

Northwest Zone VAWQP Meeting

Thursday, February 6, 2025, 9am – 1pm

Bliss Room, St. Albans Historical Museum

Attendance List

VAWQP Partners

* = attending on Zoom

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM)

- Brittany Cole (brittany.cole@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Noah Gilbert-Fuller (noah.gilbert-fuller@vermont.gov), Water Quality Program Coordinator
- Abbi Pajak* (Abbi.pajak@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Dillan Westcom (dillan.westcom@vermont.gov), VAAFAM Agricultural Engineer
- Julia Riesman (Julia.Riesman@vermont.gov), ECO AmeriCorps Service Member
- Sumner LeBaron-Brien* (sumner.lebaron-brien@vermont.gov), Program Coordinator
- Mianda Wood (mianda.wood@vermont.gov), Inspector

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Sarah Larose (sarah.larose@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Renee Bolduc (renee.bolduc@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Lauren Gibson (lauren.gibson@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Emily Lugthart (emily.lugthart@usda.gov), Natural Resource Specialist
- Luis Aponte (luis.aponte@usda.gov), Assistant State Conservationist- Field Operations
- Caitlin Richman* (caitlin.richman@usda.gov), Program Assistant
- Diana Dellinger* (diana.dellinger@usda.gov), Assistant State Conservationist for Programs
- Cheyanne Rico* (cheyanne.rico@usda.gov), Outreach Coordinator for VT NRCS
- Molly Baker (molly.baker@usda.gov), Civil Engineer

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Emily Jaquish (emily.jaquish@vt.nacdnet.net), Program Assistant

- Julia King (julia.king@vacd.org), VACD Communications Manager
- Katy Langenhorst (katy.langenhorst@vacd.org), VACD Communications and Outreach Specialist, ECO AmeriCorps Member
- Jamie Cohen (jamie.cohen@partner.vermont.gov), Ag Resource Specialist/VPFP Programs

Lamoille County Natural Resources Conservation District (LCCD)

- Peter Danforth (lccddirector@gmail.com), District Manager
- Sarah Skelding (lccd.ag.ss@gmail.com), Agricultural Program Specialist
- Caleb Nollenberger (lcc.ad.cn@gmail.com), Agricultural Program Specialist

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Molly Varner (molly.gicnrcd@gmail.com), District Manager

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

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

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District (FCNRC)

- Lauren Weston (lauren@franklincountynrcd.org), District Manager
- Kate Wettergreen (kate@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Manager
- Dorothy Kinney-Landis* (dorothy@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Planner
- Morgan Pratt* (morgan@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Maria Burnett (maria@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Orenna Brand (orenna@franklincountynrcd.org), Community Engagement Coordinator and Field Technician

Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

- No one present

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

- Karen Bates (karen.bates@vermont.gov), Watershed Planner
- Marli Rupe* (marli.rupe@vermont.gov), Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief
- Staci Pomeroy (staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov), River Scientist
- Sloane Sullivan (Sloane.Sullivan@Partner.Vermont.gov), ECO AmeriCorps Member - Clean Water Communications Specialist

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

- Shannon MacDonald (shannon.macdonald@uvm.edu), Outreach & Program Promotion Specialist
- Jeffrey Sanders* (jeffrey.sanders@uvm.edu, Agronomy Specialist

Vermont Farm Service Agency (FSA)

- Ali Malone (alison.malone@usda.gov), County Executive Director
- Connie Brigham (constance.brigham@usda.gov), Program Technician
- Denise Kellner (denise.kellner@usda.gov), Farm Loan Manager
- Eliza Rainville* (eliza.rainville@usda.gov), Farm Loan Officer Trainee

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Chris Smith (chris_e_smith@fws.gov), Supervisory Fish And Wildlife Biologist

Non-VAWQP Partners

Vermont Land Trust

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

Friends of Northern Lake Champlain

- Bridget Butler (bbutler@friendsofnorthernlakechamplain.org), Executive Director

Farmers Watershed Alliance

- Sara Gratz* (sara@farmerswatershedalliance.org), Program Coordinator

Elephant in the room: administration change & recent executive orders – Lauren Weston, FCNRCD District Manager

- Acknowledging uncertainty & change with the new administration
- The relationships we are building today are necessary to weather these changes

State-level CAFO updates – Abbi Pajak, VT ANR CAFO Program Manager

- ANR is revising corrective action plan from EPA to increase compliance, enforcement, and public outreach
- To receive updates, fill out the [web form](#) on DEC's CAFO webpage; also feel free to email Abbi to enter questions into the record
 - o Questions will be used to understand how to provide outreach when there are answers

Results of VAWQP Survey – Alli Lewis, VAWQP Partnership Coordinator

- Reminder: registration for VAWQP Annual Meeting in Killington opening soon
- Survey will be used by VAWQP Steering Committee to inform development the next five-year Strategic Plan
- Survey looks at statewide and regional data to capture:
 - o Top bottlenecks/limitations in delivering conservation
 - o Existing partnership efforts to support
 - o How the VAWQP collaboration could improve
- 94 responses so far, many from Northwest region, would like to see more responses from UVM partners
- [Survey](#) is still open
- [Results](#) - state and regional
 - o Top bottlenecks: limited capacity, program application requirements, staff turnover
 - o Top helpful things to support: cross-org program training, one-location tool for programs (navigating staff, navigating programs/resources)
- Feedback for Alli: Does this capture what we're seeing on the ground?

Farm Teams Discussion – Kate Wettergreen, FCNRCD Agricultural Programs Manager

- Challenges we're feeling:
 - o Limited capacity of internal staff, program requirements, staff turnover, project turnaround time
- Challenges we're hearing from farmers:
 - o Navigating programs, unsure whom to contact, deadlines, limited time and resources
- Potential solutions:

- One-location tool of programs, cross-org training (program & field), district Farm Teams
- Farm Teams:
 - Mission is to provide support to farmers' decision making and coordinate agricultural services
 - Designed for farmers who work with multiple service providers
 - Typically has 4-8 team members, regularly scheduled meetings
- Current Farm Team project:
 - Scenario: challenges in barnyard with water flow, broken culvert on laneway crossing stream below farm, need for updated solution for manure management, want to expand rotational grazing, limited time and resources
 - Which programs/peoples need to be at the table?
 - Sarah Larose: depends on who the farmer wants to work with
 - Resource Planner (Wetlands or Rivers agency in DEC), NRCS Planner, NRCS Engineer, BMP, PSWFP, VHCB
 - Reality: 16 people!
 - Other districts' Farm Teams try to limit the number of people involved
- What do we want this to look like in the Northwest Zone?
 - Group Discussion: informal or formal, role of districts, benefits or challenges, how to include regulatory folks, how to build trust and communication
 - Notes collected from each table
- Share-out:
 - Desire for some more structure but not strict formality
 - Karen Bates: sitting down with a map to understand where the problems are in the watershed, understand the solutions on a larger scale
 - How are we all connected geographically
 - Is there a common barrier?
 - Is this an exercise we can do with Basin 6?
 - Role of districts:
 - Sharing information as needed (not always full group)
 - Other gaps that need to be filled in this process?
 - FLNC: small watershed groups are connecting water quality data – how can that be brought into work with farmers?
 - How to pull water quality orgs or land trusts into the conversation?

Program Updates

Diana Dellinger, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

- Federal gov't has a lot of things on pause, NRCS appreciates partner support during this period
- FY24 Final Obligation Summary: \$29 million over 51k acres
 - o Easements, RCPP, EQIP, CSP
- Funding Opportunity: ACT NOW
 - o Designed to accelerate the timeframe from application to contract obligation, to help get conservation on the ground quickly and efficiently
 - o Applications ranked according to local resource concerns, the amount of conservation benefits the work will provide, and the needs of applicants as they are submitted
 - o With this authority, NRCS can now pre-approve applications when they meet or exceed pre-determined minimum ranking score
 - o Funding available through EQIP
 - o Targeted cropland practices, CPA/DIA/CEMAs
 - o Sign up period: Feb 2 – March 30, need to be registered and eligible with FSA
- FY25 EQIP & CSP payment limitations: at this time, EQIP & CSP contracts will not be subject to limitations, since the farm bill is delayed
- Anything with IRA funding is put on pause (including easements)

Sarah Larose, NRCS District Conservationist

- Pauses on IRA and BIL funding are trickling down to customers
- If farmers have any questions, Sarah can talk to them
- Hiring freeze
- Moving forward with FY25 applications, just the normal pot of money (no IRA)
- Working to implement changes from the new administration – a lot in flux
- Aug 22, 2025: FY26 application deadline
- Act Now application is open until March 30, all will be considered

Ali Malone, FSA County Executive Director

- Expecting some staffing changes with administration change
 - o Office is short staffed and will likely lose some employees without being able to rehire

- Currently funded through March 14
- Marketing Assistance for Specialty Growers program application closed, \$400k for Franklin and \$20k for Grand Isle (statewide \$1.6 million)
- Reminder that disaster relief programs require reports of damage from producers
- Regular loan servicing resuming on Feb 20

Dillan Westcom - VAAFAM Agricultural Engineer – BMP Updates

- Engineers are changing BMP application deadlines to May
- Ranking will go until July 1
- Still taking emergency projects
- Ranking projects for next year (receive grant this year, construction next year)

Brittany Cole - VAAFAM Water Quality Specialist

- Regulatory side has lost zero staff in the last year

Karen Bates – VT DEC Watershed Coordinator, Basins 5, 6, and 7

- Starting TBP planning process again, looking for things to focus on
 - o Focus on enhanced hydrology using strategic woody additions
 - o Stormwater management – new assessment tools
- Need help finding projects for CWSP

Holly McClintock – VHCB Agricultural Program Coordinator

- Legislature back in session
- Governor is supporting VHCB budget, but more will go to housing than conservation
- Lots of uncertainty
- Updates from Betsy:
 - o Award results will be announced to water quality grantees in March
 - o Slightly less competitive year than last (\$1 mil in request, \$600k to grant)

Shannon MacDonald – UVM Extension NW Crops & Soils Program Outreach Specialist

- Beginning work on a 1-year grant from the Leahy Institute to create an on-farm network platform

Chris Smith – USFW Supervisory Fish and Wildlife Biologist

- Uncertainty on federal side of things
- Start planting trees in 6-7 weeks for CREP
- Working closely with NRCS on easement programs, apps were due in January, starting to think of wetland restoration projects

Molly Varner – GICNRCD District Manager

- Working on Stream Wise, clean water projects
- Helping one farmer through NMP class
- Strategic planning with FLNC and SHLT

Caleb Nollenberger – LCNRC Agricultural Program Specialist

- Peter Danforth is at TBP 7 planning meeting
- Busy with tree plantings and tree sale
- Need to identify clean water projects
- Doing ag programs outreach to new farmers

Julia King – VACD Communications Manager

- Jill Arace is retiring, new Executive Director Michelle Monroe has been hired

Lauren Weston – FCNRCD District Manager

- Moved to new office at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, in St. Albans, hosted fun open house
- Retained staff for last 6 months
- In final stretches of PFP, about 30 farms
- Secured funding for dam removal project
- Tree sale first weekend in May