



*View of Dutch Hill from Edmonds Road  
Photo courtesy of Tom Narwald*

## Agriculture and Forestry

Agriculture and has been an important part of Danby's livelihood for over two centuries. Today despite changes in national and international practices both remain important parts of the Danby economy and landscape. While the total acreage of farms in Vermont has declined since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of farms has been rising, suggesting that more individuals have taken to farming as a lifestyle.

According to the VT Dept. of Taxes, there are several active farms in town. Among these are the Smokey House Center, the Bushee Family maple Farm the Bromley Farm, and the Fisk-Haines farm, Encouraging agriculture continues to be a primary concern of the community. Agricultural and forestry practices exist throughout the town, but are most common where soils have made it most effective.

New actions that could encourage agriculture would be the founding of a seasonal farmers market, working with co-ops in the surrounding area, or perusing agritourism. A new Best Practices Guide for Agritourism for Vermont will be released in 2015, and there will be many

aspects of its launch that focus on the Rutland Region. With an established Agritourism site already present (the Smoky House Center) the town could really increase tourism and booster its economy by investigating agritainment and other agripensual efforts.

A prime example of agritourism is showing off the process of maple sugaring. Many visitors from other states visit Vermont in the fall to look at the changing leaves, and many will also want to buy local, preservable foods, such as cheese or maple syrup.

There are many things that can be done with the tapping of trees in the area. Some have suggested that sugar makers from various regions get together to 'brand' their product as coming from a certain region, and to mark the year it was collected, much in the way that wines are. In this way maple syrup could also be marketed as a high end, discerning product that will grow in value into the future.

There is a substantial amount of land in the town which lies between 1,500 and 2,000 feet in elevation that has been used for agricultural and forestry purposes. Land of this type is also suitable for limited residential use where soils and slopes are appropriate and where it does not

### PLAN DANBY - SURVEY RESULTS



*Respondents to the Town's 2014 survey were asked what sort of method they preferred for protecting farmland and other under developed lands.*

*Overall, protection was favored over non-protection, with Agricultural zones, Land trusts, and Easements being the most preferred.*

*However, there were a large number of respondents who did not answer the question because they felt that they did not know enough about the various forms of protection in order to make an intelligent decision.*

increase forest fragmentation. Maintaining a low population density in this land conserves water purity and ensures safe and adequate sewage disposal.

The Smokey House Center has 1,300 acres of permanently conserved land above 2,500 feet on Dorset Mountain. Land is one of the greatest assets Danby has, and has a variety of ways it can be used. Silviculture is the act of 'harvesting' the forest for renewable hardwoods, wild edibles, game animals, and other products that do not take away from the sustainability of the land. There have been great strides in the art of conservation land management that allow large land owners to make a profit off of their land while still having 90% of it, at any one time, look completely untouched.

In 1978 the state instituted the Current Use Program, where enrolled parcels are taxed according to use rather than fair market value. The primary objectives of the program were to keep Vermont's agricultural and forest land in production, help slow the development of these lands, and achieve greater equity in property taxation on undeveloped land. Through this program the state reimburses municipalities for the balance in tax revenue, negating any fiscal municipal impacts for conserving the town's working and natural resource lands. To be enrolled, forest land must have an approved, 10-year forest management plan. This plan must include a description of the lands current

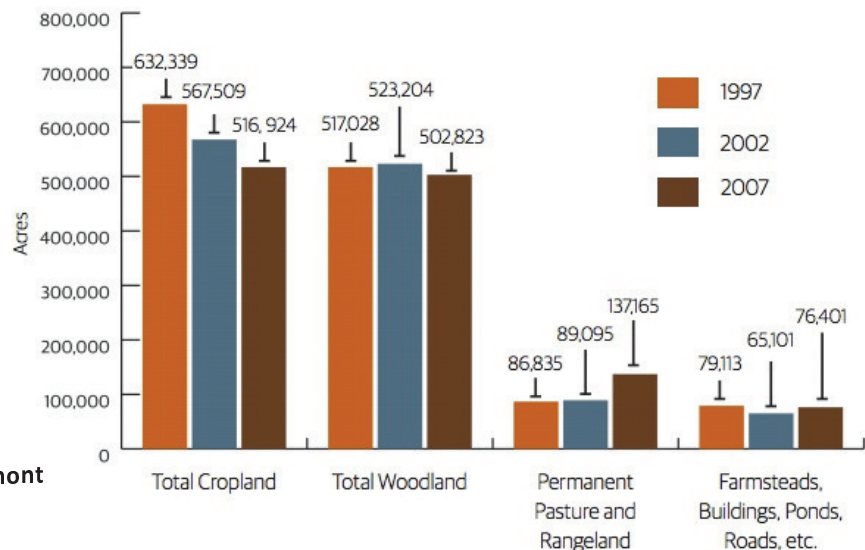


*Raiche Farm*

conditions, long term goals, management activities, and it is highly recommended that the plan be created by a certified forest manager. Not only does this plan mean that farmers, silviculturalists, conservationists, and other such land users are taxed less on their property, but there are many penalties that apply if the land is ever converted into other use ahead of the plan. This provides incentives to keep the forests whole, and disincentives for developers looking to quickly flip land.

For FY 2014, the Department of Taxes reports that 55 properties in Danby are enrolled, totaling 14,048 acres, which is 52% of the town's total acreage (26,671.59 acres).

**Relative growth, and shrinking, of various types of land cover in Vermont between 1997 and 2007**



## CASE STUDY: SMOKEY HOUSE CENTER

Based in the Danby Four Corners, Smokey House Center (SHC) is renowned locally and beyond for its unique, multifaceted approach to promoting education and conservation. SHC has served as a robust education source for local students in hands-on, work –based learning and environmental field studies programs since 1974. That tradition continues through collaboration with area partners.

With origins in the late 1950s, SHC has developed into a vibrant non-profit corporation stewarding over 5,000 acres of working land. SHC promotes sustainable agriculture and forestry, provides valuable education to students, and partners with farmers and other organizations in an effort to enhance the agricultural economy of the region.

Since receiving it as a gift from the Taconic Foundation in 1995, SHC has moved assertively to conserve its land. Since then, over 4,000 acres have been put under conservation easement, including the aforementioned 1,300 that lie on Dorset Mountain. The organization’s foresters work diligently to selectively harvest trees and promote the growth of native, high value species, ensuring a healthy forest for years to come, as well as a valuable revenue stream.

Farming has been a cornerstone of the region throughout its history and remains so today even in a changing economy. SHC works to ensure that it will remain an essential component of the working landscape by leasing land, housing and retail space to local farmers. SHC recognizes the many obstacles facing small and beginning farms and is working with others to find innovative solutions to farmland tenure and farm vitality challenges.





