

Wenner Hill Gardens Coop Community Garden Experience

VI Agriculture Conference
WEDNESDAY, 3:15-5 pm
JULY 15, 2026
Great Hall, AAS UVI

Dr. Gemma Wenner
Professor of Tourism /Hospitality and Entrepreneurship- Pikes Community College, Southern Maine, and UVI

Dr. Mark D. Wenner
Professor of Economics, UVI
Owners and Operators of Wenner Hill Gardens

Who are We?

Mark

- VI Native
- Peace Corps
- Writer
- Economist
- Professor
- Farmer



Gemma

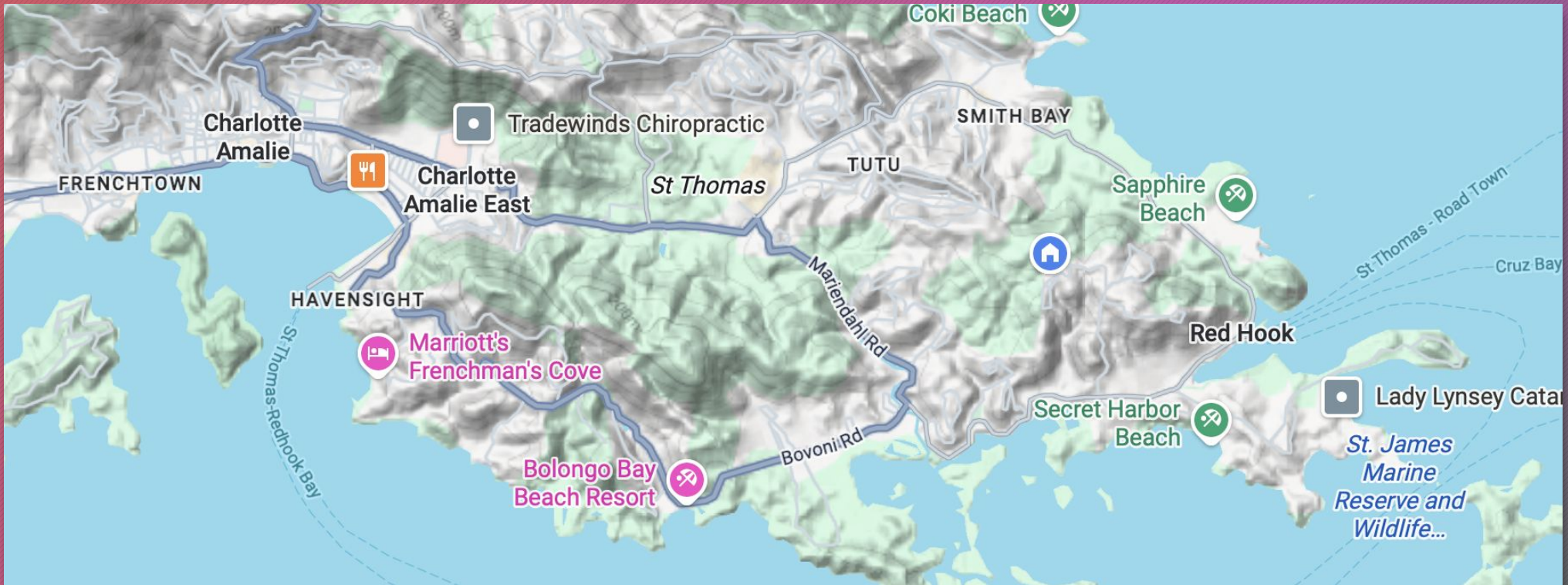
- Haiti Native
- US Army Veteran
- Serial Entrepreneur
- Professor
- Farmer

Outline:

- Location of Wenner Hill Farm
- Motivation for Starting a Community Garden
- How is the Community Garden Organized
- Achievements
- Challenges
- Lessons Learned and Recommendations



I.



18.33 N 64.86 W

Annual Average Rainfall 43.6 inches

Soil Type: Porous, low-moderate fertility

Elevation : 502-647 feet above sea level

Average Temperature Through the Year: 78-89 F

Sloped Tropical Dryland

II. Motivation for Starting the Community Garden?

Significant litter problem on a parcel next to a public road.

Was already operating a 3-acre fruit and vegetable farm, decided to clear the litter plagued parcel and invite others to join in a community garden.



II. How is the Community Garden Organized



- LOW-COST LAND PLOT LEASE
- INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTION
- MUTUAL SUPPORT
- EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE
- COST SHARING
- COLLECTIVE MARKETING

III. Achievements

Economic Impact

- Marketed Fresh Produce has increased significantly.
- Market Participation. Up from June 2024, attended 12-20 persons in biweekly market. In December 2025, 150-200 persons attended
- Average revenue from market sales per vendor range from \$200-700 per market day currently.
- Popularizing new products - edible flowers , medicinal plants and remedies (guava and soursop leaves), herbal sprays, ginger/beet shots

Social Impact:

- Established a Community Presence (Facebook Page Followers 3,747 as of June 2026)
- Offering farm tours to school children and tourists.
- Offer farm to table curated dinners,
- Offer a venue for workshops, lectures, social events, a community gathering place.

Environmental Impact-

- Using organic production techniques
- Using Composting to condition soil
- Using Soil Conservation Techniques-vetiver grass, terracing, berms, mulching, intercropping.

Products

- Some of Products of Community Garden Pictured
- Cultivate 30 different fruits, vegetables, and edible flowers.
- kale, lettuce, spinach, mustard greens,
- basil, chives, scallions,
- ginger, turmeric, moringa,
- rosemary, thyme, oregano, parsley
- melons, pomegranate, passion fruit, guava, soursop, mango, coconut, tamarind, sugar apple, sorrel, banana, plantain, sugar cane etc.
- edible flowers (sunflower, zinnias, cosmos)



Members



Main Challenges: Water Scarcity, Frequent Drought, Lack of Input Store

Rainfall Variability

Unpredictable and uneven rainfall patterns lead to water shortages and necessity to purchase tanks of water (5000 gallons at \$450)

Drought Frequency

Frequent droughts strain water resources, reduce crop yields, and threaten ecosystems and livelihoods.

Rocky Poor Soils

Lack of Agricultural Input Store in the Territory/High Cost of Inputs



V. What lessons did we learn?

- MUST Practice SMART Agriculture:** Use scientific methods and improved technology (timed drip irrigation, hydroponics, soil conditioning)
- Precision application systems, soil testing, composting, recordkeeping, and data tracking. Only plant what makes money and is easy to grow.
- Leverage Resources:** Utilize support from local agricultural agencies and extension services.
- Marketing Matters:** Social media and creative promotion have been key to the garden's success.
- Diversify Streams of Income:** Use the shed to host farm-to-table dinners and social events, and to process value-added products.



Recommendation: Replicate Community Gardens Across the Territory

- Individual community gardens provide valuable yet limited improvements to food security due to their small scale and part-time participation but can have a huge impact when widespread and have many participants within each area.
- **1. High Initial Costs:** Land clearing, irrigation, and construction are expensive. Can be overcome with pooling of private resources and small grants. Can promote, vertical, hydroponic gardens.
- **2. Technical Knowledge:** Successful agriculture requires expertise in agronomy, soil conditioning, and water management, climate adaptation, pest management, plant development cycles, and use of modern technologies (hydroponics, drones, precision fertilizers, and appropriate chemical applications). Can be overcome by making sure you have a few knowledgeable people in the group. Prior knowledge is not necessary for all. Can learn easily.
- **3. Animal Pests:** Local wildlife, such as deer, iguanas, and roaming chickens, require protective measures. Can be overcome using repellants, scarecrows, cats, BB guns, fencing, stoning, and distraction crops like sweet potato.
- **4. Social Commitment:** Success depends on committed, collaborative members. This is the key and most important ingredient. Must have a nucleus, of serious, like-minded, committed persons to make the cooperative venture successful. Need a minimum of 5-10 persons to make a success.

Thank you



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