



Spring 2024

Dear New Perennials Community Friends and Partners,

In 2018, Middlebury College welcomed the New Perennials project, which was just beginning to explore Vermont's Champlain Valley as fertile ground for a nascent collaborative project with The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. Over the past six years, the project has taken root at the College and in the surrounding communities. It has explored the "new perennials" (the human social, cultural, and economic analogs for perennial polycultures in agriculture) and begun to tell and share the stories and insights that have been discovered and enacted along the way. In the classroom and in our communities, with books, pamphlets, podcasts, exhibits, gatherings, and presentations, New Perennials offers healing rooted in common sense. It also provides a respite from a world unraveling, and with the energy and imagination to meet adversity with grace, justice, and gratitude.

Marc Lapin and I co-teach the Perennial Turn course, and this past fall, we partnered with Mark Krawczyk (owner and operator of Valley Clayplain Forest Farm) and artist Nancy Winship Milliken. Students spent time on the farm working with Mark and Nancy as they explored themes and essays in and around perennality and diversity. The classroom walls disappeared, and learning expanded into the arts—mechanical and artistic. Students not only engaged in traditional discussions about readings, but they also wrote radical pamphlets on issues they cared about most. Some of these pamphlets will be published by New Perennials in the coming year.

This excerpt from a student's pamphlet exemplifies our work during the past six years:

"Community and connection. Two things that are hard to accomplish without roots. Deep roots, not just ones that barely nick the surface. People, places, animals, ideas. It all makes up this place that you now call home. Maybe it will feel familiar

PUBLISHING

New Perennials Publishing won a **PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award for Excellence** for *Perennial Earth: Poetry by Wallace Stevens and Paintings by Alexis Serio*. In addition, New Perennials has published three books this year:

- *Life Itself: Educational Roots Amid Global Uncertainty*, edited by Regan Eberhart and featuring the work of the New Roots project of the Willowell Foundation. It is the first book in our Community Roots series.
- *Growing the Knoll: Twenty Years in the Garden*, edited by Aria Bowden '23.
- *Perennial Learning: Musings from a Middlebury College Classroom*, edited by Victoria Andrews '23.5.

We have also produced a new podcast:

- *Baby Carl's Happy Apocalypse: A Podcast for Grown-Ups*. The podcast has been featured in two Vermont newspapers and currently has over 1,000 subscribers.

to another place you know, and maybe it will feel different and daunting. Maybe some of your beliefs will be reinforced, and hopefully, some will be challenged. Hopefully, you will be persuaded to rethink some of your beliefs, question where they came from and where they will get you. Maybe you will come to question the future you've envisioned for yourself. Or maybe, you'll realize that you've been so focused on the steppingstones that you've forgotten to dream of your future at all. I challenge you to grow your roots deeper."

In addition to the Perennial Turn course, New Perennials has supported events, speakers, and student activities organized by Middlebury's



Climate Action Program. Most recently, we co-sponsored students' attendance at NOFA's winter conference. Our office and gathering space at 23 Adirondack View has hosted dozens of students and staff during its summer tea times. This space is also home to meetings, events, and classroom space for numerous students, colleagues, and departments.

COMMUNITY OFFERINGS

Recent community-based events included a spring 2023 New Perennials-curated gallery show and panel discussion at Town Hall Theater's Jackson Gallery. *Earth's Materials: Perennial Perspectives in the Arts* brought together 12 artists and four panelists to celebrate and discuss diverse responses from artists who work in a variety of mediums, using ideas and materials that reflect, respond, and rejoice in our roots and relationships.

Other ongoing efforts include awarding micro-grants to community partners including the Willowell Foundation (for its third annual Perennial Harvest Day event in October), HOPE, the Giving Fridge, A Revolutionary Press, and Charter House Coalition. And New Perennials' Lisa Winkler consulted with three of our keystone partners to provide assessments, funding strategies, and potential funding opportunities for their work.

Finally, New Perennials coordinated and facilitated last fall's Community Farm Days: A Celebration of Community and Vermont Agriculture, with additional funding provided by the USDA and Senator Bernie Sanders.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

New Perennials will continue its work in community engagement, teaching, and publishing, with the goal of creating and sharing perennial perspectives across disciplines, organizations, and practices. Over the next twelve months, we will:

- Co-curate and produce **Radical Pamphlets Past and Present**, an exhibit and workshop in collaboration with Special Collections, students, staff, and keystone partners.
- Expand and deepen connections with our new **Keystone Partners Initiative**. Working with several of our partners, we will provide support, events, and convenings to explore ways of establishing a regional perennial network of resources and organizational models of cooperative problem-solving.
- Create a new campus programming opportunity: **The Community Roots Apprenticeship Project**. The year-long project will utilize the historic framework of passing down knowledge through a lineage of learning to create more lateral, multi-generational learning relationships.
- Continue to provide small grants to support **essential needs and programming** among our community partners, including HOPE, the Giving Fridge, and Gather on the Green.

THE PATH SO FAR

The past six years have created their share of surprises and challenges as we continue to learn together with our students and community partners. We have seen important evidence that perennality, as a concept related to human society and ecosystems, is finding integration and resonance in pedagogies, practices, and perspectives—albeit slowly and steadily—just as it should be.

New Perennials is grateful for the collaborative and inspiring partnership with Middlebury College, and we look forward to our continued collective work to nourish deep, just, and resilient roots in Vermont communities and landscapes.

In gratitude,



Bill Vitek, Ph.D.

Scholar in Residence and Director, New Perennials Project
Scott Center Affiliate Humanist Chaplain, Middlebury College
www.newperennials.org

“New Perennials exemplifies best what a liberal arts education is about. With branches in arts, humanities, science, and everything in between, New Perennials seeks to do the work of combating climate change interdisciplinarily. The mission might be broad and mighty, but it allows for a lot of space to grow. New Perennials is a special organization, and my internship leaves me with lots of insights into the different ways individual actions can create massive ripples, the power of grant funding, and how there’s a place for everyone in climate efforts.”

—Crystal Zhou '23.5
New Perennials intern