

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

Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Attendees** (\*Indicates Zoom participant)

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFMM)

- Brittany Cole ([Brittany.cole@vermont.gov](mailto:Brittany.cole@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
- David Wardrop ([David.Wardrop@vermont.gov](mailto:David.Wardrop@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
- Andrew Mitchell ([Andrew.mitchell@vermont.gov](mailto:Andrew.mitchell@vermont.gov)), Ag. Engineer
- Brodie Haenke ([Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov](mailto:Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov)), WQ Program Coordinator
- Connor Steckel ([Connor.steckel@vermont.gov](mailto:Connor.steckel@vermont.gov)), Water Quality Specialist
- Luke Hughes ([Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov](mailto:Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov)), Inspector

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Liza Lemieux ([Eliza.Lemieux@usda.gov](mailto:Eliza.Lemieux@usda.gov)), Program Assistant
- Lauren Gibson ([Lauren.Gibson@usda.gov](mailto:Lauren.Gibson@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist
- Jimmy Young ([James.Young2@usda.gov](mailto:James.Young2@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist
- Sarah Larose ([sarah.larose@usda.gov](mailto:sarah.larose@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist
- Jill Mullican ([jill.mullican2@usda.gov](mailto:jill.mullican2@usda.gov)), Soil Conservationist

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Meryl Braconnier ([Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov](mailto:Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov)), Conservation Planner
- Holly McClintock ([Holly.McClintock@usda.gov](mailto:Holly.McClintock@usda.gov)), Program Assistant

VACD/Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC)

- Emily Nummer ([emily.nummer@vacd.org](mailto:emily.nummer@vacd.org)), Ag Programs Manager

Lamoille County Conservation District (LCCD)

- Daniel Lee ([lccdworkinglands@gmail.com](mailto:lccdworkinglands@gmail.com)), Conservation Outreach Specialist
- Peter Danforth ([lccddirector@gmail.com](mailto:lccddirector@gmail.com)), District Manager
- Emily Porter-Goff ([emilylccdedu@gmail.com](mailto:emilylccdedu@gmail.com)), Education and Outreach Coordinator

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Molly Varner ([molly.varner@vacd.org](mailto: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](mailto:alli.lewis@vacd.org)), Coordinator\*

Franklin County Natural Resource Conservation District (FCNRCD)

- Lauren Weston ([lauren.weston@usda.gov](mailto:lauren.weston@usda.gov)), District Manager
- Katy Dynarski ([Katherine.dynarski@usda.gov](mailto:Katherine.dynarski@usda.gov)), Projects Coordinator

- Megan Walker ([megan.walker2@usda.gov](mailto:megan.walker2@usda.gov)), Project Technician
- Kate Wettergreen ([katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov](mailto:katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov)), ECO AmeriCorps

Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Abraham Ames ([Abraham.ames@vt.nacdnet.net](mailto:Abraham.ames@vt.nacdnet.net)), Conservation Specialist\*

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

- Karen Bates ([karen.bates@vermont.gov](mailto:karen.bates@vermont.gov)), Watershed Planner
- Clarice Cutler ([clarice.cutler@vermont.gov](mailto:clarice.cutler@vermont.gov)), Environmental Analyst, CAFO Program
- Staci Pomeroy ([staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov](mailto:staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov)), Regional River Scientist
- Marli Rupe ([marli.rupe@vermont.gov](mailto:marli.rupe@vermont.gov)), Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

- No one present

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

- Stacy Cibula ([s.cibula@vhcb.org](mailto:s.cibula@vhcb.org)), Agricultural Program Director\*

University of Vermont Extension – Northwest Crops and Soils Program

- Ivy Krezinski ([ivy.luke@uvm.edu](mailto:ivy.luke@uvm.edu)), Crops and Soils Staff\*
- Lindsey Ruhl ([lindsey.ruhl@uvm.edu](mailto:lindsey.ruhl@uvm.edu)), Crops and Soils Coordinator\*

Vermont Farm Service Agency (FSA)

- No one present

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Chris Smith ([chris\\_e\\_smith@fws.gov](mailto:chris_e_smith@fws.gov)), State Coordinator for Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

**9:00 am**

Welcome

- Mingling, Sign -In, Settling in
- Initial Self-Reflection Questions
  - o Write down 1 successful experience collaborating with a partner organization on an agricultural water quality project
  - o Write down 1 challenge related to an agricultural water quality related project
  - o Write down 1 thing that has felt good about your work in the past year and/or why you choose to do this work

### **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

VAWQP

Alli Lewis:

- Reach out to Alli ([alli.lewis@vacd.org](mailto:alli.lewis@vacd.org)) if you are not receiving monthly newsletter to share information from partners; also sometimes extra email about events and resources.
- There is an orientation program that was launched in early January – good for new employees to understanding organizations in partnership and the history of the partnership.

The VAWQP Steering Committee is very excited to release the [VAWQP Orientation Program](#), designed by partnership staff for partnership staff. This program is targeted at new staff during the first six months of their employment at one of the partner organizations and is a great starting point for creating and fostering a culture of collaboration across our organizations.

*Please note this information and content about our programs or organizations was designed for partnership staff, as an introduction to the VAWQP, and it was not designed to be comprehensive, for farmers, or for the general public.*

**This is 10 - 15 hours of self-guided, interactive orientation content about the VAWQP, the history and context of our work, each partner organization, and some tips and tricks on collaborating across the VAWQP.**

#### **How to Use this Program:**

**Option 1** - As a supervisor, we hope that you will seriously consider this program as an integral part of your internal staff on-boarding process. You can simply share the [program web link](#) to your staff directly.

**Option 2** - We know schedules are busy, so if you prefer to simply reach out to Alli Lewis or ask your new staff to reach out directly, we will make sure they receive a personal invitation to complete the VAWQP Orientation.

**Option 3** - If you would like to share this with your existing staff (even if they are not new), please feel free to do so.

**Some Benefits of this Orientation Program for VAWQP staff:**

- Improves understanding of the VAWQP and all partner organizations
  - Provides resources to help improve coordination across agencies and organizations
  - Compiles, in one place, what currently requires years on the job at the VAWQP to comprehend
  - Provides examples and farm project highlights about what collaborating across the VAWQP looks like
  - Upon program completion, this program will set up each individual new staff member with a mentor in the VAWQP who can help this new staff member navigate their new position while maximizing the benefits of the VAWQP network and resources. (This process is contingent upon participants submitting the end of program evaluation\*)
- 
- Science Advisory Committee Day on May 2<sup>nd</sup> virtually – partners and other collaborators to join to talk about different science topics related to share work. All are welcome. Send Alli ([alli.lewis@vacd.org](mailto:alli.lewis@vacd.org)) an email if you would like to attend.
  - Gratitude for your commitment to these regional meetings!

VHCB

Stacy Cibula, Ag Program Director at VHCB:

- Quasi-State agency, funding through legislature to do their work
- Support affordable housing and conservation – may be the only organization in the country doing both of those things
- Ag side of things – member of VAWQP; water quality interspersed in project work
- Farmland conservation work – grant making entity to land trusts to VLT, Upper Valley Land Trusts, other land trusts across the state to work with landowners to sell their development rights.
- Funding through State and NRCS – Agricultural Conservation Easement program (typically used at 50% match to state dollars)
- Focus on protecting working land – 700,000 acres across the state assisted with conserving
- For every farm project – they look at water quality: riparian buffers, development reduction, wetland resources protected
- Farm retirement program – newer program area for VHCB
  - Funding to take pieces of farmland out of active agricultural production
  - Target is farms with clear water quality impacts that are not easily fixable financially or physically infeasible
  - Land removed from production, and an agency like VT Fish and Wildlife Department coming in and buying land and doing restoration projects (4 of these so far, more in the hopper)
  - Encouraged other TA providers to keep this in mind for any farms they are working with

- Farm and Forest Viability Program
  - [Farm and Forest Viability Program](#) – Providing business support for farmers and foresters including business planning services, technical advisors, and others. Liz Gleason ([Liz@vhcb.org](mailto:Liz@vhcb.org)) is the contact person.
  - Focus is to support farmers with business planning, succession planning, etc. to keep the farms economically viable.
  - Provide grant funding for farmers to hire business advisors
- Also do a Water Quality Grants program
  - [Water Quality Grants Program](#) – Pays up to \$40,000 per project to help farmers make infrastructure improvements on their farm to help improve water quality. Often used alongside other funds including EQIP or BMP. Can pay for new manure pits, upgrading barnyards, purchasing no-till equipment, and other things with a direct correlation to water quality.
  - Just wrapped up this year's round
  - Used to have 2 rounds a year, but now just 1 round per year
  - Farmers can apply for funds for water quality related infrastructure improvements on their farm – barnyard or farmstead improvements, etc.
  - Up to \$40,000 per farm to help with those water quality related projects
  - Could be for equipment like no-till equipment
  - Usually brings a lot of other match to the table
  - For 2022 round, funded 19 grants (\$600,000) in funds – which is about what they get on an annual basis to spend
- Reach out to Stacy ([s.cibula@vhcb.org](mailto:s.cibula@vhcb.org)) at VHCB.org on the ag program section of their website

#### UVM Extension

Ivy Krezinski – Research Specialist, working in St. Albans office with Northwest Crops and Soils Program

- Discovery Acres research site – funded through larger CWIP grant – also funds GoCrop website which helps farmers with their Nutrient Management Plans; and other Agricultural Equipment program to provide farms with technical assistance
- [Discovery Acres Research Site](#) – started in Fall of 2020, in St. Albans Bay
- 2021 was first year with site up and running
- Folks involved in the site: Heather Darby, Jeff Sanders, Lindsey Ruhl, Joshua Faulkner (Farming and Climate Change program coordinator), Ivy Krezinski
- On farm research site – worked with farmer advisory board –consists of farmers in Franklin County and representatives from ANR, VAAFM, NRCS, Lake Champlain Basin Program, and Miner Institute
- Compare conventional management to best management practices on land with and without tile drainage to monitor the results for soil health, water quality, and crop production
- Goal is to host more on-farm research events to show folks their impact of practices on water quality this summer (2022)

Lindsey Ruhl

- One great project from past year that was full of collaboration – 278 soil samples on farms across the state as part of State of Soil Health project
- On average Vermont farms have really excellent soil health
- Alissa White coordinated with all of the partner organizations to get this work on the ground – thank you to all partners!

## VACD

### Emily Nummer – Agricultural Programs Manager with VACD and NRCC

- Vermont Pay for Phosphorus Program – we are excited to have Districts assisting with Data Entry on about 40 farms
  - It's new, we are working out the bugs, excited to be diving into this type of work
- AgCWIP – Districts will continue to do this work – non-point pollution reduction work
  - Districts have a lot of different projects to meet local needs
  - A lot of Districts will be trialing Farm Teams – facilitating teams across partnerships so that all folks are in one place for a farm to help organize all of the services
  - A lot of Districts are trialing this in different ways
- VACD has hired an advocacy consultant for legislative initiative; hoping to beef up funding for Districts to reduce reliance on piecemeal grants and budgeting
  - District Managers and Supervisors have put in a lot of work for one-on-one phone calls, testimony, etc.
  - One piece of this ask is an Agricultural Resource Specialist type training to make sure we maintain institutional knowledge – partly conservation planner training and ensuring that District Ag staff are very familiar with all programs
  - If we receive legislative ask, VACD may be in contact with partners to inform training programs

### Meryl Braconnier - VACD Conservation Planner in St. Albans Field Office

- Do a lot of TA and FA work with NRCS
- Meryl is new RCPP planner now that Aaron Thomas has left. No update on those agreements right now but they are underway.

### Holly McClintock - Program Assistant with VACD – Administrative assistance to NRCS in St. Albans

- Also working in State Office with partners
- ACEP-ALE easements with VHCB and VLT in State Office
- Program Assistant for RCPP 2018 contracts – with Orleans County NRCD and Central Zone, and trying to get some projects off the ground in this region

## USFWS

### Chris Smith – Partners for Fish and Wildlife State Coordinator

- Connecting the dots as to why USFWS is in this meeting
- USFWS is best known for National Wildlife Refuge System
- Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge + Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silivia O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Vermont
- A bunch of other programs
- 1987 – USFWS – recognized areas held in public land (refuges) couldn't do it alone to manage for habitat for jurisdictional species + migrant birds, so they launched private lands program: [Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program](#) (one in each state). Goal is to work with private landowners to do habitat restoration activities that benefit or be complimentary to the national refuge system
- Chris Smith coordinates the program in VT
- Works out of Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Office in Essex Junction
- Program on the ground in Vermont since 1993
- Work on
  - Riparian restoration
  - Wetland restoration
  - Aquatic connectivity
  - Invasive species control
- Two biologists working on aquatic connectivity – David Minkoff and Julie Butler
  - Some organization hers working on culvert replacements and dam removal projects
  - Katie Kain ([Katherine\\_Kain@fws.gov](mailto:Katherine_Kain@fws.gov)) and David Rojek ([David\\_Rojek@fws.gov](mailto:David_Rojek@fws.gov)) are the riparian team working on riparian restoration projects
  - Ryan Creehan ([Ryan\\_Creehan@fws.gov](mailto:Ryan_Creehan@fws.gov)) does wetland restoration and works closely with NRCS and WRE program
- Partner with private landowners and organizations through the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) with FSA, [Wetland Reserve Easement Program](#) with NRCS, and [Trees for Streams Program](#) with NRCDs.
- Projects that have co-benefits for species of concern - interjurisdictional fish species, migratory birds, wood turtles.
- Those species are using habitats that when restored can have water quality benefits
- This is the nexus of our shared work
- Updates:
  - About to jump into spring planting projects
  - Work with CREP, Trees for Streams, tree planting projects
  - This year: 180 acres – 25 projects – will plant around 40,000 trees and shrubs statewide with partners
  - Wetland restoration work – 6 projects with WRE and NRCS mainly in Lake Champlain Basin – restoring around 600-700 acres
- Bringing on 2 bio-techs starting end of April
  - Still trying to find one of them some housing
  - Will be working closely with Katie Kain and David Rojek on Riparian work – currently working on adding equipment
- Open position – Wildlife Biologist vacancy – USA Jobs for posting

DEC

Clarice Cutler - DEC's CAFO Program

- Chris Gianfagna moved to the DEC Stormwater Program
- Clarice is recruiting Advanced Level regulatory position – field work and program development – going to be posted statewide – please send folks with ag experience to Clarice
- [Medium CAFO general permit](#) is formally on notice until May 10<sup>th</sup>
- Public Hearing on April 26<sup>th</sup> for public to give feedback – please connect farmers or TA providers to Clarice
- [CLF, VNRC, and LCC filed a De-Delegation petition](#) last month – early in that process now.
  - Just wanted to share that the content of that petition highlights disagreements between Agency of Agriculture and Agency of Natural Resources.

Karen Bates – Watershed Planner for Water Investment Division – wrote Tactical Basin Plan for Missisquoi Bay and St. Albans Bay/North Lake Direct

- Would be happy to talk to a group, staff, or farmers about water quality
- Help use that information to incentivize farmers to help Tas prioritize your work
- Contact Karen any time

Staci Pomeroy – Regional River Scientist

- Wetlands, Rivers, Lakes all have technical staff that work close with Conservation District and ag partners – we're glad to be a part of projects

Marli Rupe – Part of the Clean Water Initiative Program at DEC – which is where all money for water quality at ANR comes through

- [Annual Performance Report](#) came out – great graphics, location specific, use those graphics (with credit) for your reports
- Farmers are accomplishing 96% of phosphorus reduction
- \$10 million RCPP grant with NRCS
  - Primary goal is to make clear where farmers should go for EQIP vs RCPP
- A lot of money for Ag BMPs and wetland restoration and others – Marli will be reaching out to partners

Agency of Agriculture

Brodie Haenke – Water Quality Programs Coordinator

- Most farms have been going through recertification process – lets agency know how many farms in each category are operating in Vermont [Dairy Update Tables Below] – farms changing in past decade, average milk prices, broken down by county as well!



Vermont Dairy Data – April 6, 2022

Category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 Q1
Ave. Milk Price	\$17.98	\$19.60	\$23.63	\$16.49	\$15.25	\$16.78	\$15.44	\$17.46	\$16.45	\$17.23	\$22.56
Class III price	\$17.44	\$17.99	\$22.34	\$15.80	\$14.87	\$15.92	\$14.61	\$16.96	\$18.16	\$17.08	\$21.25
MILC Payment – USDA	\$0.728	\$0.258	\$0.00	MPP/MCP Margin level	\$8.01	\$9.68	\$7.53	\$9.60	\$9.65	\$6.92	\$11.26
# of VT Cow Dairy Farms	972	939	880	853	838	796	725	677	636	583	564
Milk Production USDA	2.56 b lbs.	2.615 b lbs.	2.672 b lbs.	2.666 b lbs.	2.724 billion	2.728 Billion	2.680 Billion	2.695 Billion	2.602 billion	2.564 billion	207 mil. Ave/month
Ave. # of cows in VT USDA	133,000	133,000	132,000	132,000	130,000	128,667	126,833	125,583	122,167	119,667	119,000
Ave. # of cows/farm	138	142	150	155	155	162	175	185	192	205	211
Certified Organic Cow Dairy Farms	205	198	184	184	203	199	190	187	169	162	157
Off-Farm Dairy Processors	29	36	58	64	78	79	83	88	87	88	88
On-Farm Dairy Processors	54	59	62	71	67	68	63	66	67	70	70
Total Dairy Processors	83	95	120	135	145	147	146	154	154	158	158

Greatest Cow numbers 154,000 in 2002. Total Dairy Processors in 2002= 58

Vermont Dairy Cow Operations by County – 2022

cows	Jan.	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	% change prior month	% change since Jan.	Ave. #
Addison	86	87	87	86									-1.15%	0.00%	87
Bennington	9	9	9	9									0.00%	0.00%	9
Caledonia	50	50	50	49									-2.00%	-2.00%	50
Chittenden	25	26	26	27									3.85%	8.00%	26
Essex	10	10	10	10									0.00%	0.00%	10
Franklin	105	104	104	107									2.88%	1.90%	105
Grand Isle	9	9	9	9									0.00%	0.00%	9
Lamoille	24	24	24	24									0.00%	0.00%	24
Orange	53	53	53	52									-1.89%	-1.89%	53
Orleans	91	91	91	92									1.10%	1.10%	91
Rutland	39	39	39	40									2.56%	2.56%	39
Washington	20	20	20	19									-5.00%	-5.00%	20
Windham	19	19	19	19									0.00%	0.00%	19
Windsor	23	23	23	23									0.00%	0.00%	23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>566</b>									<b>0.35%</b>	<b>0.53%</b>	<b>564</b>

Ave. # dairy farms-2014 -880, 2015 – 853, 2016 -838, 2017 – 796, 2018 – 725, 2019 – 677, 2020 – 636 & 2021 - 583

Dairy Cow Farms By Size – Milking cows

	LFO – over 700	MFO – 200 – 699	SFO –under 200	Total
2012	17	145	810	972
2013	17	142	780	939
2014	25	129	726	880
2015	26	127	700	853
2016	27	138	673	838
2017	32	117	250 CSFO -647	796
2018	34	104	273 CSFO - 587	725
2019	33	105	268 CSFO - 539	677
2020	35	100	198 CSFO – 501	636
2021	35	95	216 CSFO - 453	583

CSFO as of January 31, 2018. Certified Small Farms have 50 - milking cows to 199 cows.

- [Vermont Winter Manure Spreading Ban Ends](#) - Vermont's **winter manure spreading ban** ended April 1st, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) is issuing a spring stewardship reminder to Vermont farmers and Custom Manure Applicators. Make sure to be aware of all [manure application restrictions and guidance](#) as Spring and spreading season is upon us. If you need to submit a complaint, you can do so on our [website](#).
- [Regional Contacts for Water Quality Inspections](#) - AAFM Water Quality (WQ) Specialists, commonly referred to as "Farm Coordinators" or "Inspectors," help facilitate farm compliance with Vermont's water quality regulations, while also serving as resources and educators for the farming community and the public. The WQ Division has recently restructured and WQ Specialists will be assigned to work with farms of all sizes within a certain geographic region. If you are trying to get in touch with a WQ Specialist in your region, see our [regional contacts map](#). You can also find all of our [staff contacts](#) on our website if you are looking for someone specific.
- [Medium Farm Operation \(MFO\) Fees and Reports Due April 30](#) - Permitted MFOs must submit an annual report and operating fee of \$1,500.00 to the VAAFAM by April 30 of each year.

#### Grants:

- [Agency Funding Opportunities Calendar](#) – Review the Agency's schedule of annual funding opportunities to plan ahead for grant applications and projects! Some can be applied for year round – BMP, Pasture and Surface Water Program, CREP, etc.!
- [Vermont Pay for Phosphorus](#) - 57 Farms are enrolled in the new Vermont Pay for Phosphorus Program, 40 of these farms are currently working with their local Conservation District for data entry into FarmPREP. Almost 90 applications were received this January. Estimates pounds of Phosphorus per acre per year on a field given different management scenarios based on Vermont weather.
- [Farm Agronomic Practice \(FAP\) Program](#) will open on May 1st for applications for conservation practices planned from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023 including rotational grazing for the 2022 season, cover cropping, manure injection and more. Please [check our website](#) after May 1st to apply.
- [Best Management Practices \(BMP\) Program](#) - Applications to receive technical and financial assistance through AAFMs Best Management (BMP) Program can be submitted at any time. Please keep in mind that applications received prior to April 1 will be given priority consideration for assistance in 2022. Applications submitted after April 1 will be evaluated as program resources allow. Submission of an application does not guarantee grant funding or assistance. Applications received prior to April 1st will receive a response from the BMP program regarding their application status prior to July 2022.

#### Also Present:

- Connor Steckle – Water Quality Specialist in the Missisquoi Watershed
- David Wardrop – Water Quality Specialist in the Missisquoi Watershed
- Brittany Cole – Permit Specialist in Northern Half of Vermont
- Luke Hughes – Water Quality Specialist from Northwestern Territory and southern part of the state
- Andrew Mitchell – Engineer with BMP program – designing and installing on-farm water quality projects in Franklin and Grand Isle

## NRCS

Sarah Larose – Northwest Zone District Conservationist – new to the position

- NRCS – offers technical assistance and potential financial assistance through programs like EQIP and CSP
- New State Conservationist named Travis Thomason coming from Hawaii, not physically here yet but has started working for Vermont
- Working on contracting and paperwork
- Lots of staff shuffling going on –
  - GS9/11 position open from Sarah's previous position
  - Carissa Stein resigned in December
  - Will be bringing on Pathways from Central Zone – Renee, when she graduates in May/June
  - Tucker Malone resigned April 6<sup>th</sup> – looking to backfill that position as a soil con tech as well

Also Present:

- Lauren Gibson – Soil Conservationist in St. Albans
- Liza Lemieux – Program Assistant for NRCS
- Nancy Allen – Soil Conservationist in Morrisville Field Office
- Jimmy Young – Soil Conservationist in St. Albans
- Jill Mullican – Soil Conservationist in St. Albans

## Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Molly Varner – District Manager for Grand Isle County NRCD

- Toes in a number of projects
- Thanks for AgCWIP program from Agency of Ag – looking to grow their programs
- Thanks in advance for Molly to reach out to in this process and get self more educated to host workshops and provide resources
- Currently working on lakeshore assessments and water quality sampling
- Serving on Basin Water Quality Council for Basin 5
- Non-regulatory enhancement funding decision making
- Working to build relationships with farmers and grow outreach with them
- Working a bit with farm viability
- Getting projects on the ground on Vermont Farms

Peter Danforth – District Manager for Lamoille County NRCD

- Related to VAWQP – partnership is the key word – worked with everyone in this room over the years and will continue to do so

- Cooperative agreement with USFWS – upland and wetland restoration projects, Aquatic Organism Passage and stream connecting – dam removals and culvert upgrades
- VLT and DEC work on River Corridor Easements – effective way to loop in Trees for Streams and connecting river restoration work and doing this with partners
- Pay for Phosphorus Program – have 1 farm this year, looking forward to more in the future
- Payment for Ecosystem Services program – looking forward to seeing how that evolves, as well as Agroforestry programs too
- Workshops – like to do workshops with their no-till drill
- Peter had a dream of having a large conservation field day at Oxbow Park in Morrisville with partners pre-COVID – Peter is maybe working on it for later this season or next season with all partners with their dog and pony shows – keep an eye out for that!
- Helped host the local work group meeting

#### Also Present

- Dan Lee – Conservation Outreach Specialist working mostly on ag programs
- Emily Porter-Goff – Education and Outreach coordinator at LCCD – work in schools, libraries, outdoor education; background in water quality
  - Running a summer camp – one week is Guardians of the Watershed focusing on watershed education

#### Lauren Weston – District Manager for Franklin County NRCD

- Thank you to all partners who make this work possible
- Continued AgCWIP funding from Agency of Ag
- 11 Farms in Franklin County in Pay for Phosphorus
- Lake Carmi BMP project with DEC to evaluate BMPs in the watershed
- [Tree Plantings coming up – Earth Day](#) – 1300 trees onto this site – seeking volunteers
- [Tree Sale](#) – largest tree sale ever this year; there are still trees, shrubs, and plants available
- [Trout Sale](#) also ongoing
- Hosting Tactical Basin Planning meetings – thanks for attendance and participation from partners in those meetings
- Tree planting maintenance on past plantings
- District has been internally working on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice work – in addition to statewide NRCD partnership with University of Michigan team
- On three Basin Water Quality Councils – Missisquoi Bay, Lamoille, North Lake Direct
  - Please reach out to share thoughts during those meetings
- [Public comment is currently open for how CWSP grants are bring structured / formed](#)
- [Ferment on the Farm workshop in March](#) at the Choiniere Family Farm – now there is a post-event google group to share ideas about composting on the farm

#### Also Present

- Kate Wettergreen – Eco AmeriCorps Member

- Katy Dynarski – Projects Coordinator
- Megan Walker – Project Technician, mostly working on assisting farmers, tree sale, and tree planting work

#### Orleans County NRCD

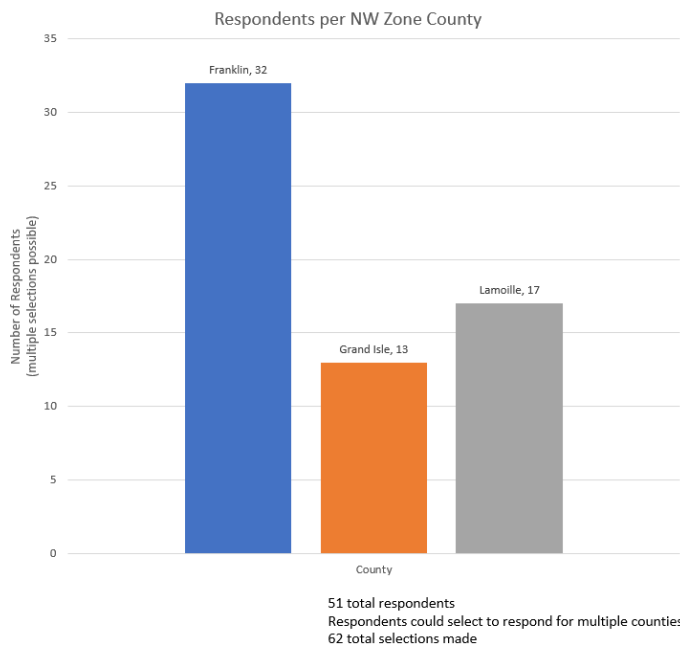
##### Abraham Ames

- Handful of towns in the Missisquoi
- Pay for Phosphorus and Nutrient Management Plan updates
- Looking forward to connecting more in the future.

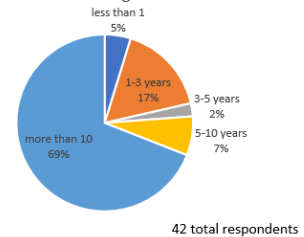
10:20 am

### Northwest Region Agricultural Water Quality Discussion

- Presentation: NRCDs + NRCS share out of results of 2022 Local Led Conservation Survey and Local Working Group process
- Conservation Districts and NRCS went through Local Led Process
- Local Led meeting of 25 people in Lamoille County at Valley Dream Farm to gather conservation practice ideas
- Also had a paper and online survey
- Presented this information to Rural Development, Risk Management, and Heather Darby from UVM Extension
- Had 51 total respondents – seems low, need to increase participation through continuous process about where resources should be directed
- In the survey, respondents could pick as many priorities / boxes as they wanted
- Most people who responded (70%) have been on the land for more than 10 years



How many years have you been farming or otherwise working on the land



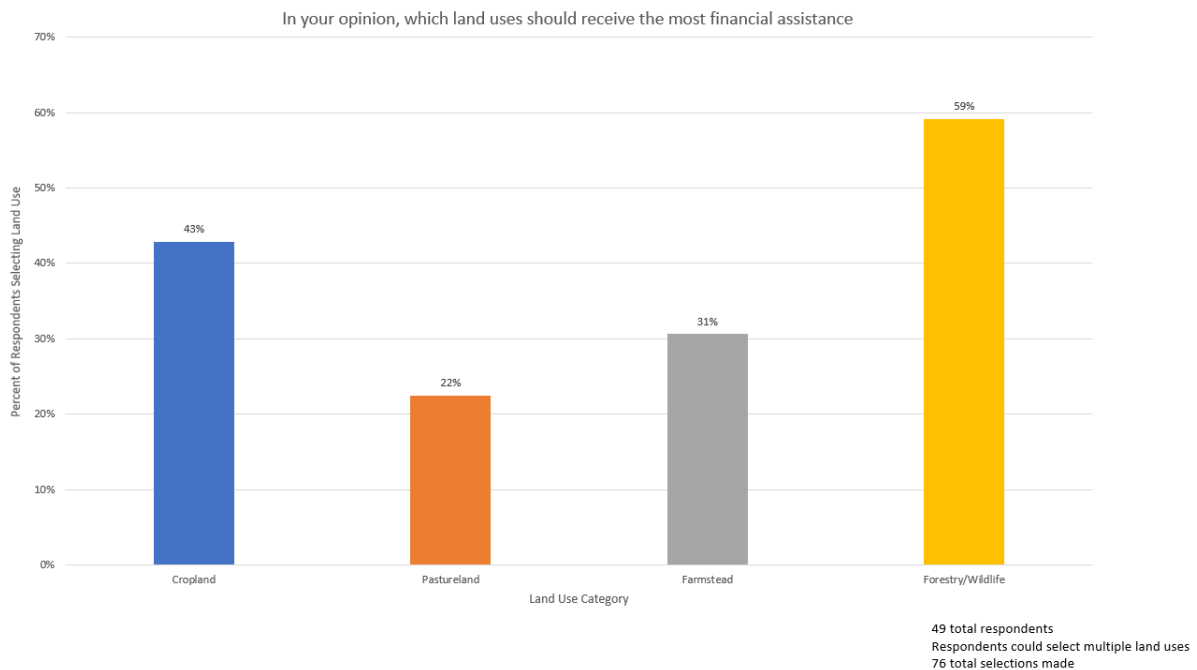
- Open ended question about what type of work folks do on the land
  - Next year – we will have pre-made selections to sort who is answering which question in what way

# What type of work do you do on the land?

- veggie crop and hay
- Technical Assistance Provider
- resource professional
- River/stream technical assistance and Regulatory Flood Hard River Corridor Permit assistance
- watershed non-profit group and walnut grove owner
- Water Quality Improvement for local Non-Profit
- Timber stand improvement, maintaining wildlife habitat
- State surface water management
- Recreational and small scale gardening
- Active agriculture
- Running a volunteer village land trust
- camp owner
- Crops research
- maintain land on lake
- Lake side camp on Lake Carmi
- Remove invasives, tree planting
- Recreational camping and boating
- small scale vegetable farming
- Manage our own property
- Gardening
- Gardening, small animal farm (pigs, chickens, rabbits), forestry
- Restoration Ecologist
- Home garden
- Shoreland owner but interested in other conservation practices
- Ecological Balance
- Sugaring, recreation
- Wildlife habitat improvement, conservation education
- hay, pasture, compost, flowers, raspberries
- Technical Assistance
- Hobby farm / orchard
- Conservation stewardship
- land and water conservation
- Riparian improvement
- Crop maintenance; forest improvement
- Farmer/USDA FSA Employee
- Agricultural education
- Extension/research
- Very little - residential property kept pretty wild. I monitor for cyanobacteria blooms.

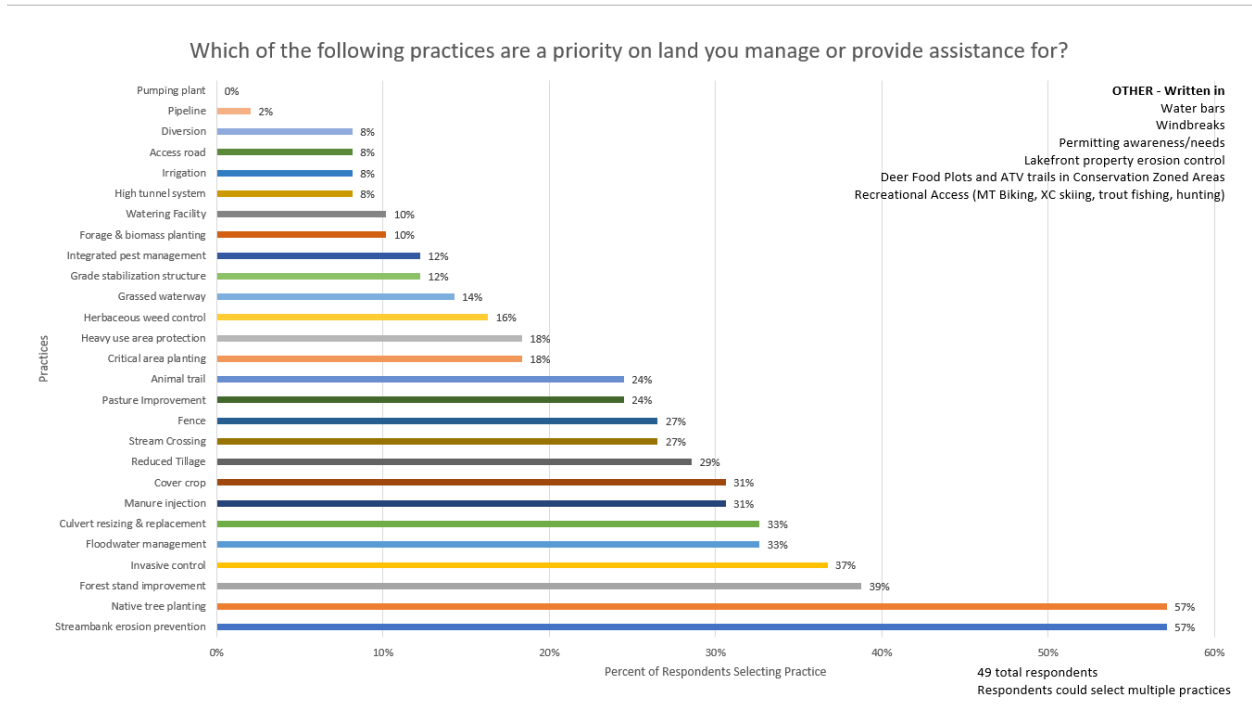
Suggestion for next year – include pre-made selections to better sort responses by land use interaction

- 59% of folks prioritized forestry and wildlife land use for funding



- Respondents cared largely about streambank erosion prevent and native tree plantings; we are thinking respondents are familiar with NRCS practices
- Planning to sort practices that were included in the survey into different NRCS funding pools (like statewide EQIP, Specialty Crop, Forestry & Wildlife)

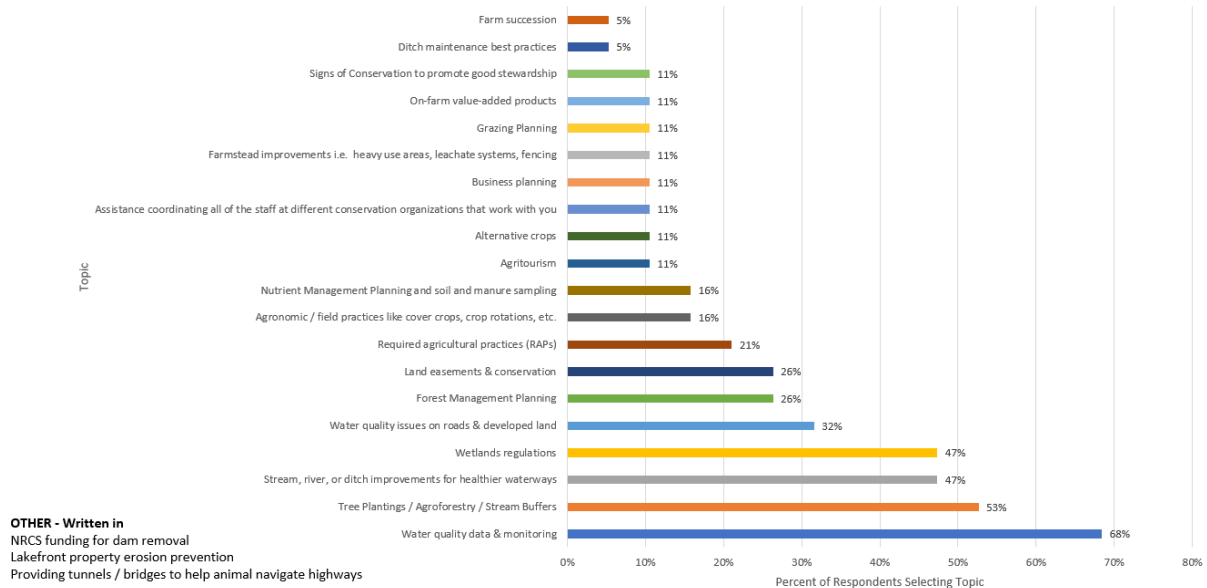
- Ultimate goal is to give feedback to NRCS state level about which practice to be prioritizing within funding pools; will also share with Agency of Ag and Agency of Natural Resources
- Will need to better match practices listed in survey to NRCS practices in ranking pools.



- Results of: If folks were interested in learning more or getting technical assistance from Conservation Districts or partners – 19 people responded to this question and folks were interested in water quality data and monitoring, tree plantings, healthier waterways (stream, river, or ditch improvement), and wetland regulations rose to the top of this survey.



If interested in learning more or technical assistance, what topics would you like more information or assistance on?



- Qualitative question as well – grouped into categories such as: Restore and protect Vermont’s Waterways and Riparian Zones, Improve Soil Health & Water Quality on Working Landscapes, Protect Ecosystem Services and Values, Enhance Biodiversity and Wildlife Protection, Increase Farm Viability, etc.

## Other comments

### Restore and Protect Vermont’s Waterways and Riparian Zones

- Vegetated buffers along stream courses
- Establishing meaningful stream and riverbank corridors/buffers is the single most important thing we can do to improve water quality and connectivity for wildlife. However it should not be on the backs of farmers. It is in the public good and should be paid for by the public.
- I think improving streamside buffers of at least a 50’ width is a priority. It is essential that well rooted buffers are developed to keep ground water in this land, and to hold the earth against erosion. We must also have significant tree growth on these buffers to keep the water shaded
- Stream and river corridor protection
- Storm water quality affecting our stream
- Derelict dam removal
- Water Quality Improvement Projects/Financial Assistance
- Reduce pollution in the Lamoille river
- Private Shoreland Riparian Buffers
- I have a house on the lake so most of this doesn’t really apply to me. My interest is in improving the water quality of the lake so my preference would be to fund projects that reduce runoff of phosphorus and nitrogen into the lake. It may be that the first step is to do more monitoring and assessment to see where the major sources are coming from on a finer scale. For example, I am in Carry Bay in North Hero which is having trouble with cyanobacteria and it is not clear to me whether the problems are local (septic, local farms, shore erosion) or lake wide (water flowing down Alburgh passage that came from the Missisquoi, climate change, invasive species).
- Prevent algae growth in Lake Carmi

### Improve Soil Health & Water Quality on Working Landscapes

- I have to say that more phosphorous reduction can come from minor improvements over vast acreages of field/pasture. In my opinion, improving the health of soil is #1 because healthy soil is a sponge for water and nutrients. More healthy soil will help towards every environmental goal.
- Make sure conservation plans for farms and forests and downtown areas address water resource conservation and restoration. There are many water quality experts and watershed/water resource specialists/groups out there that can help with bmp practices to adopt for a conservation plan.

- Tile drain systems, ditch and channelized stream management strategies

### Protect Ecosystem Services and Values

- Long term lease or purchase of riparian corridors. Buffer requirements similar to forestry cutting rules but with compensation for crop/pastureland lost to production.
- Conservation of forest land (easements)

### Enhance Biodiversity and Wildlife Protection

- Invasive Species Management
- Connectivity of forests for animals to maintain a variety of mating options
- Forestry/Wildlife funding pool practices like pollinator habitat and forest trail. Typically the level of funding is low in the forestry/wildlife pool compared to other pools and if these practices are standalone practices, they typically don’t rank high enough to get funded.
- Please view your options through a climate/biodiversity lens, and please consider the threat of high winds in Franklin County.
- Help with starting a flower farm, and forester help for disease & insects.

### Increase Farm Viability

- Land retirement budgets need a complete overhaul to address its effect on a 30-year farm business plan instead of the current model based on land sale value.
- Remember we also need housing for farmworkers, people to sell products, people who write those conservation plans

### General Words of Encouragement

- Save green river reservoir as a state campground
- Do all you can to help save Lake Carmi
- Help save Lake Carmi
- Super smart growth is achievable

- Also prepared – Assistance Guide for Agricultural Producers – attempt at sharing programs across the state that a farmer or land manager that are annual or continuous opportunity (coming soon in final 2022 draft)
- Small Group Discussion Questions:
  - Do these results agree with what you're seeing on the ground
  - How can we provide improved TA and FA? Can we be using resources like the Partner Database, Tactical Basin Plans, Conservation Desktop, partner meetings, etc.?
  - What are the biggest hurdles you face in administering or accessing conservation programs? What bottlenecks exist in your work in conservation delivery?
  - Where do private, state, and federal programs work well together? Where do they clash or overlap? Where are there gaps in funding?
  - How would we like to collectively move forward in future years to engage the greater community in Local Led conservation?

#### Notes from Discussions

Do these results agree with what you're seeing on the ground

- Re: Survey – wanted more demographics on the responders, who wants what practices on the list – are these right per demographic pool
- Should the list of practices be grouped together / similar things covered?
- Some vocab utilized not accessible to the public- for example, diversion is not in common vocabulary of the public. Ag Guide will be helpful for DEC and other regulatory officials when asked by farmer for guidance
- Representatives per group responding are helpful
- How do we get more people involved in local working group and survey – bring paper surveys to meetings; a standard survey for all districts?
- seems size of farms and way they are managed can mean different priorities are rising to the top. i.e., a larger farm might have more resources to do multiple projects, smaller farms might not have the resources like employees to help with the projects they need to get done
- more layers of complexity for smaller farms, help to get projects done vs larger that potentially have more resources
- education important for all different size farms
- resources/funding assistance for these projects, how do we get the information out and connect to landowners
- Some practices/projects are more cost effective to do on your own, not with NRCS
- overall one small group seemed to feel like the results of the surveys captured a lot of the local concerns, although there was some differing of opinions as to the level of priority and how they sort of ranked out from the survey, i.e., one person feels very strongly that tile drainage should be a top priority the results indicated that was a bit lower of a priority from the survey results.
- Try to figure out what practices are not being funded high enough
  - Ditch management – 2 tier – was this incentivized?

- Almost no value to the landowner themselves; ditch Top of Bank within ditch issue.
- streambank, not sure how much NRCS does, Stream crossing tie into streambank erosion issues
- VAAFM regulatory staff were not terribly surprised that stream erosion prevention was a concern – they see a lot of issues with farmers continually having to increase their buffer back into their fields because streambank erosion has eaten into their previous buffer.
- Resources for culvert issues
- EQIP – need a higher pollinator planting payment – rates in general are not adequate for tree and shrub planting
- Excitement around Forest Management Plans being prioritized – this is what NRCS is seeing in the field
- NRCS is not funding forest stand improvement like they are for agronomic practices
- Sugarbush owners are looking for road and trail improvements (for erosion and business purposes)
- thought it was interesting that the lowest priority in the local-led conservation survey were the expensive farmstead improvement projects, which NRCS tends to fund. Many of the high-priority concerns in the survey had to do with forest stand management, which the NRCS often struggles to fund.
- tree planting / erosion not as much of a priority. Biomass plantings (seed downs) are popular.
- Someone noted that tree planting has been a huge push in the Missisquoi Bay for at least a decade
- Integrated Pest Management about a zero, mostly invasive species
- wild parsnip an invasive – big concern, lots of it, not good for animals
- What do you think farms are looking for: Helping wildlife, Want money to do things i.e.: one farmer wanted delayed mowing funding because of wet fields, not because of actual habitat for migratory birds
- Someone asked about what types of issues are happening right now in urban, suburban farms – Another person said lots of horse farms have issues!

How can we provide improved TA and FA? Can we be using resources like the Partner Database, Tactical Basin Plans, Conservation Desktop, partner meetings, etc.? What are the biggest hurdles you face in administering or accessing conservation programs? What bottlenecks exist in your work in conservation delivery? Where do private, state, and federal programs work well together? Where do they clash or overlap? Where are there gaps in funding?

#### Issues with Collaboration / Volume of Offerings

- Some group discussion of the VAWQP orientation, folks hadn't seen it yet so wondering if it was useful for teaching new staff about who they should reach out to in specific situations
- Shared that there is a spreadsheet with contact information for all of the VAWQP partners in our region on the FCNRCD website
- Interest in a decision tree for who to refer farmers to or reach out to
- In general, there seems to be a need to organize our information/resources in a central location so that all partners know where to find info

- There are so many programs and resources that it's hard to know what they all are or where to find them!
- how to connect it all and understand what is out there, who to pull in
- putting the puzzle pieces together, what resources are out there, who do I go to, i.e., websites and just knowing where to look or how to look up the information
- seems the biggest issue is how to make sure landowners/professionals across agencies know how and who to contact to then assist in getting the customer technical and financial assistance.
- Building relationships & trust is a hurdle
- Moving parts, more than 1 TSP per farm
- knowing what is out there and available
- turn over of employees, getting them trained
- higher ups seem to have a disconnect
- different agencies knocking on landowners' doors at different times regarding same issue, how do we work better together
- We discussed how important personal relationships are in this work – efforts can break down when organizations have turnover, or restructure (VAAFMs inspectors were reorganized recently which has been challenging)
- Collaboration: Field days, peer to peer events
- group suggested possibly doing an interagency training, something like the one Jim E. does with State and Army Corps to discuss wetland rules with the different agencies to get people to understand how it works across agencies and to educate/inform folks who work with the different agencies.
- Trying not to duplicate effort
- Do feel like these VAWQP meetings are helping, keeps it on your mind more of the time that collaboration is needed.
- How many programs we are all working on and navigating and trying to share with farmers
- Things that feel helpful
  - Orientation
  - Assistance guide
  - Stored in a shared place and to where referrals should go
  - Create a decision tree for a concern on a farm
- Attendance at events / programs – making sure farms know; get on the ground
- Need training on how to get WQ data?
  - How to prioritize areas / pollutants
- Assistance Guide likely will be very useful and be a good resource

#### Partner Database

- Is partner database being used for collaboration
  - Not functioning ideally
  - Not using it often, not up to date,
  - VAAFMs does input site visit data after each visit – site inspectors and engineers

- Liza Lemieux can be the connector for Districts to know if NRCS is working with a certain farmer/landowner
- Does Conservation Desktop work for the districts yet?
- How else can we be effectively collaborating? Use of partner database??
  - These small farms that are not on our radar should theoretically be in the partner database (and there is another database that Stone is making for the regulatory side)

#### Chat about Farm Management Teams

- Maybe we need to implement farm teams, and identify someone who has a long relationship with an individual farmer and make sure that person is on their team and can be a point of contact.
- Would a designated “Farm Advocate” benefit coordinating “farm teams”?
- Sounds like a big workload for all of the partners
- Should we be doing trainings of other programs for new people
- Do people know what other groups/organizations are doing?
- Could farm teams just lead to more meetings?
- The Ag Producers Guide/booklet – sounds like a great idea
  - If ANR Atlas type of approach could be used for something like this – to check on the farm
  - People should be keeping things up to date
- Enthusiasm around Farm Teams and long-term connection
  - Need to find farm allies

#### Issues with Programs

- timing of programs, don’t jive with how things get done on the farms/land
- Farm Bill limit, restrictions to practices, i.e., cover crop after 3 years considered adopted and can’t get more funding for that practice
- overall seems most hurdles are that a lot of programs don’t align very well with when the funding is needed and when the projects can get done. Turnover of employees and educating/training up new folks to understand what they do and then on top of that what all the other agencies do, i.e., knowing and understanding who to go to
- different rules that the different agencies work with, i.e., clean water act vs food security act
- Wetlands permitting is a bottleneck – 2 to 3 months for an ANR wetlands general permit

#### Successes

- Someone brought up about how organizations that have been working on the ground for a long time (MRBA and VLT, plus Ben Gabos) are really effective at getting woody buffer plantings done
  - Have strategy for reaching out to farmers via someone that the farmer knows who can effectively communicate the need for buffers, figure out the needs and concerns of that farmer, and help set up their planting in a way that meets their needs

- For example, if a farmer is hesitant about having “the feds” on their land, MRBA can come and do the planting.
- It seems effective to have one contact who knows farmers well and can package all of the programs together
- Once a farmer agrees to a project, it’s easier to enhance that project and include more programs
- VHCB water quality + VAAFM + NRCS to cost-share is very beneficial

#### New Farmer Outreach / Barriers

- How do we get more people into the door to work with NRCDs/NRCS
  - prioritizing by impaired streams
- Is a barrier that farmers are sick of dealing with all of the paperwork for the NRCS/FSA – they send a LOT of paperwork out with a lot of deadlines
- Noted that it is hard to get permission to work with farmers and come onto their land if they think that they are going to be regulated
- Can we improve outreach, TA, FA to help farms (especially SFOs who tend to be off the radar) before problems happen and have to be regulated
- Inspectors noted that many of the SFOs that they inspected recently are not used to the record-keeping that they’re supposed to be doing
  - Other common violations: production area issues, no NMPs, milk house waste management
  - Many smaller farmers are older folks with sometimes no phone or internet
- Someone pointed out that for small impaired streams, the problem is likely coming from one or two farms
- In the Rock River, one of the big issues is erosion. Wondering about detecting erosion with LiDAR and then being proactive about approaching farmers

#### Turnover

- Turnover is a big problem
  - Is it all \$ - is that why people are leaving?
  - All our work + stress also combining
  - You have to do too much work without enough training
  - We are making it up as we go
  - There aren’t enough frameworks to work in
  - Over worked and underpaid
- NRCS-ladder of promotions – once you can become a soil conservationist / have the appropriate qualifications, can move up
  - The way you get promoted in the NRCS is to move states; can be stagnant within an office
  - NRCS is trying to get exit interview information from folks who have left; too much paperwork/contracting not enough working with the producers

- VAAFM Engineering at least has good incentives to stick around to move up.
- Turnover is hard for farmers – they want reliability too

#### Miscellaneous

- Question about does NRCS continue to provide TA if FA is not a good match?
  - If FA not funded for a project, farmer is typically still working with NRCS on a handful of things, so keep them in the system (and maybe try again next year). This is the plan NRCS puts together. TA is supposed to be able to do this, depends a bit on the project and the planner though. It's really on the planner. Now working with clients that are one year out before contracting. Need to be able to answer: how can I help actually improve the resource concern
- From the District perspective
  - Each has its own thumbprint
  - Lamoille County NRCD is less agriculture focused
    - Do a lot of work through river corridor and stream projects, some NMPs
    - Sometimes feels like we're trying too hard
    - Farm infrastructure doesn't really come up for them
- Someone shared about the new Missisquoi Tactical Basin Plan, and the PowerBI reports that are linked that can show what specific areas in the basin are high in P
  - In Mud Creek, there are many folks adopting cover crops but also continuous corn, leading to high P
  - Katy Dynarski shared that FCNRCD did use this information to pick watersheds for targeted landowner outreach in a new partnership with Partners for Fish and Wildlife

How would we like to collectively move forward in future years to engage the greater community in Local Led conservation?

- be open, pull in other agencies in the beginning
- understanding generational differences in the farming community
- LWG meetings with stakeholders, multiple meetings in a year
- partner to partner training
- who is the person to share the information with, i.e., regulatory vs non-regulatory
- training regulatory and non-regulatory employees to know what side does what and when, who is looking at what, possibly a field day to discuss/look at issues

**11:30 am**

Lunch from Mill River Brewing BBQ & Smokehouse + Dessert (Worms and Dirt)

**12:15 pm**

## Agricultural Water Quality Skill-Building

### Small Groups/Discussion Topics

#### Business Planning and Viability

- How do we help farms stay afloat
  - What resources are out there for farmers to connect with
  - What is the role of viability in agricultural water quality work
  - Are there additional leverage points organizations could be working on
  - Examples of “viable” farms + their business models
  - What does it mean to diversify
- 
- efforts that were done to help farmers with conservation and viability in the area around New York City
  - Need to have whole regional approach, can’t just try and deal with viability farm-by-farm
  - We can’t control the price of milk
  - Some resources: Tony Kitsos at UVM, VHCB Farm Viability program
  - New farmers need training – lots of new farmers got high tunnels funded through NRCS, how many of those are acting as boat storage right now because they didn’t know how to run the farm?
  - Some frustration from NRCS staff that EQIP ranking structure can reward the worst offenders – the more resource concerns there are, the more likely it is that you’ll be funded
  - Someone said that the most viable farms she’s seen tend to be generational farms, also organic, diversified farms
    - Even xxx, who have big dairy farm, are also doing maple
    - A few generations back, used to see a lot more diversification – turkeys, eggs
      - In the 1970s and 1980s, dairy was seen as the most profitable and farmers stopped a lot of their other ventures
      - “Get big or get out” era, which was also driven by USDA and banks (and still is, to some extent)
      - Problem is, when you rely heavily on just one income stream, you don’t have any wiggle room for when things go on
  - Someone said she knows one farmer who is making great money selling mealworms as feed, other folks are making mushrooms in old wine cellars
  - Someone wondered if we have many vacated urban properties that should be filled in with farms – that’s a big issue in the south but maybe not so much here
  - Types of diversification that work – not just selling dairy products but also branching out into meat
    - Someone said that incorporating the creamery at one dairy farm helped get through pandemic



- Concern that there is a place for value-added dairy products, but are we going to flood the market?
  - VT has a lot of cheese, beer, and alcohol
- Direct sales of value-added products seem effective, small buildings where one or multiple producers will bring their products and customers come and leave cash
- Someone mentioned the Arbor Farm Market in South Hero, which buys from a lot of local producers – is that a path that more farmers can use?
- Buying local is becoming more important with the pandemic, and now inflation

#### How to reach new farmers / build relationships

- Do organizations make connections for other organizations; how do I know who is working with a farmer
  - Should there be a sub-watershed approach to focus in certain areas
  - How do you meet farmers
  - How do you build a successful relationship with a farm
  - How does staff turnover affect relationships
  - How to avoid “bugging” and confusing farmers
  - Should we try piloting Farm Management Teams?
- It would be beneficial to have joint visits with regulatory and non-regulatory partners
  - It would be good to have a network or information to pass people off to for specific projects and scoping for additional projects outside of regulatory areas
  - Trust and relationships between landowners and regulatory vs. non regulatory partners are very different relationships
  - The language we use is really important, riparian buffers vs. wetlands can be a very different conversation
  - Solutions for water quality may not be advantageous for business and farm operations, we need to think about and understand that side too
  - Succession planning is an investment
  - Some farmers are only interested in conservation if it makes operational and financial sense
  - There might be an opportunity to leverage those financial benefits which can sometimes be a smaller hurdle than some of the cultural hurdles (‘this is the way my family has always done it’ mentality)
  - Franklin County is different than a lot of Vermont
  - Wetland is a trigger word for some people
  - Often larger farm projects are focused on manure management what does this mean given that we're seeing farm consolidation?
  - TMDL related to streams might be a place to start conversations
  - In the Missisquoi area there has been the White River partnership with Orleans NRCD, Vermont Land Trust, Ben Gabos, and some others. Vermont Land Trust has taken over being the main point of contact in this process many times

- Starting with what a landowner will accept (often trees), then once a relationship is formed, then the next step is maybe wetlands or conservation easement but emphasis on starting with what the landowner is ready to do
- We should not underestimate how influential neighbors talking to neighbors is
- Conversation on the farm management teams as a point of contact incorporating NRCDs and farmers to facilitate conversations meeting at least twice a year with all partners working on that farm. The trials of this model have been working well. Putting together these teams is part of the AgCWIP contract for some districts this time around
- Important to be aware of existing relationships and building on those rather than starting from scratch
- Discussion on wetland land value compensation and how it doesn't include the production value of the land as well
- The Missisquoi model works in an area of hay crop and pasture. This process and relationships might be different in other areas with other farming and land use practices
- Land is scarce in Franklin County and giving up land for conservation is a challenge
- When we think about putting land into conservation easements or out of production in other ways we need to also be thinking about manure management and livestock numbers and the financial aspects of the farm all at the same time
- When land is out of production some farmers have an excess of manure and may end up growing corn over hay to utilize that manure. We need to think about those water quality impacts as well
- Corn is a manure management strategy on some farms
- We need to standardize manure sampling protocols and time of year to have a better understanding of manure composition statewide
- Discussion on challenges with manure injection, soil nutrients, crops, and water quality
- Focusing on river corridor easements might be a way to build new relationships since or because of the monetary incentive

#### Field Days + Workshops

- How to host a successful event
- Which farms like to help host
- How to advertise + get attendees
- How to build an agenda + get speakers
- What are farmers interested in
- How can we promote each other's events
- Difficulty with food
- Timing of the day is tricky – end of day, middle of day? – depends on the audience
- Farmers seem to like mid-day
- Helpful to be able to offer stipends and water quality credits
- TSPs and TA providers get paid to be at these events, so should farmers
- Helpful to connect with farmers at their own farm
- Hard to catch farmers in general

- Surveys at the end of events typically show growth
- Get farmers more aware of why they are being asked to do different things in terms of RAPs and regulations
- Do we tap into existing things – field days, existing workshops?
- Have an attractive item at the event – machines, equipment
- How to advertise
  - Press release, social media, partners with newsletters, Front Porch Forum, listservs; farmers telling their own friends, direct one on one outreach
  - Strategically placed information
- In your exit survey – what else do farmers want
- Can there be a shared events calendar so that all TA providers can know what's going on?
- District Managers need to share ideas and topics so as to not keep reinventing the wheel
- Trickiness with funding because sponsoring and cosponsoring events are very different things; need to be a lead organizer to count the event as a deliverable
- Like the ideas of big field days but these are hard to organize
- Where can we table
- Idea from Burlington Farmers Market – bring livestock to entice people to stop at your booth
- Attend summer programs – like before summer concert/music series to give general presentations
- Use language from Water Words that Work
  - Need to know how simple to go
- Let's have a VAWQP training about outreach and education
  - What to say/use?
  - How to talk to the general public
  - How to answer questions to keep question askers involved
  - Issue with us all using alphabet soup
- All professions have an issue with communicating their area of expertise
- How to frame a presentation / restructure
- Give and take – make sure you communicate to audience that they are also experts and should share from their perspective
- Give people information back in their own language

## Research and Innovation

- What research is going on by organizations/institutions
- What are farmers trying on their own
- What's new in manure management + energy + nutrient recovery/management
- What doesn't seem to be working as intended
- What questions are we collectively still grappling with
- Do other organizations need to get involved in research to help close gaps
- How can we all learn from each other

- UVM field trials
- Ferment on the farm
- SARE research
- Josh Faulkner on tile drain
- Julie Moore tile Drain Report to Legislature
- There was a large discussion on tile drain effect on water quality, lack of progress after findings ie. Lack of initiative in “next steps”. Lack of solid data statewide related to existence of tiled fields – farms that do not report tile have a different p-index that allows them to spread more. Sampling tile after rain events is difficult to capture, even 8 hours after rain the tile can be at a trickle but there is evidence of large movement of water has occurred from the drain.
- Northeast Cover Crop Council – cover crop finder tool

#### Full Group share back from Small Groups – Overall Sentiments

- Need to release agricultural land back to nature
  - Enforcement side
  - Pasture restoration
  - River Corridor Easements
  - Need to develop a packet for the landowner - Ben Gabos is good at this
- How many programs we are all working on and navigating and trying to share with farmers
- Things that feel helpful
  - Orientation
  - Assistance guide
  - Stored in a shared place and to where referrals should go
  - Create a decision tree for a concern on a farm
- Attendance at events / programs – making sure farms know; get on the ground
- Turnover is hard for farmers – they want reliability too
- Need training on how to get WQ data?
  - How to prioritize areas / pollutants
- Next time
  - Goal for info
  - Pasture management
  - Partner database
  - AAFM – how the data is being organized?

**Conclude Meeting at 1:00 pm**