⁶⁸ These funding programs include the Blight Clearance Program, the Downtown Enhancement Grant, the Historic Renovation Grant Program, Indiana Main Street, the Main Street Revitalization Program, and the Residential Historic Rehabilitation Credit.⁶⁹ OCRA runs a comprehensive [website](#) that provides information about each of these programs, as well as others having to do with infrastructure and community development, alongside easy-to-access resources for obtaining funding.

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development's Rural Development [webpage](#) clearly organizes the programs and resources available for rural economic development including the [Site Development program](#), [ThreeStar program](#), [Community Development Block Grants](#), [Main Street programs](#), and [Asset Based Planning grant](#).⁷⁰ This webpage also serves as a clearinghouse for organizations and contacts relevant to rural economic development.

Washington's Department of Commerce's Growing Rural Economies' webpage outlines five services for entrepreneurs and small businesses: access to capital, networking, mentorship, technical assistance, and education and training.⁷¹ As p9 0 1 429.55 666.34 Tm0 g0 G[(r)-5(esour)5(ces)]

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Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Anthony JQe of Vermont under the der the der the de that undreW 792 reW*ñBT/F1 9.96 Tf1 0 0 1 108

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