

**Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) – Northwest Regional Coordination
Meeting Notes**

Friday, September 23rd, 2022

Attendees (*Indicates Zoom participant)

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM)

- Brittany Cole (Brittany.cole@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- David Wardrop (David.Wardrop@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Dillan Westcom (Dillan.Westcom@vermont.gov), Ag. Engineer
- Brodie Haenke (Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov), WQ Program Coordinator
- Luke Hughes (Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov), Inspector

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Liza Lemieux (Eliza.Lemieux@usda.gov), Program Assistant
- Lauren Gibson (Lauren.Gibson@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Sarah Larose (sarah.larose@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Jill Mullican (jill.mullican2@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Renee Bolduc (renee.bolduc@usda.gov), Social Conservationist
- Sean Pease (sean.pease@usda.gov), Soil Con Technician
- Nancy Allen (Nancy.allen@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Meryl Braconnier (Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov), Conservation Planner
- Caitlin Silber, (caitlin.silber@usda.gov), Program Assistant

Lamoille County Conservation District (LCCD)

- Peter Danforth (lccddirector@gmail.com), District Manager*
- Emily Porter-Goff (emilylccdedu@gmail.com), Education and Outreach Coordinator

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Molly Varner (molly.varner@vacd.org), Communications Coordinator with VACD/District Manager for Grand Isle County NRCD*

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

- Alli Lewis (alli.lewis@vacd.org), Coordinator

Franklin County Natural Resource Conservation District (FCNRCD)

- Lauren Weston (lauren.weston@usda.gov), District Manager
- Katy Dynarski (Katherine.dynarski@usda.gov), Projects Coordinator
- Megan Walker (megan.walker2@usda.gov), Project Technician*
- Kate Wettergreen (katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov), Project Technician

Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Abraham Ames (Abraham.ames@vt.nacdnet.net), Conservation Specialist*

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

- Karen Bates (karen.bates@vermont.gov), Watershed Planner
- Staci Pomeroy (staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov), Regional River Scientist

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

- No one present

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

- Holly McClintock (h.mcclintock@vhcb.org), Ag. Program Coordinator

University of Vermont Extension – Northwest Crops and Soils Program

- Ivy Krezinski (ivy.luke@uvm.edu), Crops and Soils Staff
- Jeff Sanders (jeffrey.sanders@uvm.edu), Agronomy Specialist*

Vermont Farm Service Agency (FSA)

- Heather Mateja (heather.mateja@usda.gov), Lamoille/Orleans County Executive Director
- Laurie Locke (laurie.locke@usda.gov), Franklin County Executive Director

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Chris Smith (chris_e_smith@fws.gov), State Coordinator for Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Vermont Land Trust (VLT)

- Tucker Malone (tucker@vlt.org), Project Director

Agenda

9:00 – Welcome and Mingle

9:15 – Round Table Organization Updates

- Each organization's representative(s) provides a brief update on any program, staff, event, grant, and/or project update relevant to this VAWQP Northwest Region group
- If representative(s) would like to use slides/technology, please send to Lauren Weston at lauren.weston@usda.gov by 4 pm on Thursday Sept 22nd or plan to share own screen if attending virtually

10:30 – Presentation and Q&A on 2022 Guide to Assistance for Vermont Agricultural Producers – Megan Walker, Project Technician, FCNRCD and Lauren Weston, District Manager, FCNRCD

Check out the Guide here: <https://www.franklincountynrcd.org/agproducersguide>

10:50 – Locally Led Conservation + Conservation Needs Assessment Activity – Lauren Weston, District Manager, FCNRCD

11:30 – Lunch from Nourish + Fall Farm Themed Cake Dessert

12:15 – Presentation and Q&A on On-Farm Engineering – Dillan Westcom, Agricultural Engineer, VAAFM

12:45 – Brainstorm topics for future meetings

1:00 - Adjourn

Round Table Organization Updates:

VAWQP (Alli Lewis) – VAWQP is currently in year three of five. There will be an in person annual meeting in March – more details coming soon. Science focused meetings have continued, and they are sending out surveys for more feedback. Partnership is talking at the leadership level and regionally on current funding and future funding. Make sure you are signed up for the newsletter and check your spam folder if you are not getting the emails.

VHCB (Holly McClintock) – VHCB has dual goals of creating affordable housing and conservation. they have about \$3 million grant through the Great Lakes and are currently working on hiring a manager for this program. The payment for ecosystem services working group which has a model similar to NRCS will be presented to the legislature in January. The farm viability program has a new coordinator. September 28th is the next board meeting.

LCBP (no representative present) - has grants open now, see the [LCBP website](#) for more info.

UVM Extension (Ivy Krezinsky) - Agricultural literacy project working with 8th to 12th graders, there will also be a training next summer for teachers. They have received funding for Discovery Acres experimental site in Saint Albans Bay there's a lot of information on the [UVM Extension website](#). They will be hosting a Fall Farm Meeting October 20th at the Rolland Rainville's farm, [more details here](#).

FSA (Laurie Locke) - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) currently has 45 enrollments in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, this includes 6 re-enrollments this year and two new contracts including the first in Grand Isle. FSA also has the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) for disasters one example was an extreme microburst wind event but damaged sugaring trees. The Dairy Margin Program payments for August are going to kick in those will be going out in October.

VACD (Meryl Braconier) - Lots of staffing changes for VACD. There are currently discussions with NRCS and NRCDs trying to figure out if VACD will be hiring more technical. They will be hiring a new person to help with the drone program, they also have a new drone. VACD along with the NRCDs are working on legislative request for core funding. The [Clean Water Design and Implementation](#) grants from NRCC just went live on the VACD website applications are due the end of October.

PFW (Chris Smith) - Partners for Fish and Wildlife works with private landowners to focus on Fish and Wildlife species and ecosystem resilience. They are finishing their fiscal year. Working on CREP and enhancement program, and this year have 15 projects statewide which includes 10 miles of stream and 40 acres of upland habitat. They also work with NRCS on the Wetland Reserve Program including a project in Bridport that is 310 acres and it's moving a lot of dirt. Not including that project, 167 acres of

wetland restoration happened this year including lots of hydrology work, invasive species control, and tree planting. They are also working with the Intervale to hire a seed coordinator position to make sure there is enough local seed supply in our region.

DEC (Karen Bates) - Water quality sampling and new funding for MAP program. The LaRosa water quality sampling program pays to help support sample analysis and through Tactical Basin Plan (TBP) funding the DEC can help support sampling and coordination of volunteers. Franklin County NRCD and Friends of Northern Lake Champlain (FNLC) are sampling in this region. On the [LaRosa website](#) you can find all the sampling locations and test results. Sampling has been happening near Lake Carmi as well. The Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP) framework is using Basin Water Quality Councils, there is a limited category for agricultural project funding. Karen is the TBP planner for the Missisquoi Bay and North Lake Direct basin. They are currently working on the updated plan for Winooski.

DEC (Staci Pomeroy) - Can provide Technical Support around projects you are working on. River Corridor Easement Program is an incentive for passive or active management. It pays landowners for their management rights. Funding happening happens every three to four months and they are often working with VLT, White River Partnership, NRCDs or NRCS in that process. There is currently a Rock River pilot program to look at small tributaries. The Stream Geomorphic Assessment works for large streams in this project is an opportunity to have more information on small streams and will be happening in 2023 and 2024.

VAAFM (Brodie Haenke) - The Capital Equipment Assistance Program is currently accepting applications; they are due November 1st. They are currently in the middle of the Farm Agronomic Practices program; the applications have closed and currently doing field checks. Pay for Phosphorus is a new program, it is currently a pilot program, the NRCDs are helping with implementation this program. It takes information from the Nutrient Management Plan and importing it into farm prep to model phosphorus losses on the farm and along with NRCS data compares to TMDL. Staffing update is Nina Gage was promoted to deputy director.

NRCS (Sarah Larose) - For fiscal year 2023 there will only be one round of funding this is a major change for this year please spread the word.

-CSP due 10/21/22

-EQIP/AMA due 11/18/22

-RCPP Connecticut River 11/18/22

-RCPP LMR 1/13/23

NRCS also lots of new staffing updates Lauren Gibson in new role, new staff including Caitlin Silber (VACD St Albans), Renee Bolduc (NRCS St Albans), and Sean Pease (NRCS Morrisville). Josh Nappi has

been detailed to the Saint Albans office. Dillan Westcom is transitioning to VAAFM full time, Xav Rivera is done in October, hopefully that position will be hired. There is going to be a new forester position in the Morrisville office in the 401 series, this is a shift from the 457 series and the education requirements are different. They are currently interviewing for a civil engineer. Travis Thomason wants to push the Pathways program to have eight Pathways in the state next summer.

Lamoille County NRCD (Peter Danforth) - Working with the Basin Water Quality Council setting up for the Clean Water Service Provider. They're starting a new cycle with the Tactical Basin Plan for Winooski. They have a sizable partnership with Partners for Fish and Wildlife for AOP and upland habitat. Reboot AgCWIP and are currently in the process of hiring a new Ag staff member. Doing lots of buffer work with three tree planting projects. Lots of stormwater projects and Lake Watershed Action projects in Eden and Elmore. Education programs this summer and fall at the Nature Center which they are trying to develop a bit more and have state funding to create a covered area for events and signage. Also working with VACD to get core funding from the state.

- Doing 3 tree plantings this year including one reforestation of private land project in Cambridge
- Lots of stormwater projects and doing Lake Watershed Action Plans for Lake Eden and Lake Elmore
- Hydroseeder program
- Robust education and outreach program – have worked with 22 schools and libraries, run programs at their nature center

Grand Isle NRCD (Molly Varner) - Hosting a drone event in South Hero October 13th - details coming soon. Developing lake and watershed action plan (LWAP) for Keeler Bay and are currently starting field work for that project. Involved with Clean Water Service Provider funding and in August, wrapped up the first year of LaRosa sampling and are working on ways to deliver the results back to the public.

- Working with Franklin County NRCD for staffing needs to provide ag assistance
- Vice chair of North Lake Direct Basin Water Quality Council
- Looking forward to implementing more clean water projects in the coming year

Franklin County NRCD (Lauren Weston) – October 12 [CEAP workshop](#), November 1 [Pay for Phosphorus info session](#), Nov 1 Local Led Conservation Meeting (more info coming soon).

Orleans County NRCD (Abraham Ames) – new hire: Ted Sedell doing watershed work. Putting a lot of emphasis around Lake Memphramagog.

Vermont Land Trust

- Vermont Land Trust – not technically in partnership but works with everyone here
 - All new conservation easements get permanent riparian buffers on perennial streams and wetland protections for significant wetlands

Presentation and Q&A on [2022 Guide to Assistance for Vermont Agricultural Producers](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NDvHlfhOb2edYxW7LYDPILbJ2EaX7Ib9/view?usp=sharing)
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NDvHlfhOb2edYxW7LYDPILbJ2EaX7Ib9/view?usp=sharing>

Please send any/all updates for the guide to info@franklincountynrcd.org for the 2023 version.

- Guide can be found on [FCNRCD website](#) and on [VAWQP website](#)
- Working with Joshua Allen at NRCS about how to disseminate the 2023 version!

A rectangular image with a teal background featuring wavy, water-like patterns. The text is centered in the lower half of the image.

Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers 2022 Northwest Region VAWQP Meeting

Welcome to the presentation on the Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont. Some of you may have heard of it.

Overview

What is this document?

Why was it created?

What purpose does it serve?

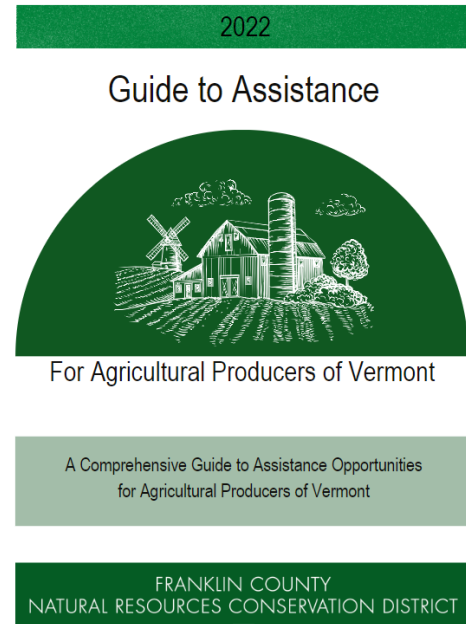
How is it utilized?

Today, we are going to cover the origin story, definition, purpose and use of The Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont. We also call it the Ag Guide, and since that's a shorter name, I'll call it that for the remainder of this presentation.

What is the *Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont*?

A comprehensive guide to assistance for agricultural producers of Vermont.

- Pocket Guide
- Notebook
- Virtual Document



Show the pocket guide and spiral bound notebook.

The pocket guide was produced for a couple of reasons. First, it is more economical to print. Second, it is easier to fit into a pocket or vehicle console, which means service providers are more likely to bring it to a field visit. They are available for organizations to take and retain, as well as distribute to producers,

The spiral bound notebook is a good when performing an interview or discussion session with a producer. A service provider and producer can look through options together at a table. This notebook is available for producers to keep at home as a reference.

The virtual document is available for service providers to utilize during site visits, when having an encounter with a producer, or when remotely fielding an inquiry. This document is available on mobile devices as well as desktops.

Why was the *Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont* created?

- Serve
 - Support accessibility to resources in an efficient way
- Learn
 - Creating the document provided knowledge of many resources

This document was created out of a desire to more effectively serve producers.

Thoughts from Megan's Perspective:

As a new employee with Franklin County NRCD, I began visiting farmers and having discussions related to natural resources, water quality, infrastructure, on-farm constraints, and desires for improvement. I remember leaving site visits determined to provide the resources the producers were looking for and help them improve their operation. I went back to my desk and started looking for programs that served specific needs of farmers. The more I searched, the more overwhelmed I was. As a person employed to serve my community, I began to think of how daunting it might be for a producer to do this research. I was compelled to become familiar with as much as I could and find a way to reflect those resources in a clear way.

A great benefit to creating this guide was the opportunity it gave me to learn the expanse of resources available to our farming community. To say that creating this was a valuable training exercise is an understatement.

Let's take a look at what it might be like to have an interaction with a producer..



Wow. There are so many words on the screen here! Are you overwhelmed?

All these circles represent types of assistance available to producers. They represent questions farmers have, and help farmers need. They represent organizations, technical experts and well funded programs. Sometimes those programs have long complicated names. When you have an encounter with a producer, they are likely to bring up their needs and desires through language represented in these circles.

Now, try to imagine programs you know that are associated with different circles. Do you know the name of the program? Who to contact? When to apply? Do you know if the producer you are talking to is even eligible? Can you compare two different programs offering similar services?

This slide shows that our brains are not encyclopedias. Knowledge of details related to specific programs takes time to understand, and in many cases years of experience. Some of us spend our time working on one specific program and have limited capacity to attempt to learn other available resources. If we would like to have successful programs with great financial and water quality results, we need to ensure that we are aware of available programs and have the tools to deliver that

information to farmers in an efficient way. This is where the Ag Guide comes in.

What purposes does the Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont serve?

- Desktop Reference
 - Agricultural producers
 - Value-added businesses
 - New-hires working for partner agencies, especially those participating in VAWQP
 - Employees working for organizations in agricultural, business, and natural resources sectors.
- Field Reference
 - For those working directly with producers and value-added businesses at their farm or business

How is it utilized?

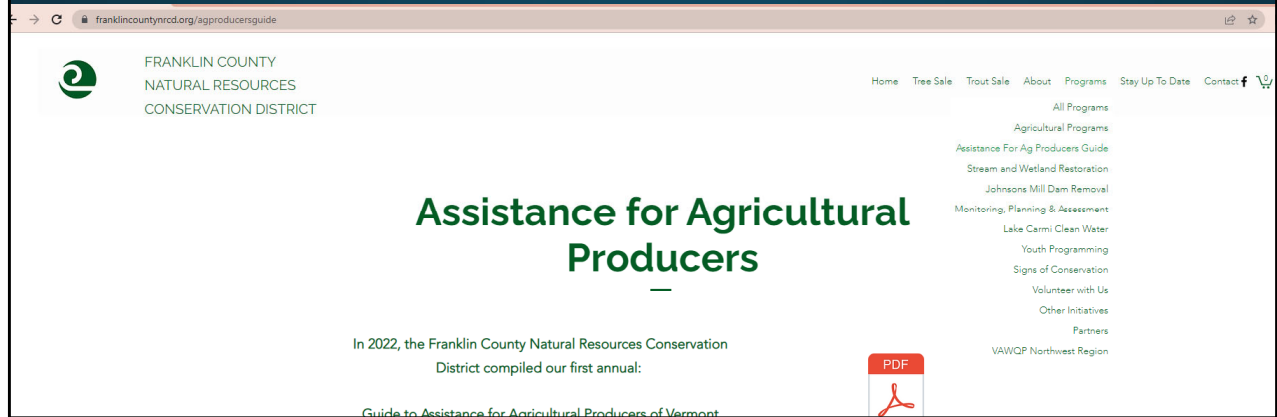
Online locations

Virtual demo

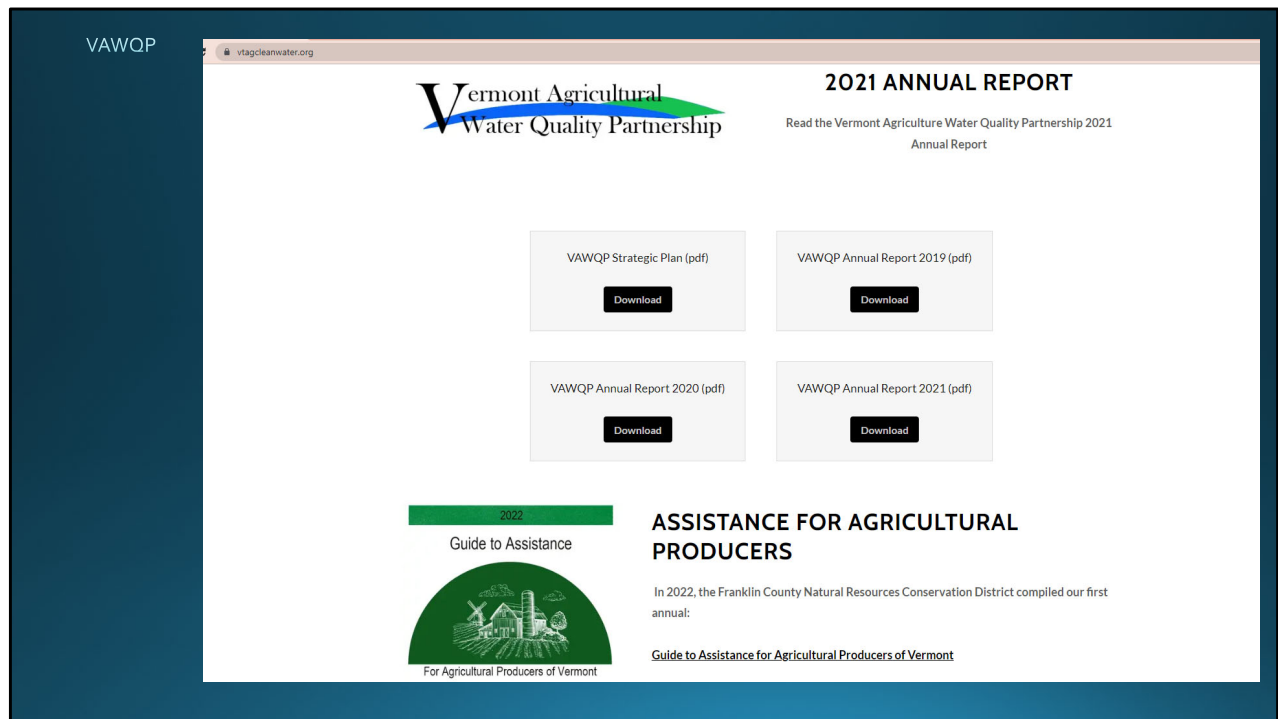
Now we are going to move into where to find the guide and how to navigate the document

Online locations

Franklin County NRCD Website



The Guide is available from the Franklin County NRCD Home Page by navigating the Programs Menu



Scroll down on the VAWQP Home Page a bit and you will find the Ag Guide here also.

Locally Led Conservation + Conservation Needs Assessment Activity

Individual Work (solo):

Take 5 minutes to review the program list below and Assistance Guide on your own.

- First, identify which programs you are unfamiliar with and those that you are very familiar with.
- Choose 5-10 programs that are NOT hosted by your organization and make notes on your understanding of their strengths + weaknesses
 - o Strengths i.e.: Serves many producers, high interest, complements another program's gaps,
 - o Weaknesses i.e.: Barriers to enrollment or implementation, not enough funds available, match requirement, too many confusing forms
- If you have extra time, feel free to comment on strengths and weaknesses of programs hosted by your own organization.
- If you see anything inaccurate in or have an update to make for a future Guide, please notify FCNRCD

Table Work (as a group at your table):

Take 20 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- Pick 2-3 programs that are hosted by an organization represented at your table (i.e. EQIP, CSP, FAP, BMP, Farm and Forest Viability, CREP, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, UVM Grazing Program).
- If possible, report out on: how much funding is available and it is usually all distributed, how many applications do you receive, how many applications are awarded, have you ever made adjustments to your program based on feedback and/or lessons learned, were the funds effectively distributed?
- Otherwise, as a group, select 2-3 other programs from the Guide list to discuss strengths and weaknesses of various programs, or any questions that members of the group might have

Large Group Share Out (full room):

Take 5 minutes to discuss as a whole group:

- What are we collectively doing well (programs, practices, serving certain producer groups, etc.)?
- Where do gaps, barriers, or needs exist and why do you think that is (resource concerns, practices, programs, serving certain groups)?
- Are there areas of redundancy or gaps that could be improved with increased collaboration?
- Are there programs that we collectively need more information about (through Lunch & Learn or future VAWQP Regional Meetings)?
- What information would be useful to you to learn from the communities you serve through a survey/outreach process?

Program List as written in the 2022 *Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont*

Category	Program	Page No.	Program Strengths	Program Weaknesses / Questions about the Program
Engineering, Construction, and Equipment	Equipment Rental Directory	8	Covers most of VT	Specific equipment not all over VT
	RD – Farm Labor Housing	9		
	RD – Meat & Poultry Processing Expansion	10		
	VAAFM – Farmstead BMP Program	11		
	VAAFM – CEAP Program	12		
	ACCD – Historic Barn Preservation	13		
	VHCB – Farm & Forest Viability Program	14	A lot of \$\$	Timeline is restrictive + long
	NRCS – EQIP	15	A lot of \$\$, lots of money available, high quality projects, high level of practices	Timeline is restrictive + long, long time for designs
Energy	EV – Agricultural Loan	16		
	NRCS – EQIP	15	Great planners at NRCS, holistic planning	Must have resource concerns, lots of paperwork hurdles
	RD – REAP	17	Filling niche, Can be lots of money, there's a grant option	Local contacts, familiarity, hard to apply, reimbursement based
	DEC – Diesel Emissions Reduction Financial Assistance Program	18		
	VEDA – Agricultural Energy Loan Program	19		

Business Development, Research & Innovation	AMS – Farmers Market Promotion Program	20		
	AMS – Local Food Promotion Program	21		
	FNS – Farm to School Grant Program	22		
	NIFA – Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development	23		
	NIFA – Small Business Innovation Research Program	24		
	SARE – Farmer Grant Program	25		
	RD – Value-Added Producer Grant	26		
	UVM Ext – Farm Viability	27		
	UVM Ext – Northeast Direct Vegetable Benchmark	28		
	UVM Ext – Water Quality Business Analysis	29		
	VAAFM – Community Supported Agriculture Grant	30		
	VAAFM – Farm First	31		
	VAAFM – Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant	32		
	VAAFM – Farm to School Vision Grant	33		
	VAAFM – Local Food Market Development Grant	34		
	VAAFM – VT Specialty Crop Block Grant	35		
	VAAFM – Trade Show Assistance Grant	36		
	VAAFM – Working Lands Enterprise Initiative	37		
	VHCB – Farm & Forest Viability Program	14		
Dairy Business Support	NE-DBIC	38		
	FSA – Dairy Margin Coverage Program	39		
	UVM Ext – Dairy Business & Herd Management Technical Assistance	40		
Grazing	VAAFM – Pasture & Surface Water Fencing Program	41	Fast! Faster than NRCS	Less \$ than NRCS, only for surface water exclusion?

	NRCS – EQIP	15		
	FACT – Fund-A-Farmer Grant	42		
	UVM Ext – Grazing and Livestock Program	43		
Conflict Resolution	EMC – VT Agricultural Mediation Program	44		
Croplands & Conservation	FSA – Conservation Reserve Program	45 & 46		
	NRCS – ACEP – Agricultural Land Easement	47		
	NRCS – ACEP – Wetland Reserve Easement	48		
	NRCS – Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program	49		
	NRCS – Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)	50		
	NRCS – Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	51		Confusing for employees and participants
	NRCS – EQIP	15		
	VAAFM – Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)	52		
	VAAFM – Farm Agronomic Practice Program (FAP)	53	Easy to apply to	
	VAAFM – Grassed Waterway & Filter Strip Program	54		
	VAAFM – Pay for Phosphorus	55		
	USFWS – Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program	56		
	VHCB – Farmland Conservation Program	57		
	DEC – CWIP Design and Implementation Block Grant	58		
	FCNRCD – Signs of Conservation	59		
	NRCS – Regional Conservation Partnership Programs	60		
	Regional Orgs – Tree Plantings	61		

	NRCDs – Agricultural Support	62		Roles are not well defines, what's NRCDs roles vs NRCS
	VACD – RAP Quiz	63		
Awards, Microgrants, Scholarships & Stipends	NOFA VT – Family Farmer of the Month	64		
	The Fruit Guys Small Farm Microgrant	65		
	VLT – Eric Rozendaal Memorial Award	66		
	VFWF – Scholarships and Stipends	67		
Forestry & Maple	Audubon VT – Bird Friendly Maple Project	68		
	DFPR – Resources for Loggers	69		
	DFPR – County Foresters	70		
	DFPR – Forest Legacy Program	71		
	DFPR – Use Value Appraisal Program	72		
	DFPR – Resources for Trail Stewardship	73		
	DFPR – Vermont Invasives	74		
	NRCS – EQIP	15		
	UVM Ext – Forest Business Education & Planning Assistance	77		
	UVM Ext – Maple Resources	76		
	USFWS – Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program	56		
	VHCB – Farm & Forest Viability	14		
Organic	VAAFM – Organic Certification Cost Share Program	77		
	NRCS – EQIP	15		
	OCIA – Microgrant for Research and Education	78		
	OFRR – Grants Program	79		

Natural Disaster	FSA – Emergency Conservation Program	80		
	FSA – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program	81		
	NOFA-VT – Farmer Emergency Funds	82		
Other? i.e. Land Use Planning, New Producers, Pesticide Applicator Resources, Materials Recycling Resources, Producer Associations, etc. Or – any programs we missed in listed categories above?	VLT easements!		Permanent conservation, amount of money is incentivizing, rules/reqs of each easement does not change, keeps land in ag and affordable	Loss of freedom on your land, misunderstanding of limitations that come with easement for landowners and external partners, no long term leases
	DEC Generally		Tactical basin planning group brings people together	Landowners not taking advantage of available resources, would be good to have more institutional knowledge
	FSA Generally		Along with DEC having centralized contacts (Ben Gabos, Phil Wilson)	Complicated policy, would be nice to have more communication with partners, losing key partners that have been around
	VAAFM Generally			Not sure what happens after inspections, needs some clarification on policy / fuzzy

	VHCB Generally		Lots of resources	Communication with a variety of partners
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Table Discussions

Notes from Discussion on Ag Guide

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Funding fluctuates for this program; they are currently they are receiving \$30,000 from US Fish and Wildlife and around 1.5 million from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission. On the ground this means about \$1 million of on the ground projects per year. Funds are distributed through cooperative agreements with partner organizations they are not paying the landowner directly. The application process is a little bit different than NRCS and other programs, they do it on a rolling basis there is no formal application just a meeting with the landowner and partners. The minimum agreement is 10 years, but they try to mimic CRP. Lessons learned - policy is not created at this level it is handed down they have tried to make it work by adjusting programs to fill gaps (such as invasive species management) that other programs that are more rigid cannot address. This flexibility is helpful. Currently Senator Leahy is involved with the money that comes from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and funding for FY24 is very up in the air.

Conservation Stewardship Program

Large program nationally, simple for the landowner but complicated to administer. EQIP is resource concern driven, CSP is the opposite. For every resource concern met you get \$350 and you get an annual payment per acre. Vermont had to send back CSP funding and got denied additional EQIP money because of it, they're trying to not have this happen again. There are about 8 state resource concerns and 10-12 national resource concerns. It is a guaranteed \$1500 per year. For applications currently, they are handpicking people they approach for the program. It is better to get problems solved first with EQIP and then enroll in CSP. October 21st is the signup deadline, but they are going to be promoting the program much more for 2024. You could be working with a landowner that had two contracts, one for forest and one for pasture meaning they would get two times the guaranteed payment of \$1500 per year. Ideally, they would help fix resource concerns with EQIP and then maintain with CSP payment.

Small Group Discussion about Program Strengths, Weaknesses, and Barriers

- EQIP –
 - Strengths: can do for lots of different land uses, can do multiple practices/projects in one contract, practices must be done to NRCS standard

- Weaknesses: there must be a resource concern in order to do a project, there is a \$450k cap per producer per Farm Bill
- The funding cap can prevent big, important projects from being done, and this can result in the NRCS losing customers – people think they will get all of a manure pit paid for, and when they don't, they walk away from the contract
- Pairing with VAAFM BMP and VHCB WQ programs can help, but often the combined three funding sources still are not enough
- NRCS has had to send money back to the state before because they did not actually use all of their appropriated money – getting people to sign contracts and implement the projects is the bottleneck
 - Also inflation and cost of materials, price and availability of contractors
 - Some farmers are resistant to change and spending money
- Capacity of NRCS staff is also limited – Meryl is now getting help with grazing plans from Amber Reed at UVM, also could use more support from District
 - NRCS struggles to do timely technical and financial assistance because of capacity limitations
 - NRCS engineering capacity is particularly limited
- Sent money back for CSP – Vermont has a hard time getting this program implemented – land stewards don't want to commit to 5 years or don't have enough resource concerns
- RCPP can fill some of the gaps in EQIP because those pools get to set their own ranking
- Other issues – program deadlines are not aligned with growing season (EQIP deadline is this fall, but nobody knows what fields they are going to cover crop in fall 2023 at this point)
- Hope that new system of one deadline will result in better pre-planning support for farmers
- VHCB Water Quality –
 - Can offer \$40k of funding for projects, their total appropriations for this program is \$600k
 - Always get more applications than they can fund
- UVM Extension –
 - Not a lot of overlap between staff – there are a lot of different services offered by Extension but not everybody knows what everybody else is working on
 - Feels like they need an Ag Guide just for Extension
 - Also capacity limited – need more Jeff Sanders in the world!
- NRCDs – feel like we should be playing a more clearly defined role of coordinating farmers through all the different programs they can be getting funding from and helping shepherd them through the various opportunities

Full Group Share-out

- Want more information on how to use different funding tools in combination with each other (like combining CREP with other programs) especially for easements
- There is a Building Executive Business Skills for farmers – free class available through Working Lands Enterprise Initiative

- Interest in understanding CRP vs CREP
- Need more info collectively on CSP

Engineering – BMP vs EQIP – Dillan Westcom

- Differences between VAAFM BMP and EQIP –
 - BMP offers less money (\$100k or 90% for BMP, vs \$450k EQIP cap)
 - A little faster
 - Addresses single resource concerns
 - One engineer per territory
 - Less contacts because the engineer is also the planner
 - Land Treatment Plan and NMP are not required (we think)
- BMP is now using ARPA funds, so farms will need to have federal UEI
- There is also the EQIP-Assist programs – funds an additional \$200k on top of EQIP cap, or up to 90% of total cost share, or matching what EQIP is funding (whichever number is smaller)
- Rolling ranking – farmers can apply at any time!
- BMP typically gets used in smaller projects – barnyards or animal mortality composting facilities
- NRCS EQIP does more manure pits and bedded pack systems (BMP can also do bedded pack but they're not as good as the NRCS ones because less money is available)
 - BMP tends to not touch access roads, animal trails
- Engineers are theoretically not regulatory unless they see a point-source discharge (which could be complicating)
- Farmers should sign up early for EQIP engineering projects – it can take a long time to go through NRCS system!
- Differences in payment
 - EQIP pays farmers a set rate per practices as they are done
 - BMP is reimbursement based, and VAAFM prefers to do reimbursements all at once
 - Need to send them your bills at the very end of the project (everything must be done) and then you will get paid
 - BMP can pay farmers for the cost of their labor and use of their equipment if farmers do some of the work themselves
- BMP operations and maintenance agreements are theoretically the same as NRCS, but they don't actually make the farmers sign anything

Feedback

- It was helpful to have Dillan talk to us about the BMP program! Folks would like more of having someone who is an expert at administering their program come and talk to us about that program!
- A future topic of discussing what kinds of projects the CWSPs will pay for- someone can give a presentation, and we could discuss project ideas as a group
 - Lauren Weston gave a quick explanation of what CWSPs are.

End of Day Activity:

- Local Working Group Questions:
 - Are there areas of land use/resource concerns where more resources / programs /funding / support are needed?
 - Should we be looking to create a Locally Led Funding Pool for practices in NW Vermont using NRCS procedures? If so, what Practices do you think are underfunded or don't rank high enough in the NRCS pool of Practices?

Mark practices you think need to be ranked differently (perhaps in a Locally Led Funding Pool) to get more funding for implementation

NRCS Practices

- Access Control - x
- Access Road
- Agrichemical Handling Facility
- Alley Cropping
- Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products
- Amending Soil Properties with Lime
- Amendments for the Treatment of Agricultural Waste
- Anaerobic Digestion - x
- Animal Mortality Facility - x
- Annual Forages for Grazing Systems
- Aquatic Organism Passage
- Brush Management - x
- Clearing and Snagging
- Combustion System Improvement
- Composting Facility - x
- Conservation Cover - xxx
- Conservation Crop Rotation - x
- Constructed Wetland - x
- Contour Buffer Strips
- Contour Farming
- Controlled Traffic Farming
- Cover Crop - xxx
- Critical Area Planting - xx
- Diversion
- Drainage Water Management
- Dry Hydrant
- Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
- Emergency Animal Mortality Management

- Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation
- Energy Efficient Building Envelope
- Energy Efficient Lighting System
- Feed Management
- Fence
- Field Border - x
- Filter Strip - xx
- Firebreak - x
- Forage Harvest Management
- Forest Farming
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Forest Trails and Landings - xxxx
- Grade Stabilization Structure - x
- Grassed Waterway
- Groundwater Testing
- Heavy Use Area Protection - x
- Hedgerow Planting - x
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment - x
- Herbaceous Wind Barriers
- High Tunnel System
- Irrigation Pipeline
- Irrigation Reservoir
- Irrigation System, Micro irrigation
- Irrigation Water Management
- Lined Waterway or Outlet
- Livestock Pipeline
- Livestock Shelter Structure
- Low Tunnel System
- Mulching
- Nutrient Management - xx
- Obstruction Removal
- On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility
- Open Channel
- Organic Management
- Pasture and Hay Planting
- Pest Management Conservation System
- Phosphorus Removal System
- Pond
- Pond Seal or Lining - Geomembrane or Geosynthetic Clay Liner
- Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil Treatment
- pond Sealing or Lining, Concrete
- Prescribed Burning - x
- Prescribed Grazing - xx

- Pumping Plant
- Raised Bed
- Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till
- Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till
- Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities - xx
- Riparian Forest Buffer - x
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- Road/Trail Landing Closure and Treatment
- Roof Runoff Structure - x
- Roofs and Covers
- Row Arrangement
- Saturated Buffer
- Sediment Basin
- Silvopasture - xx
- Soil Carbon Amendment - x
- Spring Development
- Sprinkler System
- Stormwater Runoff Control
- Stream Crossing - xx
- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
- Streambank and Shoreline Protection - xx
- Strip-cropping
- Structure for Water Control - x
- Structures for Wildlife
- Subsurface Drain
- Surface Drain, Field Ditch - x
- Trails and Walkways
- Tree/Shrub Establishment - x
- Tree/Shrub Pruning - x
- Tree/Shrub Site Preparation - x
- Underground Outlet
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Vegetated Treatment Area
- Vegetative Barrier
- Waste Facility Closure - x
- Waste Recycling
- Waste Separation Facility
- Waste Storage Facility - xxx
- Waste Transfer - x
- Waste Treatment
- Wastewater Treatment - Milk House - x
- Water and Sediment Control Basin
- Water Well

- Watering Facility - x
- Well Decommissioning
- Wetland Enhancement - x
- Wetland Restoration - xxx
- Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management - x
- Wildlife Habitat Planting - x
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation - x
- Woody Residue Treatment