

# **New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMSN) Urban Food Systems: Burlington Site Visit**

**June 3-4, 2013**

Final Report



*Andy Jones, farmer, and Bonnie Acker, Board Member (on left), speak with NEMSN members at the Intervale Community Farm, Burlington, VT, June 2013*

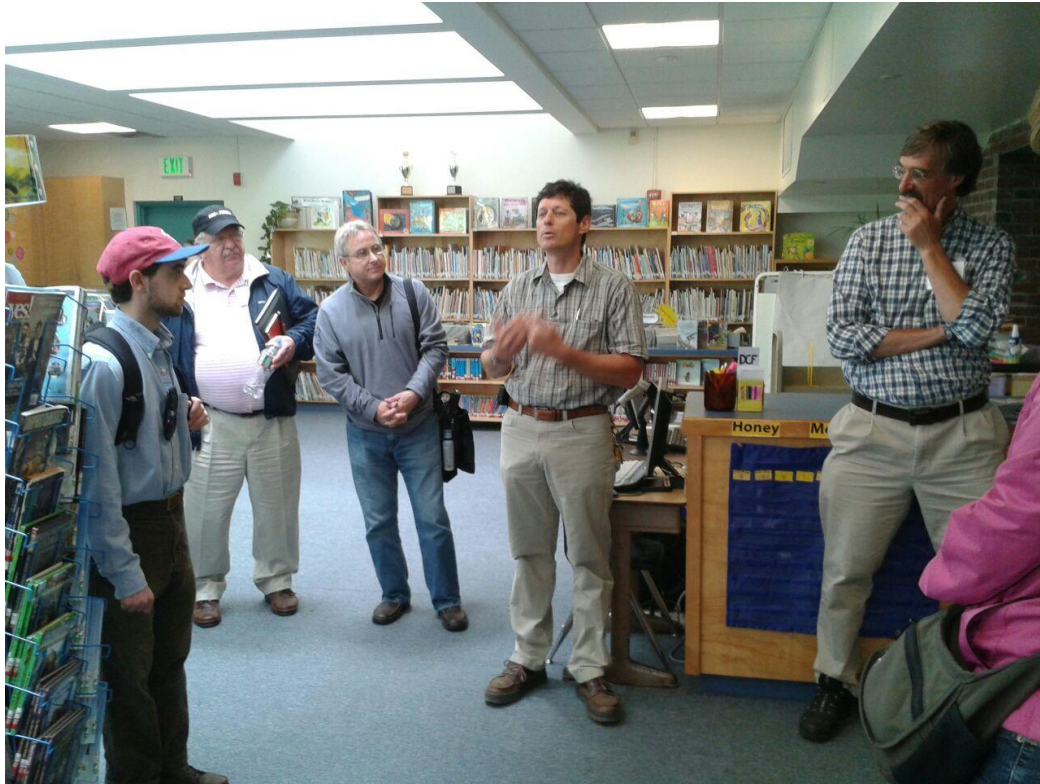
The Burlington Site Visit was funded through the Urban Sustainability Directors Network

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*Doug Davis (c), Burlington's Sustainable School Food Service Director, speaks with NEMSN members pictured: Drew Devitis, Montpelier, VT; Rick Norris and Mike Murphy, Groton, CT; and Rhett Lamb, Keene, NH*

## **THE NEW ENGLAND MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY NETWORK (NEMSN): HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

The New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMSN) was formed in December 2010 as a way for municipal staff working on sustainability issues to share ideas, resources, and lessons learned through training and regular teleconferencing. The idea of formation was initially discussed at the Denver USDN Annual Meeting and was subsequently launched by city staff from Burlington, VT, Boston, MA, Cambridge, MA, New Haven, CT and Portland, ME. Today the group is composed of 26 cities and towns from each of the 6 New England states, plus a representative from Albany, New York. This group was modeled after the larger and successful Urban Sustainability Director's Network; indeed all six of the founding members of the NEMSN are USDN members, testifying to the strength and importance of this larger group to its New England affiliate.

Administrative support for the Network is provided by EPA Region 1 by way of a part-time staff person, access to conference rooms, teleconferencing, and technical speakers. In the past, technical assistance also has been given by the Institute for Sustainable Communities of Montpelier, VT. Within the NEMSN, a volunteer seven person Steering Committee meets monthly via phone to work on planning and development issues. The committee includes two co-chairs and represents each New England state. Representation on the Steering Committee rotates annually.

### **NEMSN MEETINGS and FUNDING**

Meetings take place twice a year, in June and December, and focus on topics and areas of concern identified by the group. Each meeting lasts 1½ to two days and always includes both a networking and a training component. Previous meetings have focused on climate change adaptation, long-term sustainability planning, and complete streets and transportation. Meetings are generally held at EPA headquarters in Boston.

During meetings, blocks of time are set aside for both general and specific topics, giving time for questions and in-depth explanation. The Network tries to have at least half of the presentations be by current members, and brings in other people from the sustainability directors' home offices to enhance support for sustainability issues from within a municipality.

The Institute for Sustainable Communities provided both training and hotel/food costs for the December 2011 meeting on climate change and adaptation. For the June 2012 meeting on long-term sustainability planning and the December 2012 meeting on Complete Streets and Transportation, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network in conjunction with the Summit Foundation covered hotel and food costs.

### **BURLINGTON, VT – JUNE 2013 MEETING/SITE VISIT**

At the December 2012 meeting, the NEMSN voted to hold their June 2013 meeting on sustainable food systems. Interested in meeting outside of Boston and seeing specific work first hand, the group decided to gather in Burlington, VT, a city known for its leadership in sustainable food systems. Funding was secured through the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, with some additional support from the City Market Co-op, and the University of Vermont.

Based on the December 2012 brainstorm, the Burlington, NEMSN representative created a draft agenda for June 2013 to share and vet with the Steering Committee. After changes, comments and edits were integrated, it went back to the Steering Committee for final feedback and edits before being sent to the larger group for approval. The agenda included both food systems policy and project work at the city and community level on each component of the food systems grid: production, processing, marketing, consumption and waste. It had a mix of speakers representing the public and private sectors, field visits, time for formal discussion around food system work and an informational exchange about what each city was doing. Informal “down time” included travel between sites and meals produced by restaurants using local ingredients, as well as free time in the city of Burlington. The agenda also built in time to collect qualitative and quantitative feedback about the gathering, including lessons learned and intentions to further food system work once back home (see Appendices I, II and III).

### **NEMSN FOOD SCAN**

According to the USDN Food Scan prepared for the October 2012 USDN meeting and compiled by the Innovation Network for Communities, cities generally fall into one of three categories of food system advancement – early, developing, and advanced. Cities with early systems have community gardens, farmers markets, food trucks, and food procurement policies, and have made policy changes to allow for urban food production. Cities with further developed food systems have farm to institution and farm-to-table efforts and local food hubs, and support healthy eating in schools and consumer education. Advanced communities have regional food shed strategies, intensive farm-scale urban production, developed food clusters, and can exhibit large scale behavior change in eating habits.

To make the most of the meeting time together, the Steering Committee sent out a food systems evaluation template or “scan” (see Appendix IV) as “homework” to complete and bring to the meeting. Each participant assessed current work related to food systems in their home communities and noted whether they might be willing to serve as a mentor on a particular subject or if they would like to be a mentee. The scan was developed by the Steering Committee with assistance from EPA 1.

The information gathered from the scan structured the meeting in two ways: participants spent individual time assessing their own community, and then shared it with the group. In addition, the aggregate responses were looked at to get a sense of where Network members fall on the spectrum. This data, combined with qualitative research gleaned from small group discussions and formal presentations at the meeting, indicate that the majority of NEMSN members are in the early stage of food system advancement. Most of the members noted having community gardens, farmers markets and food focused community group formation. A few have made or adopted food-related policies. Based on the survey, evidence suggests that nearly 1/3 would define themselves in the “early” stages of development.

When asked what obstacles held cities back from work on food system advancement, “lack of funds” and “lack of leadership” were primarily noted, as is often the case with sustainability-focused initiatives. Of those working on established food systems goals, only two, Portland, ME and Boston, MA, had well established measurements and matrices. These are two of the Network’s largest cities. Several other cities (Cambridge, MA, Burlington, VT, and Keene, NH) have some matrices in place, mostly around greenhouse gas reduction targets.

According to the USDN Food Scan, there are three kinds of food system strategies: supply (the increase in the number and volume of local producers and processors), distribution (making it easier and cheaper to get healthy and nutritious products to customers), and demand (the increase in consumer demand for healthy and nutritious foods). While the NEMSN agenda attempted to integrate field visits and meetings covering each of these categories, at the close of the workshop, several participants expressed an interest in learning more about distribution, and most notably “increased knowledge of school food and school food programs and policies.”

## **MENTORING and LESSONS LEARNED**

In preparation for the June meeting, members of the Steering Committee and EPA R1 Network coordinator Cynthia Veit held several planning calls. The group asked Peter Plastrik, of the Innovation Network for Communities and consultant to the USDN, to participate in one. The Steering Committee were all familiar with Pete, and wanted to get his thoughts on how to maximize meeting success, including how to stimulate and encourage mentoring between cities on various food issues. One of the things that resonated strongly with the Steering Committee was Pete’s suggestion to let the mentoring relationships happen organically, between members, as forced efforts to link cities based on where they were on the food-system spectrum would likely fall flat. With this in mind, the meeting included a two-hour window at the end of the second day for facilitated conversation in both a large and small groups to talk about who was willing to serve as a mentor, what new connections could be forged as a result of the meeting, and next steps to further dialogue and support.

As a result of this session, several possible mentoring components emerged. For example, Burlington invited interested cities (Keene in particular) back for an in-depth look at farmer market start-up and management. A follow-up visit is tentatively scheduled for late September and will include, at the least, members from Keene and Chris Wagner, manager of Burlington’s non-profit Farmer’s Market. Albany offered mentoring to members wanting help with outreach and social media campaigns and subsequently sent follow-up information to the group. Cambridge, MA sent out material on their school food policy and a pledge to mentor Cranston, RI, Amherst, MA and others interested in learning more. Lastly, the aggregate responses to the food system scan, which included whether or not a member was interested in being a mentor or mentee, was sent to participants after the meeting (see Appendices V, VI).

Also during this time, the group spent 20 minutes individually filling out a prepared feedback /lessons learned form to gather thoughts specifically related to food-systems as well as the meeting in general (see Appendix VII).

Two specific quotes that succinctly captured much of the general feedback on important lessons learned about food systems came from Northampton, MA, and Montpelier, VT, respectively:

*“Synergies – it’s not just farmers’ markets but how we use them to support downtowns and sense of place/sense of community.”*

*“[There is a] web of connections between various partners necessary to support food system efforts, school efforts.”*



## MEANINGFUL SITE VISITS: LESSONS LEARNED



NEMSN member Rhett Lamb (l) of Keene, NH, and Mike Murphy of Groton, CT (r) listen as Dan Cahill and staff of the Parks and Recreation Dept talks about Burlington, VT's community garden program

### Feedback from Participants:

*"Excellent, thought provoking workshop! Thank you."*

*"This was an excellent meeting. It spanned so many different aspects of food systems -- growing, distributions and partnerships, social equity, composting food waste."*

*"I learned something from each person and presentation."*

Unlike traditional conferences, regional site visits on a specific topic can offer unique benefits and opportunities for members beyond knowledge acquisition. The following bullets outline some key lessons on what makes, and how to create, meaningful site visits:

**1. Meet Member Needs:** Unlike a traditional conference or workshop, where the agenda is set and then later shared with prospective participants, a regional network gathering can and should respond to the specific interests and needs of individual participants. In the case of the NEMSN June 2013 meeting, the agenda setting started at the December 2012 meeting with a group brainstorm. From this list of interests, the Burlington representative was able to build a skeletal agenda to share with the Steering Committee, and later with the entire group for comments and feedback. Through several reiterations, the final agenda was agreed upon and approved by the entire group. According to meeting feedback, it was this process that helped members feel vested in the meeting, provided them with the information and connections they wanted and needed, and offered a foundation of knowledge to help forward food system work once back home.

**2. Combine Information on Topical Issues With Administration and Management Work:** Not only does a site visit allow for an in-depth look at a specific topic or sector, gathering face-to-face offers the chance to address important administrative and management issues not easily covered by phone or email. For example, the Steering Committee was able to meet separately the evening before the start of the visit to address issues related to chair and Steering Committee goals, roles and responsibilities. The agenda included time to discuss important administrative issues (i.e. whether and how to launch a funding sub-committee) and a presentation by co-chairs Rhett Lamb and Troy Moon on the spring 2013 USDN Network Leadership training in Chicago.

**3. Use the Gathering to Enhance Civic Pride and Engage Local Leadership:** Topic-specific site visits offer a unique way to further enhance and build civic pride in the host

community. For example, the NEMSN meeting was covered in the local paper, garnering civic pride and creating more community awareness on Burlington's efforts. Through hosting the meeting in Burlington, the Mayor and other leaders were not only brought up to speed on recent efforts, but stepped up to the plate as key spokespeople. This started with a Mayoral welcome letter sent to participants several days before the meeting and a subsequent press release about the event. Lastly, as a result of hosting, Burlington was paid a visit by EPA Regional Administrator Curt Spalding. This not only raised Network visibility, but drew further attention to the City's food system work.

**4. Build Connections with Formal and Informal Time:** Perhaps the greatest benefit of a site visit is the opportunity to build, thorough both formal and informal interactions, a greater sense of connection and commitment between the individual and the group, and individuals to each other. For example, one member decided that because of the connections made during the gathering, he was going to upgrade his USDN membership from associate to core member. Connections can also be fostered by Network members and their colleagues back at home. For example, one participant noted that even during the formal presentation on composting in municipal buildings, he was communicating with the General Services Director back home: "We've already been texting and talking about it [municipal compost] since the morning session! I think he could sense the enthusiasm."

Connections are best made by mixing fun and informal conversation with formal learning and exchange. Whereas the formal interactions allowed for solid and valuable exchange of experiences and lessons learned around food-specific topics, informal interactions in the city such as meals and bus rides to various sites allowed for unexpected opportunities and insights to emerge.

**5. Use the Meeting to Build New Partnerships:** Not only do site visits allow for members to build new partnerships and connections among each other, site visits can offer the host city a chance to further build and foster partnerships between city government and its partners. For example, thanks to the NEMSN's Intervale Center visit, the Executive Director reached out to the Mayor, inviting him to appoint a representative to the Center board. The Mayor decided to host the September Department Head meeting normally held in City Hall's conference room in the new Intervale barn, and to address the public at the August Summervale event, a weekly community gathering celebrating local food, producers, and music held at the Center.

**6. Foster Mentorships:** Site visits are a great way to foster mentorships. To help, offer and encourage participants to build connections and mentorships between themselves and topical specialists. Facilitate this by providing contact information and allowing for questions and small group interaction following larger presentations. Understand that mentor relationships need to evolve organically, and are best facilitated with ample "down time" and informal discussion between interested attendees.

**7. Unleash Unforeseen Opportunities:** Perhaps one of the most important aspects of regional site visits is the opportunity for unforeseen consequences and opportunities to develop and grow. For example, inspired by the Burlington meeting, and their interest in expanding and further fostering their own community's work around local food, a NEMSN team applied for, and was accepted to attend, the Institute for Sustainable Communities' September Food

Systems Leadership Academy in Memphis, TN. This “East Coast Corridor Collaboration” included NEMSN members from Boston and Providence and their respective food systems peers. A potentially greater benefit is that normally ISC solicits applications from city teams – this is the first application ISC received from a regional group, perhaps opening the door for other regional networks to apply as teams.

**8. Don’t Forget Follow-Up:** Several days after the NEMSN meeting, EPA followed up with links and information about each of the presentations and with contact information to help facilitate mentoring. Follow-up also included a Steering Committee debrief on the workshop and next steps resulting from the deliberations (e.g. the creation of a fund-raising committee) as well as thank you notes to all the Burlington presenters, with a cc to the Mayor.

**9. Preparation is Key:** Organizing a successful site visit is more than setting and securing a one to two day agenda. Indeed, the best site visits entail in-depth planning and preparation on the part of the host and Steering Committee. In the case of the Burlington site visit, this included dedicating a portion of the monthly Steering Committee agenda to planning the June meeting for nearly six months. Preparation also included reaching out to network specialists, including a conversation with Pete Plastrik on how to foster mentorships and capture lessons learned, and preparing and sending a “welcome packet” to meeting participants. In short, allow for ample preparation time over many months prior to the actual visit, and prep participants with information before they arrive.

**10. And last but not least, have fun and enjoy!** Hosting site visits are a wonderful privilege and opportunity. Being together with other network members is a special way to grow and foster important relationships built around the common goal of creating more sustainable communities.





*Jen Cirillo (standing), Sustainable School Program Director at Shelburne Farms, VT, discusses the wide variety of aspects in the program with the NEMSN*

## **Appendix I: Agenda**

### **June 2, Sunday:**

Arrival and Welcome to Burlington and UVM's Greenhouse Dorm <http://www.uvm.edu/~ghrlc>  
Dinner on Own

Steering Committee meets in lobby and walks to City Hall for 7:00 working dinner

### **June 3, Monday:**

7:30 – 8:30 Breakfast Available at Harris Mills Dining Hall

8:30 – 9:00 Welcome: Meet in Downstairs Conference Room, Greenhouse

Introductions and Icebreaker  
Agenda Review and Housekeeping

9:00 – 10:15 NEMSN Administration

Update from Co-Chairs on Strategic Planning  
Fundraising Discussion and Next Steps Plan  
Tagline and Logo

10:15 – 11:00 City Report-Out and Share: Matrix Review

11:00 - 11:30 Walk/Shuttle to City Market Co-Op

11:30 – 12:45 City Market Co-op – “Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Going”  
<http://www.citymarket.coop/about>

Lunch at City Market

1:00 – 2:00 City Hall, Conference Room 12

Welcome From EPA Regional Administrator Curt Spalding and Mayor Miro Weinberger

Local Food Policy – Urban Agriculture Task Force (Ed Antczak, Business Development Specialist, Community and Economic Development Office)

Burlington Food Council – Alison Nihart, Food Council Coordinator

Compost in Municipal Buildings – Sandrine Thibault, DPZ, and Jon Adams-Kollitz and Dan Cahill, Parks and Recreation, compost champions

2:00 – 2:30 Bus to Intervale

2:30 – 4:00 Community Supported Agriculture:  
Intervale Community Farm (ICF) and Intervale Center

Andy Jones, Farmer, ICF and Bonnie Acker, Board Member:  
<http://intervalecommunityfarm.com>  
Travis Marcott, Director, Intervale Center: <http://www.intervale.org>

4:00 – 4:30 Bus to Shelburne Farms

4:30 – 5:30 Shelburne Farms and the Sustainable School Food Program  
<http://www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/about-us/staff-profiles>

Jennifer Cirillo, Director of Professional Development

5:30 – 7:00 Working Dinner at Farm

December Meeting Discussion

7:00 Return to Burlington

#### **June 4, Tuesday**

7:30 – 8:00 Breakfast Available at Harris Mills Dining Hall

8:00 – 9:00 Working Breakfast – Compost

Michele Morris, Chittenden Solid Waste District – Launching Municipal Compost,  
<http://www.cswd.net/>

One Revolution Compost – <http://www.onevt.com/my-blog/revolution-compost.html>

9:00 – 9:30 Travel to Sustainability Academy at Barnes

9:30 – 10:30 Sustainability Academy and Local Food in Schools <http://sa.bsdt.org/>

Brian Williams, Principal  
Doug Davis, Burlington School District, Director

10:30 – 11:00 Travel to Burlington Parks and Recreation Department – Community Garden Sites

Dan Cahill, Parks Steward

11:00 – 12:00 New Farms for New Americans

Alisha Laramee, Program Specialist

12:30 Return to UVM for working lunch

1:00 – 3:00 Meeting Debrief, Deliverables, and Wrap-up

Lessons Learned: Brainstorm and Individual Work (Lessons Learned Template)  
Mentor Matrix – Connecting Community Players

3:00 Adjourn

## **Appendix II: Description of Site Visits**

### **New England Municipal Sustainability Network Spring Meeting – Burlington, VT June 2-4, 2013**

#### **What We'll See:**

##### **City Market Co-op**

<http://www.citymarket.coop/>

**City Market, Onion River Co-op**, is a community-owned food cooperative and Burlington's only downtown grocery store. City Market provides a critical service to the residents of Burlington and the larger community by providing conventional, organic and local products. The Co-op is dedicated to supporting the local economy and strengthening the local food system. The Co-op works with thousands of Vermont vendors to feature a wide selection of local and Vermont-made products.

##### **Community and Economic Development Office**

<http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/cedo/>

The Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) is one of Burlington's 16 City departments. CEDO works with the community to foster economic vitality; preserve and enhance neighborhoods, quality of life and the environment; and promote equity and opportunity for all residents of Burlington.

##### **Intervale Center**

<http://www.intervale.org>

Founded in 1988, the Intervale Center is a community based organic farming network dedicated to improving farm viability and promoting sustainable land use in Burlington's farming area and beyond. The Center works to improve farm viability, promote sustainable land use and engage the community in the food system, while honoring producers and offering good food and an enhanced quality of life for residents and others.

##### **Intervale Community Farm (ICF)**

<http://intervalecommunityfarm.com/>

The Intervale Community Farm began in 1990 on a small field in Burlington's Intervale. Originally conceived as a reliable local source of fresh organic produce when such options were difficult to find, the farm organized around the community-supported agriculture (CSA) model. Today the ICF boast over 400 members and cultivates over 50 acres within City limits.

##### **Shelburne Farms and the Sustainable Schools Program**

<http://www.shelburnefarms.org> and <http://sustainableschoolsproject.org/about>



Shelburne Farms is a nonprofit education organization whose mission is to cultivate a conservation ethic for a sustainable future. The campus is a 1,400-acre working farm and National Historic Landmark on the shores of Lake Champlain in Shelburne. It is also home to the Shelburne Inn and Restaurant. The Sustainable Schools Project, one of the many Shelburne Farms programs, works with schools to cultivate responsible, informed citizens, engaged in building sustainable communities, including support to the Sustainability Academy at Barnes, one of Burlington's two magnet schools.

### **Sustainability Academy at Barnes**

<http://sa.bsdt.org>

The Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes, a collaborative partnership of educators, families and the community, integrates the big ideas of sustainability into PreK-5 curriculum and campus practices. The goal of the Academy is to prepare students to be responsible citizens and agents for change, in their community and beyond. The Academy is an international model for using sustainability as a lens for place-based education and service learning.

### **Farms for New Americans**

<http://www.africansinvermont.org/new-farms-for-new-americans/>

New Farms for New Americans (NFNA) is African Americans Living in Vermont's (AALV) gardening and agricultural program. Its mission is to help participants at three levels: 1) access community gardens and gardening resources; 2) learn about farming for a profit in the U.S. and participate in social enterprise sales, or 3) start up a farm business. Farms for New Americans operates with support from the Burlington Parks and Recreation Department.

### **Chittenden Solid Waste District**

<http://www.cswd.net/about-cswd/>

Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) encompasses Chittenden County, and is the largest solid waste district in Vermont with a population of about 153,000. The District's mission is to provide efficient, economical, and environmentally sound management of solid waste generated by member towns and cities and their residents and business

### **Appendix III: Welcome letter from Mayor Miro Weinberger, Burlington, VT**

**From:** Mayor's Office  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 28, 2013 5:47 PM  
**To:** Mayor's Office  
**Cc:** Jennifer Green  
**Subject:** See you soon in Burlington

Dear NEMSN members,

I look forward to welcoming you to the City of Burlington for the New England Municipal Sustainability Network meeting from June 2 - 4. I am especially glad that you will be seeing our food systems work firsthand and meeting with the leaders and stakeholders who make Burlington's efforts so noteworthy. I also am pleased that you will be sharing information about what's happening in your own communities. Indeed, this time together offers a unique opportunity to learn from each other and, together, to make New England the epicenter of the food systems movement.

While you're in town, I encourage you to explore the City and, if you're able, take advantage of our wonderful [Burlington Discover Jazz Festival](#).

Warmly,

Miro Weinberger  
Mayor

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(Excel spreadsheet)**

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