



Spring 2023

Dear New Perennial Community Friends and Partners,

As the seasons transition from a reluctant spring to a burgeoning summer, I find myself marveling with deep appreciation for the incredible opportunities that have come with directing this experiment called New Perennials.

My occasional letters to our community not only provide a glimpse into where we are and what we've been doing, but they also afford me a chance to reflect on and relay New Perennials' current projects and future aspirations.

As I think about all the events and gatherings that brought us to the here and now, and our efforts to introduce perennial thinking and action in a higher educational institution that takes seriously the value of the humanities and liberal arts in navigating an uncertain future, the questions that informed this project almost a decade ago remain central:

- How do we transform human capacities for knowledge, wisdom, and imagination during an age of climate collapse, global threats to democracy, and—despite our best efforts—the continuation of social and ecological injustice?
- How do we adapt and evolve from the social-ecological impacts of annual grain agriculture toward the co-creation of more just, diverse, and perennial agricultures?
- How do we feed our bodies and minds within real biophysical limits and without reducing options for future generations?

2023 INITIATIVES

- Bill Vitek will be teaching a professional-development graduate education course for K12 teachers—From the Ground Up: The Practice and Theory of Community Engaged Learning—through Castleton University (part of the Vermont State University system).
- Tom McKenna and Bill Vitek will be exploring the pamphlet as a medium for radical social change through the Bread Loaf Teachers Network/Next Generation pedagogy.
- A new podcast exploring the term “apocalypse” with humor and inspiring interviews with New Perennials' community partners and Baby Carl, a little guy who likes to ask big questions, will be released this summer.
- NewPerennials will continue to expand its catalog of free, downloadable PDFs to include accessible scholarly monographs, pamphlets, practical teaching and learning materials, and a community roots series featuring partner and student work.

New Perennials continues to share and explore these questions—and our emerging and tentative responses—in classrooms and communities. By joining with others to create an accessible, just, and practical story that we can all begin to live into, we are cultivating an accessible narrative for a sustainable future.

During the past five years, New Perennials created a Covid-19 Rapid Response Fund to provide small grants to community partners, and developed a regional network, now approaching 50 members, as part of its experimental framework to engage five community spheres—agriculture, education, the arts, wellness, and sacred practice traditions. We developed and hosted a month-long festival in October 2021 that featured the work of students, community partners, and collaborators, and we now host two to three Fall Harvest Days events every year.

We created a publication platform in 2020 that has published two pamphlets and four books—with more in the works—and one podcast, with another in development. Since the fall of 2018, the New Perennials team has taught eight courses and four independent studies and has mentored 13 interns. And we just concluded *Earth's Materials: Perennial Perspectives in the Arts*, co-sponsored with Town Hall Theater in Middlebury, featuring 12 regional artists.

Over the next few years, New Perennials will continue to provide small grants to community partners who are doing essential-care work. We will continue to deepen the work with our keystone partners—the Willowell Foundation, Bread & Butter Farm, Addison County Parent/Child Center, Courageous Stage, and Bread Loaf Zen Community—by providing support, collaborative events, and convenings to explore establishing a regional mutual-aid network of resources and organizational models of cooperative problem-solving and assistance. We will host our annual New Perennials Harvest Days at keystone partner locations and at Middlebury College and host four events around Vermont in the fall of 2023 as part of a congressional discretionary award from Senator Bernie Sanders.

We will continue to teach the Perennial Turn course and host and co-support conferences and events at Middlebury College, including support for student interns and campus partner projects at the Knoll and the Charles P. Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life.

ALL THINKERS HAVE A PLACE IN THE WORLD, no matter the level of education and the title associated with their names. This book is a collective example of living, working, and dreaming in community, and can be viewed through this lens, rather than by an expectation of intellectually bulletproof perfection. I aim to highlight the discoveries of my peers as a way to encourage conversation and perhaps energize readers to bring elements of perennality into their own spheres of influence.

—Victoria Andrews '23, NP student intern and editor of the forthcoming New Perennials book featuring student work: *Towards Perennial Learning: Musings from a Middlebury College Classroom*

The past five years have created and nourished myriad partnerships, collaborations, and educational spaces. Perenniality—and yes, it is a word—is a social- and eco-system concept that is finding its way into our pedagogies, practices, and perspectives—albeit slowly and steadily—just as it should be.

This past year has brought with it many shifts—in staffing, offerings, partners, and in teaching and learning. Change isn't always welcome or easy, but I hope we have navigated it with kindness and humility. As we look to the next few years, I want to thank you for believing in—or at least tolerating—the informal motto that guides my philosophically inclined methodology: The best approach to solving difficult challenges is to think more deeply and slowly about them.

In gratitude,



Bill Vitek, Ph.D.

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Scott Center Affiliate Humanist Chaplain, Middlebury College
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I'M GRATEFUL FOR A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE who are exploring this idea of perenniality. It's a new lens that aligns with the general work that the NP community partners are doing. They are culture-makers and if we're going to connect with each other and have a way to network, I want to be involved in the expressed world of the work, the actual remaking of culture, because goodness sakes, we need it.

—Gillian Kapteyn Comstock,
New Perennials community partner and founding codirector of Metta Earth Institute

The “new” of New Perennials is really about allowing agricultural, ecological, and social systems that have been constantly disturbed and forced to focus on short-term, annual growth to re-establish themselves as more perennial and diverse. It's mostly about healing and about giving these systems and communities a chance to see what they might become again and anew.

—Marc Lapin, Associate Laboratory Professor of Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and New Perennials Educator

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