



Fall 2008

Smokey House Center • 802 293 5121 • Fax 802 293 5650 • www.smokeyhouse.org • shc@smokeyhouse.org

**Smokey House Center**  
is a 5,000-acre year-round  
classroom where local at-risk teens  
and other youth learn academic,  
social, and work-place skills  
through hands-on farming,  
forestry, and ecological research.

**Working, learning and  
tasting success in 2008...**



page 2



page 3



page 4

*A generous, anonymous  
donation enabled us to  
give this year's newsletter  
a face-lift. Enjoy!*

Published annually for  
friends and supporters of  
**Smokey House Center**  
426 Danby Mountain Road  
Danby, Vermont 05739

Editor: Corrie Miller

Copyright © 2008 Smokey House Center

Printed on 100% post-consumer  
recycled paper, manufactured  
entirely with wind generated-electricity.

## Local Harvests – Food, Forecasts and the Future

In early August, walking up the steps to the old milk house loft affords an unexpected sight. Rows of garlic bunches hang upside down from the rough hewn rafters. Beneath the ceiling of suspended garlic, five students and one crew leader (in red t-shirts) crowd together around three harvest baskets. They're leaning in so closely it's difficult to see what they're doing. But, fragments of conversation—"that's five heads of firsts" and "here are two seed garlics"—reveal that these students are sorting and counting garlic.

These five high school students are part of Smokey House Center's *Youthwork Program*. Youthwork students help manage our farm and forest land; in the summer, they spend six hours each day growing organic vegetables, cutting firewood, raising livestock, or marketing products to the community. On this particular day the Youthwork crews are preparing for the weekly

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) delivery. Seven crews harvest, clean, and pack vegetables for delivery to fifty local families who have purchased a "share" of Smokey House's harvest. This week, the shares include organic cabbage, summer squash, zucchini, carrots, tomatoes, peppers, beets, corn, leeks, cucumbers, and, of course, garlic.

The Red Crew has been in charge of the garlic crop all summer—they weeded, dug, and hung it to cure. For today's CSA boxes, the students calculated that they need eighty garlic bulbs. The students have become proficient at looking for blemishes,

*continued on page 3*

## Thank You, IBM!

Smokey House Center is delighted to announce a generous donation of sixteen computers from IBM Corporation in support of our education programs. This donation has provided our students with the opportunity to use current technology and software in meaningful applications for their applied and academic work at Smokey House.



*Field Studies students prepare presentations  
on new IBM computers.*



*Stashia packs  
green beans  
into a CSA box.*

# *Sustaining the Working Landscape – A New Opportunity for Farm Vitality*

“*Vermont.*” The word evokes images of a patchwork of farmland and forests blanketed across rolling hills. While residents and visitors value the state’s working landscape and heritage, the land use patterns that created our quintessential rural landscape are rapidly changing. Skyrocketing land prices, declining viability of conventional agriculture, and countless other variables conspire to reduce the number of working farms in Vermont. As land lies fallow and fields become forest or second homes, Vermont’s rural character is threatened.

For 34 years, Smokey House Center has been committed to keeping this 5,000 acre valley in active production—it is the working landscape that epitomizes Vermont. In the background of our hands-on education programs, we have leased 600 acres of prime agricultural land to three local farm families and sustainably managed over 4,000 acres of timberland. In 2001, as part of our ongoing commitment to preserving the rural character of the region, we placed approximately 700 acres of farmland under conservation easement.

But times have changed. The conservation easements have turned out to be just half the battle. In recent years, we’ve watched two of

our three longtime tenant farm families go out of business and the third struggle to stay afloat. Though the land is conserved *from* development *for* farming, farming itself is not yet conserved. To maintain the landscape’s working character and culture, Smokey House Center has a plan to strengthen our region’s underlying farm economy.

As a first step, **one of Smokey House’s tenant farms is available now for long-term lease.** The Harrington Farm encompasses 230 acres of pasture and tillable

*To maintain the landscape’s working character and culture, Smokey House Center has a plan to strengthen our region’s underlying farm economy.*

land, a large farmhouse, an eighty-stall dairy barn, and numerous other outbuildings. We are seeking a new generation of farmer with an innovative business plan, sustainable farming practices, a community ethic, and an interest in creating opportunities for the young people who work at Smokey House. We’ve developed a model long-term lease that offers farmers an attractive alternative to land ownership by providing affordability, security, and equity. Farmers can get started without an expensive down-payment, be secured in the length of their tenure, and—through an innovative farm equity fund—build capital as they steward the land. Furthermore, Castanea Foundation is investing in house and barn updates that will be critical



Photo: Peter Dydos

for a successful farming operation. Smokey House plans to locate a farmer with both farming and business savvy, who can create a sustainable agricultural enterprise at the Harrington Farm.

Over time, we plan to make more farmland available for lease, attracting two more entrepreneurial farmers with diversified agriculture and innovative farm technologies. Successful farms will strengthen the local economy by supporting agriculture-based businesses. In turn, we will provide our students with broadened learning opportunities and increase the relevance of their work. Between the farmers’ efforts and our hands-on education programs, the Smokey House valley will be dedicated to cultivating nutritious food, healthy land, a vital local economy, and resilient youth. At the same time, we will nourish Vermont’s working heritage and preserve the landscape’s rural character.

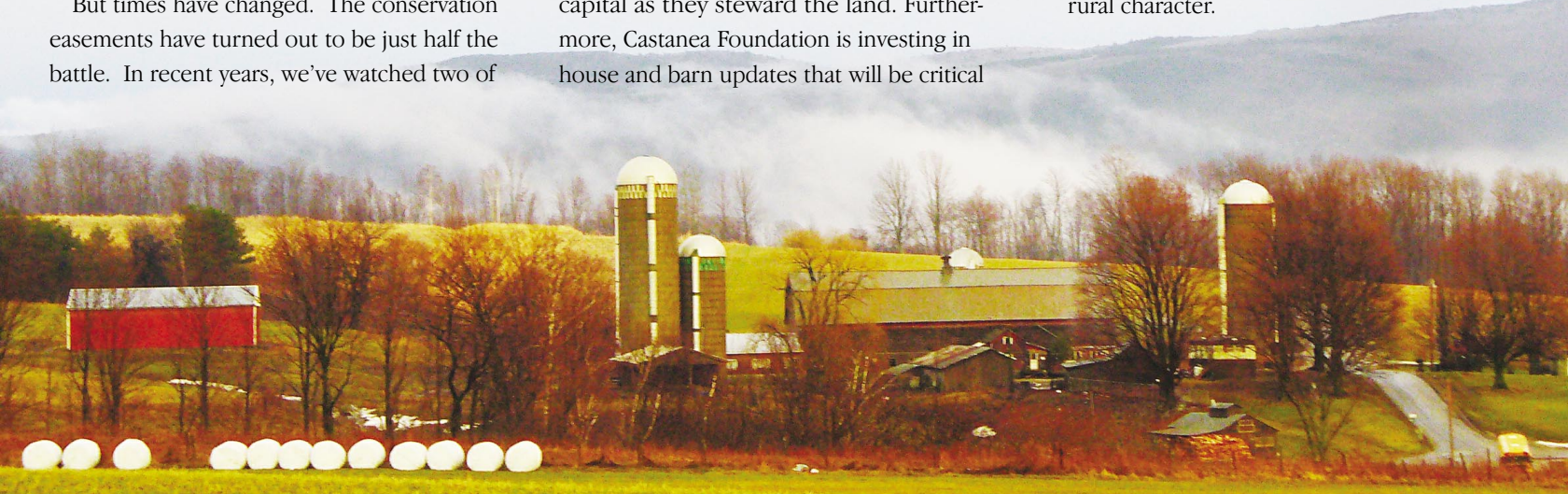


Photo: Katie Ross

## Local Harvests – Food, Forecasts and the Future *continued from page 1*

counting cloves, and appraising bulb size in order to sort their harvest into three groups—seed garlic, firsts, and seconds. The students laugh with their crew leader, Kate, as she reminds them to save the “biggest and most beautiful” garlic heads for Smokey House. Underlying their snickering at Smokey House’s apparent selfishness is the youths’ understanding that saving the best garlic for next year’s seed ensures another bountiful crop. When the youth have met their quota and head to the Produce Stand to pack it, they walk with an air of satisfaction. Because these students take pride in their crop and understand its value to customers, they strive to produce the best food possible.

The farm’s bustle slows as students and staff lean closer to the nearest radio to hear the report. Walkie-talkies among rows of beans, stacks of firewood, and acres of pasture sound out the familiar, “Good Morning Smokey House, this is Andrew of the Green Crew with your weather.” Though the anchor’s voice is different each morning, the words are familiar—“maximum temperature,”

“barometric pressure,” “Nimbostratus clouds,” “today’s forecast,” and “rain.”

The middle school students on the Green Crew are part of the *Environmental Field Studies Program* at Smokey House Center.

They are spending their summer days collecting ecological data and submitting it to various state and national scientific studies. As with this weather broadcast, Field Studies students are also contributing scientific data to inform Smokey House’s land management.

Earlier that morning, the Green Crew gathered at Smokey House’s weather station to record data from thermometers, a barometer, an

anemometer, a compass, and a rain gauge. Together, they pieced this information into a picture of the previous day’s weather and a prediction of the weather to come, and returned to the classroom to script their forecast. Andrew drew a breath, prepared his

anchorman voice, and delivered his report, adding “Have a nice day!” Promptly, calls of “thank you” crossed the air waves.

With the Green Crew’s information, the National Weather Service can improve its forecast accuracy and Smokey House

staff and students know what to expect from

the weather to prepare for their day outside. In the process of collecting and contributing information valued by the Weather Service and our local community, the students understand that their research is meaningful and are inspired to take detailed, accurate measurements.

This year, at Smokey House Center, the harvests have been abundant—we’ve produced locally grown organic foods and valuable ecological data. **Nevertheless, the real “harvest” in this Vermont valley is our students.** Through their important work, they not only learn and apply academic skills, build relationships with positive role models, and practice working cooperatively with peers, they also become contributing members of their local community. Whether the harvest is food or forecasts, the ties between the young people’s work and the community who values it inspire them to work hard and produce quality products. Though they may not become garlic farmers or network news anchors, the students’ work and learning at Smokey House have nurtured their sense of belonging and encouraged their future academic and workplace success.



Jacob displays his wares at the local farmers' market.



Alicia and Angel read an anemometer to measure wind speed.

### Our Wish List

Please think of Smokey House Center and local youth as you upgrade items such as:

- Desk chairs
- Camera cases
- A VCR
- Hand-held GPS units
- A small pick-up truck
- Cordless drills
- Hand braces
- Hand saws
- Printers
- Raincoats
- Winter boots
- Garden tools

To donate, call (802) 293-5121.

Also, go to [www.smokeyhouse.org](http://www.smokeyhouse.org) for an updated and comprehensive list.

# Meet Josh Short

Pizza, a tool belt, and a walkie talkie.

Inconsequential to most, but to a young man named Josh Short, each is significant and represents three years of achievement.

## Pizza

Josh started as a Smokey House Youthworker three years ago in his ninth grade year. He and his family of seven had just moved to Danby after circumstances forced several temporary moves. Josh proudly recollects taking home his first paycheck, *“I bought my family pizza, from Domino’s, for dinner. They liked it and it felt good to be able to help.”*

Josh remembers when Smokey House rehired him for a second semester, *“I knew I’d done a good job and given a good first impression.”* He advanced to spend a total of four semesters as a Youthworker on general farm and forestry crews and learned valuable workplace, academic, and interpersonal skills.

## A tool belt

Over the next two years, Josh was a carpentry student at Stafford Technical Center and an integral part of our new advanced carpentry crew. At Smokey House, he helped build a barn, garden shed, and deck—practicing what he learned at Stafford while also learning new skills. Because of his carpentry experience, Josh found himself in a leadership role. *“The other kids on my crew looked to me when they had questions about their projects.”* During his first summer, Josh saved enough money to purchase a tool belt.

Since then, as earnings allow, Josh adds to his belt, confident that the “tools” he accumulates prepare him for his future.

## A walkie-talkie

Stafford Tech encourages seniors to apply their training through internships. This fall, we were pleased when Josh chose to intern at Smokey House. Thinking back to his first day, Josh recalls how much it meant to him that we gave him a staff walkie-talkie. He is proud that three years of dedication and hard work have earned him a place alongside Smokey House staff.

Josh has gained the respect of his peers, teachers, and family. He told us recently, *“It makes me happy to know that my father is proud of me for being the first in the family to have a job and stick with it.”* Everyone at Smokey House is also proud of Josh and looks forward to celebrating his future successes.



Josh shows off his tool belt, skills and smile.



**Smokey House Center** practices ecologically sound and economically productive land management in rural Vermont. We engage local, at-risk youth in our farm and forestry work, giving them the tools to become confident and competent adults who assume productive roles in our communities.

We cultivate nutritious food, healthy land, a vital local economy, and resilient youth.

