

## Abandoned farm

BY ROBERTA HEMMER

Mill River Union High School, Grade 11

Spindly weeds crackle in a stiff early autumn wind. A fiery leaf flips and twirls like a dancer, gracefully coming to rest on a silken cushion of emerald moss. A muffled thump focuses my gaze downward. Speckled with browning worm holes, a pale green crabapple glances off my boot, rolling over an uneven hillock. I blink away wind tears, rough wool scratching my cheek as I wipe my streaming eyes. My little apple is gone. That peculiar, distinctive autumn scent fills my nostrils as I chase after my quarry, scrambling over ground marked here and there by inscrutable, lumpish knolls.

My feet still, my breath catches as a shadow unfurls before me. Coarsely hewn stones, fingered by trailing roots, ring a murky hole that once served as a well. And that stone wall there, not ten paces off, must have been the front wall of an old Vermont homestead. Eyes widening with realization, I survey this fading landscape, imagining the working farm it once was. Blossoming apple trees sway in the orchard, the small courtyard overflows with farm machinery, chickens peck at corn kernels scattered round the well, as a small herd of cows dapples the verdant hillside behind it.

That was the springtime of Vermont's farming era, and what a glorious springtime it was. But now, at this uncertain meeting of summer and autumn, the fate of small Vermont farms dangles over a precipice. How long before my classmate's farm bows to the thickets encroaching upon its borders? How long before all vestiges of Vermont's apple industry stink of the rotting fruit left to fade under the impassive sun? I turn slowly into gusting wind, a glimmering tear slipping down my cheek.

## Spreading manure

BY LANCE BERGMANS

Ferrisburgh Central School, Grade 3

On our muddy road by the hayfield  
My dad drives the huge tractor  
The smell of manure spreads everywhere  
People in their cars scrunch up their noses  
At the smell  
The manure looks like it is raining  
And the field is as brown as cardboard  
I feel sick to my stomach  
But after my dad is done  
He will run to me  
And give me a hug.

More winning submissions:  
[youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org)

## FARMING CONTEST WINNERS

Each year Young Writers Project asks students to write about farming and selects the very best among their submissions for cash prizes. Here is some of the winning writing from this year's contest. Each of the students on this page has won a cash award courtesy of

**St. Albans Cooperative Creamery and Cabot Cheese.**

### VERMONT 2059

Envision your town in the year 2059. Best submissions will win cash prizes and potential public presentation.

Due May 29



Young Writers Project is an independent nonprofit engaging students to write. We operate [youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org), a safe online community for Vermont young writers, and build **Digital Writing Classrooms** for schools. Early sign up ends **May 29**. More at [ywpvt.net](http://ywpvt.net).

## Farming

BY DEREK FOLEY

Oxbow High School, Grade 12

A friend of mine works and lives on a farm. He works extremely hard every day and has long hours. He milks the cows at the farm he works on better than the other workers, which means he is the only one trusted to do it on a regular basis.

I met him in the summer three years ago because he was playing soccer on the summer team that I joined. The team was part of an adult league that consisted of teams throughout the Upper Valley. My friend is an amazing soccer player. He is barely over five feet tall and he is not very muscular, but he is so quick he can beat just about anyone.

I have gone to the farm to give him rides to games and I have also just visited him. I was surprised how high-tech the farm was. They had machines for milking the cows and other electronics that I can't even begin to explain. Yet my friend knew how to operate all of it and he was good at it. There were hundreds of cows and it took him hours just to set the cows up to be milked.

Some people hate my friend because he is an immigrant from Mexico. He works harder than anyone I know and he makes very little money; the money he does make gets sent home to help support his family. He keeps so little for himself that he couldn't even afford cleats to play soccer, so the team pitched in to get him some. He told me the story of how he came here once. The hardships he went through were something I feel would have stopped most people. ... Many people say that these immigrants are stupid and have no right to be here, yet my friend can operate very complicated machinery necessary to an American farm and he fought his way into the country to be allowed to do it, all for almost no money.

## Grandpa's temple

BY ALICIA CERASOLI

Hartford High School, Grade 9

Grandma hands me my lightweight,  
multicolored windbreaker.  
I pull it over my chubby arms.  
She zips it in the front.  
I head towards the door  
Then slip on my black, rubber boots.  
Grandpa stands up from his chair,  
Towering high above me.  
"Ready, Monkey Shine?"  
Grandpa asks,  
Tousling my hair  
Roughly.  
He doesn't need an answer,  
I was born ready to farm.  
He pulls open the large green door,  
Leading out and beyond,  
Into the freezing winter air.  
We head down to the barn,  
Grandpa's large sanctuary.  
This is his temple  
Full of warmth and cows.  
We reach our destination,  
Climbing three concrete steps.  
Entering the milk house,  
A soft, low lull soothes my cold ears.  
I lean against the huge, silver canister  
Filled with creamy, fresh milk.  
Grandpa grabs a soft bucket  
And the yellow powder.  
He adds two scoops to one bucket  
of warm water.  
"Can I stir Grandpa?"  
I ask impatiently.  
"Yep, just like this."  
He dips his large, wise hand  
Into the mixture,  
Stirring it slowly.  
I mimic him,  
Admiring his knowledge,  
As he picks up the bucket,  
Pouring the mixture into a bottle,  
Ready for a calf,  
A slow flurry begins outside,  
Leaving us safe  
In our sanctuary.

## My life in farming

BY CODY O'CONNELL

Waits River Valley School, Grade 7

My family moved to Vermont in the year 2000. My parents had both grown up in Massachusetts and had good jobs with great pay. When we moved to Vermont, my father chose a house that had a small family farm.

When we were all moved in we started the farm running again. My dad was new to this business so he learned everything as he went along. We got a herd of heifers . . . which we let out during the day and brought into the barn at night. When the heifers were old enough, my dad bought a bull so they could breed! Once they were ready to give birth their udder would start to fill up with milk. After they gave birth, they would stay in for a day or two. We would finally congratulate the mom for becoming a cow and would start to milk her. . . .

One winter was fiercely cold at Christmas. Two of the water bowls' pipes split and leaked all through the night. When my dad went out the next morning, he had a lovely flooded barn for a Christmas present from the cows. . . . When spring hit that year, milk prices started to go down the drain dramatically. We couldn't afford the electric bill in the barn, so we had to sell the herd. My dad started doing little jobs off the farm. Once he had enough money, he bought another herd that winter and they were great. We kept them all the way into the next winter. Milk prices stayed nice and steady. Then spring came and milk prices started to go down very slowly, like water in a clogged drain. When the summer hit we had a really bad drought. It wiped out our wells and we had to sell the herd.

Over the summer, my dad was thinking of how he could make farming easier for us. He decided that he was going to build an addition onto the barn. . . . When it was done he still had money left over and he bought a new herd immediately. Milk prices stayed stable until the winter started to settle in. Then milk went under \$15. We had to sell the herd because it wasn't making enough milk. My dad's heart was broken. He had thought this was going to be the herd that would wash away all of his bad memories.

. . . My dad got even more little jobs off the farm and got enough money to buy another herd. He bought it because milk prices were at \$21.50. Milk prices were so good that we bought a small goat herd. They were phenomenal. Then we started to run out of hay, so we had to sell it. Then milk prices started to drop under \$10 and we had to sell the herd again. My dad is distraught; he really wants a cow herd again.