

Abha Gupta
Candidate for the Intervale Community Farm Cooperative Board of Directors

Board Candidate Questions (up to 150 words for each response):

1. Describe your past and current involvement with Intervale Community Farm (ICF) and why you are excited about serving on the Board.

I wholeheartedly love being part of the ICF community felt at each visit through friendly faces, valued farmers, and beautiful land. I am excited to serve on the board to help continue and grow the wonderful community, environmental, and nutritional stewardship that ICF promotes since its establishment.

I have had a summer share since 2014 and a winter share for the past few winters. In 2014, as Program Coordinator for the UVM Farmer Training Program, I was introduced to ICF farmers as our students experienced the farm. From 2015-2019, I worked with UVM Extension on agricultural research and outreach, during when I connected with Andy Jones many times for letters of support for our grant-funded research. Currently as horticulturist for CANNA Gardening, I continue to enjoy the comfort and familiarity of being on an organic vegetable farm. Since my daughter arrived last year, I feel grateful to share this special community farm with my young family.

2. Please describe any relevant skills you would like to contribute to ICF that make you a good candidate for the Board. This may include specific skills such as accounting and financial planning, land management, engineering, flood management, farm and food sovereignty policy, experience with cooperatives, addressing diversity issues, strategic planning, or past board or community organization experience. Or, you may have never served on a Board or don't have specific skills but have a passion for food, health or farming and love ICF; describe these qualities as well.

I have grown an understanding of our food and agriculture system from farming commercially for 5 years in NY and OR, doing agriculture research for 5 years in VT, working in the private industry for 4 years, and studying horticulture through my MS degree, where I focused on school garden and nutrition programs for research. I feel this systems' view can be helpful when trying to envision practical ways of promoting land-based community development. I also have experience living in cooperative housing and leadership skills through crew management, teaching, and event planning.

3. The ICF Board has identified the importance of serving the diverse members of the Burlington community whether because of wealth, racial, ethnic or religious background, recent immigration, gender or LGBT identity or other. What experience do you have, personal, business or organizational, that could help ICF work towards this goal? Do you have any suggestions?

When I started farming out of college I offered hands-on agriculture lessons to local schools and aimed to create materials to reach as many different kinds of learners and backgrounds. Similarly, when with UVM Extension we aimed to provide services that worked with the practicalities and limits that our community faced. Whenever teaching I always try to stay open to others' perspectives, create a space that is welcoming, and bear in mind potential accommodations. In that sense, one way of reaching broad audiences is to ensure that the services or products offered are accessible – from a cultural, financial, practical, and emotional standpoint.

Another way of reaching a broad audience is through a personal, bridged connection. For example, an introduction via a friend can more easefully welcome newcomers. Personally as a child of Indian

immigrants I have seen how being new and financial status can insulate groups from each other, that those barriers are removable, and there are also natural limits that groups feel, as well.

4. ICF experienced tremendous flooding this year which impacted our food, our land, and our personnel. We think these events might become more frequent in the future, what ideas do you have about the future of ICF and how it might deal with these challenges? Do you currently have the time outside of Board meetings to help grapple with these challenges which involve both short-term and long-term solutions?

As weather events are increasingly unpredictable and damaging, efforts on building resiliency into farm production are essential. From a financial perspective, crop insurance and built in resiliency funds to cover additional losses may need additional investment. From a land management perspective, I am curious to explore land diversification. It may become helpful to install more greenhouse or high tunnel structures, which may qualify for partial funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Services. It also may be helpful to investigate land lease options at an additional location to add resiliency for long-term crops such as winter squash. Lastly, as I have expertise in field research, I would be happy to assist in continued farm-based research on climate change resiliency planning. I recognize that given my current capacity, I would have limited availability to help with these challenges outside of Board meetings and would make every effort possible to be available, in addition to serving as an advisor.

5. What else would you like ICF members to know about you?

I moved to Burlington almost 10 years ago and my family and I are slowly transitioning to Buels Gore as we build a house. I love living in Vermont and feel grateful that this is my place of home. I am from upstate NY originally and lived in Oregon before moving back East. I love time with friends and family, nature walks, yoga, paddling, biking, live music, and of course, vegetables.