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Notes from editor (not for publication):

You really infuse your stories with warmth and heart.

I tightened it up a little. Note some of your impressions read as a more opinionated than they need to be. Simple solution is to substitute qualitative descriptions with statistics that will illustrate the point but let readers draw their own conclusions. Example: lines 142-145.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Guilford residents close the distance between farm and
2 table

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 A community-run volunteer effort connects farmers and
4 residents while expanding access to locally produced food

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 Ask the average American where their food comes from,
7 they might say “the store.”

8 In many ways, we've lost the conscious connection to
9 how our food is grown and produced — your bread and carrots
10 likely made their journey from bakery or farm to you via multiple
11 trucks and at least one warehouse.

12 But not if you got them from the Guilford Food Hub.

13 Every other Wednesday, folks roll up to the Broad Brook
14 Community Center (BBCC) to pick up their groceries: Green
15 Mountain Creamery yogurt from Commonwealth Dairy in
16 Brattleboro, bacon from Corvus Ferments in Vernon, salad greens
17 from Up the Road Farm (literally up the road from the BBCC),
18 eggs from three growers within a 5-mile radius.

19 Maybe they splurge for a treat: creamy lemon bars from
20 Paul A. Boyd Farm or fresh flowers from Tapalou Guilds, both
21 right down the road.

22 The typical order form has well over 100 items to choose
23 from, even in the lean months of winter — everything from
24 staples to more exotic items like kombucha, kimchi, falafel, and
25 labneh.

26 In this way, and many more, the Guilford Food Hub is
27 actively working to break the anonymous distribution chain and
28 forge deeper connections among local farmers, food makers, and
29 the community.

30 **Dreams of food resiliency,** 31 **community connection**

32 In 2020, in the pressure cooker of the pandemic, at a
33 time when many balked at shopping inside grocery stores, many
34 were looking for alternatives and talking about local resiliency.

35 For a time, Hanna Jenkins organized a food buying group
36 out of her farm, Tapalou Guilds, connecting with Food Connects,
37 a nonprofit that lets institutions make bulk purchases from
38 smaller regional farmers and food producers.

39 Although Jenkins's primary focus on farming made
40 running a long-term buying group out of her barn impractical, it

41 proved that local folks could support a buying group focused on
42 local foods.

43 Three Guilford residents — Julie Beet, Anna Klein, and
44 Jody Hauser — met in August of 2020 to figure it out.

45 They had a lot of ideas and one big question: “What’s the
46 infrastructure that’s required for a farmer who’s growing all of this
47 food to actually get it into the community?”

48 Klein’s day job in office management and Beet’s
49 experience ordering produce for a buzzing San Francisco food
50 market were the group’s bare bones qualifications, but it was
51 their vision that drove the project.

52 “We had ideas about what would be good for the town,
53 but from the start, it became clear that we [would] have to be
54 community responsive,” Beet says. “We’re just three people. We
55 wanted it to be a community effort.”

56 **A good idea, manifest**

57 At first, the trio ordered from Food Connects and kept
58 items at Beet’s house where, she says, “we had food stored in
59 closets, in freezers.”

60 Klein would come by to pick up grocery orders for her
61 neighbors across town.

62 “It was really just a neighborhood food buying group,”
63 Beet says, “but we realized that we had something good going,
64 and we didn’t want to be weighing mushrooms in my garage in -
65 20 degrees in January anymore.”

66 When the BBCC reopened after undergoing extensive
67 renovations to transform the former Grange Hall into a
68 community center, the team moved their efforts there.

69 With the move came a bigger vision for the umbrella
70 organization, which they named Neighborhood Roots. The Food
71 Hub is one of its three community-agriculture-related projects.

72 “We really wanted to address food resiliency for the
73 entire town,” Beet says. “We were holding all sorts of events

74 throughout the year — garden education events and plant swaps
75 and harvest swaps and food preservation workshops.”

76 Food resiliency includes improving food access for
77 everyone. The move to the BBCC meant sharing storage space
78 with the Guilford Food Pantry, an organization with a parallel
79 mission to provide free food to those in need in the community.
80 By sharing space, each organization could be supportive of the
81 other’s work.

82 **Build it, and the farmers will** 83 **come**

84 Neighborhood Roots began actively inviting local
85 farmers and food producers to participate. One of the first
86 vendors, Hermit Thrush Homestead, a non-certified organic farm
87 on Green River Road, agreed to supply produce, eggs, and other
88 goods.

89 “I was excited to have a new sales outlet, so I jumped at
90 the opportunity to get involved right away,” owner Meggie
91 Stoltzman recalls.

92 Stoltzman had experienced challenges trying to sell from
93 an open-air farmstand in the winter and had been turned down
94 as a vendor at the Brattleboro Farmers’ Market because others
95 were already selling what she had to offer. She had also struggled
96 with delivering CSA orders in cold temps.

97 “Practically speaking, the Food Hub gives my farm a way
98 to sell and distribute produce in the winter months in a heated
99 building that has plowed parking and easy access,” she says.

100 Today, Hermit Thrush Homestead makes about 15% of its
101 total farm sales at the Guilford Food Hub.

102 Vendors now regularly approach Neighborhood Roots to
103 be included. Priority partnership goes to hyperlocal farmers in
104 Guilford, Brattleboro, Vernon, and Halifax, but, as Beet says, “If
105 someone’s within 50 miles, has a product there’s a need for, and

106 they want to deliver on a Wednesday, we consider taking them
107 on.”

108 To date, she says, “we’ve never turned away a farmer.”

109 **Competition makes for a better** 110 **market**

111 Even as the team accepts increasing numbers of vendors
112 selling similar offerings, the attitude of vendors is more
113 camaraderie than competition. Farmers have found that more
114 vendors simply makes for a better market.

115 Board member Meghan Dougherty, a participating
116 volunteer on Food Hub Wednesdays, says, “One of my favorite
117 moments is when I see vendors talking to each other, saying, ‘Oh,
118 hey, I learned this,’ or ‘I just took this course.’ It’s really cool to be
119 part of that connective tissue and see it all come together.”

120 For smaller local farms, joining the Food Hub provides
121 an opportunity to learn from other farmers as well as gain an
122 expanded audience.

123 Tadj Schreck, who owns Up The Road Farm, has a small
124 farmstand on Bullock Road, but finds the Food Hub “a great
125 place to sell more perishable items that we like to grow, like
126 herbs, but struggle to sell at our farmstand before they wilt.”

127 “We can harvest the exact amount consumers order, so
128 we do not waste time harvesting and washing produce that may
129 or may not be sold,” Schreck says.

130 **Making the numbers work**

131 What began as a spark of an idea has grown into a
132 sustainable model. Dozens of farmers and food makers deliver
133 their products to the BBCC every other Wednesday morning.
134 Volunteers sort the food into big green bins. Neighbors show up
135 to grab and pay for their orders, often stopping to chat.

136 “We’re not just creating a place for people to come shop.
137 We’re creating a market that the vendors rely on as much as the
138 buyers,” says Dougherty.

139 “We’re able to use that market as a funnel for money
140 from inside the community to stay inside the community and
141 bolster the economic situation of the town,” she adds.

142 In 2025, the Guilford Food Hub logged 1,124 orders
143 from 140 households, and \$77,640 flowed through the
144 organization to farmers and food makers, a 43% increase from
145 2024.

146 The Food Hub is able to sell food at cost, with no store
147 markup, because its expenses are low.

148 All labor is handled by volunteer effort. Minor expenses
149 include a modest fee to rent the BBCC space, the subscription
150 cost of the ordering software, EBT (electronic benefits transfer)
151 fees, insurance, credit card point-of-sale fees, and miscellaneous
152 supplies.

153 To cover these charges, customers can opt to round up
154 their totals, and recently, vendors unanimously voted to start
155 paying a 5% fee.

156 Since moving to the BBCC, the Food Hub has added a
157 pay-what-you-want food table on pickup day. It now accepts
158 SNAP/EBT payments with Farm Stand Match from the Northeast
159 Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), a program
160 that lets consumers who receive support through the 3SquaresVT
161 (food stamps) program.

162 Neighborhood Roots has also raised money from the
163 community for its Food Security Fund, which lets the Food Hub
164 offer coupons — \$25 for small families, \$50 for large — which
165 can be applied to any order, no questions asked.

166 “We’ve never done a big push to get more people or
167 more vendors,” Beet says. “It has just continued to grow
168 organically to the point where we’re now at this tipping point of
169 ‘Wow, it’s getting a little tight at the BBCC.’”

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An evolving vision for the community

The Neighborhood Roots board is considering whether and how to keep growing the Guilford Food Hub beyond its current space.

The organization could move beyond the all-volunteer model to hiring staff. It could expand into a bigger space.

It will almost certainly encompass other ways of connecting local farmers and makers with eaters. In addition to the Food Hub, Neighborhood Roots is in the beginning stages of creating a community medicine garden in Guilford — built by citizen volunteers and available to anyone who wants to harvest for their household.

The board has plenty more ideas for growing the organization and creating easier access to locally produced food.

The organization is looking to raise \$38,000 this year to help bridge the organization beyond its grassroots beginnings. To date, it has raised almost \$6,000.

“There’s a lot of dreaming,” Dougherty says. “The thing that impresses me is how, as a group, these women have managed to balance forward drive with patience and an attitude of ‘Let’s wait and see, maybe we’ll learn something from the space that we’re in.’”

Ultimately, Beet says, “My vision is that Guilford becomes a town known for food — a place where farmers can thrive. Not just where we say we support our rural heritage, but where we actually live it.

“If there’s a farmer with some land, even a small amount, we have a market here where they can sell. And Guilford will become a place where local food is celebrated.”

It starts with the personal connection of knowing not just roughly where your food comes from, but exactly who grew or made it.

203 "Every night at dinner, we can say, 'These are Meggie's
204 carrots and Jane's beans,'" Dougherty says. "It's something that's
205 really special."

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

206 For more information about Neighborhood Roots, visit
207 neighborhoodroots.org, where new customers can sign up to
208 order from the Guilford Food Hub.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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210

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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