

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

Thursday, August 22, 2024 at the Saint Albans Museum
9 Church Street, Saint Albans, VT 05478

**Indicates attendance on Zoom*

Attendees

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFMM)

Nina Gage, nina.gage@vermont.gov, Assistant Director Division of Water Quality
Noah Gilbert-Fuller, noah.gilbert-fuller@vermont.gov, Water Quality Program Coordinator
Lee King, lee.king@vermont.gov, Water Quality Specialist
*Dillan Westcom, dillan.westcom@vermont.gov, Engineer
Brittany Cole, brittany.cole@vermont.gov, Water Quality Specialist
Ellen Friedrich, ellen.friedrich@vermont.gov, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator
*Mianda Wood, mianda.wood@vermont.gov, Water Quality Specialist
*Emma Redel, emma.redel@vermont.gov, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator
David Wardrop, david.wardrop@vermont.gov, Water Quality Specialist

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

Will Ebby, william.ebby@vt.nacdnet.net, Resource Support Technician
Shannon Harty, shannon.harty@vt.nacdnet.net, GIS/UAV Technician
Emily Nummer, emily.nummer@vacd.org, Agricultural Program Manager
Emily Jaquish, emily.jacquish@usda.gov, Program Assistant
Julia King, julia.king@vacd.org, Communications Manager

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

Elijah Schumacher, elijah.schumacher@vermont.gov, District Wetlands Ecologist
Kait Jones, kaitlyn.jones@vermont.gov, Agricultural Grant Program Coordinator

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

Alli Lewis, alli.lewis@vacd.org, Coordinator

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Logan Reese, logan.reese@usda.gov, Natural Resource Specialist
Renee Bolduc, renee.bolduc@usda.gov, Soil Conservationist
Sarah Larose, sarah.larose@usda.gov, Zone District Conservationist
Emily Lugthart, emily.lugthart@usda.gov, Natural Resources Specialist
Caitlin Richman, caitlin.silber@usda.gov, Program Assistant
*Luis Aponte, luis.aponte@usda.gov, Assistant State Conservationist-Partnerships
Joe Bondi, joseph.bondi@usda.gov, Water Quality Specialist
Chris Evans, christopher.evans2@usda.gov, Forester
Sean Pease, sean.pease@usda.gov, Soil Conservationist

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District (FCNRD)

Dorothy Kinney-Landis, dorothy@franklincountynrcd.org, Projects Coordinator
Kate Wettergreen, kate@franklincountynrcd.org, Agricultural Programs Manager
Lauren Weston, lauren@franklincountynrcd.org, District Manager
Orenna Brand, orena@franklincountynrcd.org, Community Outreach Coordinator
Maria Burnett, maria@franklincountynrcd.org, Agricultural Program Specialist
Morgan Pratt, morgan@franklincountynrcd.org, Agricultural Program Specialist
Kerry Brosnan, kerry@franklincountynrcd.org, Natural Resource Planner

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District (GICNRCD)

Molly Varner, molly.gicnrcd@gmail.com, District Manager

US Fish and Wildlife, Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Chris Smith, chris_e_smith@fws.gov, Supervisory Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Farm Service Agency

Connie Brigham, constance.brigham@usda.gov, Program Technician
Denise Kellner, denise.kellner@usda.gov, Farm Loan Manager
Alexis Brown, alexis.brown@usda.gov, Loan Assistant
Ali Malone, Alison.malone@usda.gov, County Executive Director

Lake Champlain Basin Program

Katie Darr, kdarr@lcbp.org, CAC Coordinator/CABN Coordinator

Vermont Land Trust (VLT)

Tucker Malone, tucker@vlt.org, Project Director

Minutes

8:30-9:30 People gather, mingle, and do some art projects (barnyard animal drawings)

9:30: Lauren Weston, FCNRCD District Manager

- Welcomes folks and thanks everyone for their patience and recommends people continue to do artwork throughout the day
- Showcases two fliers: 'Why do farmers spread manure' and 'Bike Along the Black Creek'
- Suggests people get up and move around and network with people they don't know
- Shares the agenda

9:37 Alli Lewis, VAWQP Coordinator

- Shares a land acknowledgement

9:38 Nina Gage, VAAFM Water Quality Assistant Director

The VAAFM Water Quality Division has three main components:

1. Inspect and regulate farms
2. Programs section for grants and cost-share programs
3. Investing in local partnership organizations

Flooding - [VT Flood Imagery \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

After the July 2023 floods, there were multiple organizations that surveyed flooding, and there was a task force developed. Survey impact data has now been completed, and the major flood issues and potential support programs have been studied. We're hopeful that we'll be more prepared for the next flood event.

- July 2023 floods: 27,318 acres impacted, and \$16 million reported in damages.
- July 2024 floods: 88 farms reported losses, 3166 acres impacted, and \$4.57 million reported in damages

The most detrimental flood costs for the July 2024 floods:

1. loss of crops for sale,
2. loss of crops for feed

Whereas the opposite was true July 2023 floods, with the most detrimental costs being:

1. loss of crops for feed
2. loss of crops for sale

When a flood occurs, there is a lot that farmers are asked to do, including documenting damages with photographic evidence, receipts, and invoices.

There are three places where farms should report damages:

1. 211, which collects information on damages. Emergency personnel use this to justify FEMA, and it directly plays into FEMA eligibility.
2. FSA for insurance.
3. VAAFM Survey - capturing survey data at the state level. This impacts the amount of state funds available to fill the gaps. In order to get state funding, we need to document the need and then go through legislation to request funds.

When asked 'what are you going to do to improve resilience on your farm?', here's what farmers had to say:

- Acquire more land
- Plant different crops
- Improve soil structure
- Take land out of production
- Close their business

Farmers can change their rotations to reduce how much they're planting on floodplains, and flooding events can change how their NMP is designed.

Only 6% of people indicated mental health resources as a recovery need. Brought up FarmFirst: <https://www.farmfirst.org/>

The Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) provided some regulatory guidance on floodplains and flood debris in fields.

- Debris can't be stored in fields
- There are River Engineers that can come out to help people, however they're super busy immediately post floods

Flooded hay crops for livestock: can be a source of pathogens. Agronomists suggest not to harvest flooded hay, as it can produce mycotoxins.

Flooded corn crops for livestock: the biggest concern is respiration of the root.

Flooded pastures: If it's flooded and heavily silted, it can be very dangerous for animals. Ideally, wait a year to graze it. If a farmer can't do that, don't graze too closely.

Assistance Resources

<p>Business viability assistance: Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) Farm and Forest Viability Program: https://vhcb.org/viability</p>	<p>Business planners typically have a 2-year long program, however some business planners can do immediate post flood assistance without the 2-year commitment for farmers</p>
<p>Insurance options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Private crop insurance or USDA crop insurance. Never going to get paid for the full amount. ➤ Farm liability insurance. Farm buildings are covered.
<p>NOFA</p>	<p>Farmer emergency fund: https://www.nofavt.org/farmer-emergency-fund</p>
<p>VAAFM</p>	<p>Has programs that could help with flood impacts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ FAP: deadline closed for the fall, NRCS deadline is Aug 23 ➤ CREP: take land out of production ➤ SFS: seeding and filter strip program. Rebranding from GWFS. ➤ PSWF
<p>FEMA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 211 helps determine FEMA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Primary financial program for those who are in residential areas. Not a lot of money ➤ Rental assistance, home repair, pPublic infrastructure FEMA is now available for the July 7-10 floods ➤ Any farm who is an individual sole proprietor is eligible for individual assistance. Farmers no longer have to go through USDA.
State of Vermont (SOV) Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program (BEGAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Approximately \$7 million available ➤ 40% of this is going to be allocated towards farmers. ➤ However, there's a LOT of paperwork required, and a farmer should have a business advisor.

10:05: Sarah Larose, Zone District Conservationist (NRCS)

- [EWP: Emergency Watershed Program](#). Runs continuously.
- Last year NRCS offered an EQIP Disaster Assistance program. This year they have decided not to offer an EQIP Disaster Assistance program, but they do have other programs
- The new RCPP 3273 added additional resource concerns, one of which is flood resiliency
- Local funding pool deadline for Northwest Zone: October 31st
- Each disaster that does happen is taken into consideration.
- The EQIP DA was a separate pot of money, the EQIP DA FY24 funding pool (which was created to continue funding of the Disaster Assistance applications) this came out of our regular pool of money and was not extra/additional funds.
- Offers TA to FSA.

10:10: Alison Malone, County Executive Director for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties (FSA)

DISASTER ASSISTANCE AND RECOVERY, FSA Program Updates

Natural disaster has to occur to trigger these programs (i.e., Flooding, Wind, Ice, Hail)

Has to have a 30% threshold in loss in order to trigger assistance.

[Emergency Conservation Program \(ECP\)](#)

Damages Covered: Repairs physical damage to cropland and other agricultural land. Two lane tractor roads potentially covered (case by case basis). Helps to remove debris from farmland, woody materials, sand, rock and trash on cropland or pastureland. Clear snow from feedstock, water supplies, and feeding areas.

Restoring fences, restoring conservation structures (culverts are case by case).

Emergency water for grazing and confined livestock and assistance in irrigation for vineyards and orchards.

- Crop, farm or ranch land (10ac avg size ~\$3,800)
- Skid steer, truck, tractor, trailer, equipment operator (included in costs)
- Hard to figure out which scenario fits the producer best

Process For Applications: Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and the program is cost-share based. A farmer has to preemptively call FSA and report damages. The County Emergency Board meets and discusses the damages that have been reported, and they need to recommend that ECP is needed. The County Committee then has to approve the recommendation. It's run through an electronic system and then approved at a national level.

There's a minimum qualifying cost of \$1000 (\$750 for SDA qualified farmers). The program can't disperse funds to a farmer until everything is done up to NRCS standards. Farmers can request advanced payment up to 50% of what they're approved for.

Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)

Damages Covered: This program fixes something that is caused by a natural disaster only if left untreated, natural resources will be impaired. The landowner needs to have a Forest Management Plan (FMP) and the forest has to be managed for agricultural purposes in order to qualify. Practices covered by this program include debris removal (down or damaged trees), site preparation (planting materials and labor), restoration of forest land roads (fire lanes), tree tubes, wildlife enhancements (cover openings for wildlife habitat). Recreational trails usually aren't covered.

Process for Applications: The process is the same as that for ECP. The producer has to call to request EFRP. It's a cost-share program based on payment scenarios.

Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP)

Damages Covered: Natural disaster triggered. Have to have grazing acres certified on acreage reports. Dairy operations are not eligible for ELAP unless they graze dry cows or young stock, only eligible for animals grazing on that land. Must have grazing acres reported on FSA-578. Confined cows are not considered. Livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, adverse weather conditions. Losses not covered by other disaster assistance programs (VT typically does not qualify for drought).

Process for Applications: Although this program is also disaster triggered, it has its own program year. It runs every year until July 31. Applications are due by January 30th of the year disaster occurred. Only authorized until January 2025 (if Farm Bill is not extended).

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

Damages Covered: Provides financial assistance to producers for non-insurable crops. To be eligible, you have to have had a lower yield compared to previous years or crop loss. You HAVE to be signed up prior. This is risk mitigation rather than disaster response. Safety net, not designed as an afterthought. Qualifying losses vary based on qualifying losses projected. Have to lose over ½ of their crop in order to trigger a payment (only pay 55% of price for state farm crop). Buyout coverage offers 100% of price of crop.

Process for Applications: \$325 per crop as an admin fee. Historically underserved farmers: fee is waived. USDA farmers: fee is reduced by 50%. Catastrophic coverage: not a lot. For hand harvested crops (veggie farms), you have 72 hours to report damage. You don't have to fill out paperwork in that time, but you do need to give the office a call. For mechanically harvested crops (hay), you have 15 days.

Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)

Damages Covered: Benefits to eligible livestock or contract growers for excess death caused by conditions (weather disease, drowning, attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by governments [i.e., federally protected animal]). Livestock have to be maintained for commercial use. If livestock are for personal consumption, it does not qualify.

Payments adjusted for livestock mortality, set by national average fair market value of livestock. Disaster designations only open up emergency funding to FSA, move payment to the end of term. Have to meet the 30% threshold in loss in order to trigger.

10:30-11:00 Networking Break

11:00 Shannon Harty and Will Ebby from Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

VACD Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS)

Overview: VACD is a nonprofit in partnership with NRCS. Under USDA NRCS policy, NRCS isn't allowed to own drones. VACD received a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) license. NRCS provides VACD with funding support, and VACD runs drones for NRCS projects. This started in 2019, and VACD recently received a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG). The program was founded in 2019 and has since purchased two drones. They are currently in the process of purchasing hardware and have done a lot of outreach.

Drone information:

- **Rachel Flyson:** Smaller, use for promotional imagery shots, used for smaller projects
- **Bessie Flyman:** Flies on larger areas, over 200 acres, can withstand high wind speeds, good batteries, can capture highly accurate location data, helps to develop elevation and contour line data which can be shared with engineers.

Data process / Collaboration Information

1. Flight planning
 - a. Share details about the project and call
 - b. If submit flight request can join for data collection
2. Data Acquisition
 - c. Time saving, so planner does not have to walk out in field
3. Post flight data processing
 - d. Data shared over cloud-based software (link)
 - e. Do not need NRCS credentials to see imagery
 - f. Can share imagery with landowners

Resulting Data:

- Most common is orthomosaic
 - A high-resolution aerial image
- Elevation model
 - Great for engineers who need high accurate elevation data

Past Projects	
Orleans County NRCD: Floodplain Restoration	Barton, VT (Along the Barton river). Landowner has unproductive corn and is interested in exploring floodplain restoration projects. Imagery and elevation data. High resolution imagery (better than satellite imagery). Can see gullies forming, eroding down into the river. Can see differences in productivity across the field.
WRE Flood Damage Assessment	The goal is to assess damage and changes to hydrology post July 2024 flooding

	<p>It's a large site, the team was able to cover the ground a lot more quickly with the drone than they would have if they were walking the site. There's some sediment deposition, and the drone provided helpful insights to the wetlands team. Great for getting aerial imagery, the team can review it in the office, and then can get a super accurate location for any spots they want to do a field check rather than sending the team out to a flooded wetland.</p>
--	---

Benefits of Drone Services:

- Helps people to get accurate location for damage assessment so they can walk directly to location instead of wandering around.
- Quicker than a traditional survey
- Survey hard to reach areas
- High accuracy elevation data
- Up to date aerial imagery monitor change over time
- Experience new technology and training opportunities

Each time a drone flies, it collects data which offers opportunity for change over time.

Future work and goals:

- Primary goal is to support NRCS conservation planning
 - Most of their time is funded through an NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant
- Interested in purchasing multi spectral sensor
- Goals to work with Districts and other partners
- If you can envision technology in your work, fill out a flight request form (Lauren Weston to share at a future date).
 - Purpose of the flight request form: understand partner interest, determine project goals and data needs, determine timeline for data acquisition, landowner consent form

Q/A:

- Question: Who does VACD drone collected elevation technology compare to existing survey data/statewide lidar? Answer: Accurate to within one tenth of a foot but vegetation can skew accuracy because VACD drone technology does not penetrate through leaves.

- They do not have lidar capability yet. There is technology out there, and lidar sensors for drones that are relatively affordable. Future steps include finding funding for lidar sensor and other sensors to build foundation.
- New sensors can analyze chlorophyll level in a plant, potential for help with tree survivorship counts. Potential to also help ID reed canary grass, purple loosestrife (potential to identify invasive / aggressive species).

Roundtable Updates From Partners

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP, presented by Katie Darr)

- [Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystem Implementation & Planning Grants RFP](#) Press Release, Proposals due October 3
- [State of the Lake](#) Report & [Recorded Presentation](#)

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB, presented by Lauren Weston)

- Upcoming conference on October 7th: [Sowing Seeds: Conservation Connections for a Resilient Future](#)
- There's a great mix of sessions, including flood mitigation and resilience, riparian area and restoration, urban conservation and stewardship, and appraisal fundamentals.
- Link on homepage of VHCB website where [folks can sign up for email updates](#)
- The Leahy Memphremagog clean water program in the last round funded 12 proposals for riparian areas, etc.
- Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP) - completed first project

UVM Extension (Presented by Lauren Weston)

Flooding resources (manage damage crops, manage silt) [updated on their website.](#)

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Rivers update (Presented by Lauren Weston)

- Staci Pomeroy is the Vermont DEC River Scientist for our region
- Continuing to work with partners to explore possible restoration project
- Potential River Corridor Easements could be something that partners help scope out
 - How this is done: work with DEC River Scientists to determine if the site is a good candidate for a River Corridor Easement. If so, check to see if the landowner is interested. If so, the project then moves onto the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Vermont River Conservancy (VRC)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) could be something to look into along with water quality funding. maybe with VLT, partner orgs

- Projects may take 2-3 years or longer to move from the start of conversations with landowners to implementation. This depends on the complexity of the project and staff capacity within VLT and VRC to move projects forward.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) RCPP update (Presented by Kait Jones)

- RCPP – DEC received another RCPP award of \$10.7 million.
 - \$8.1 million is going directly to agriculture and forestry producers
 - Sign up deadline is August 23, 2024
 - Landowners get additional points in the ranking if they are bundled through DEC, direct to Kait
 - There are 3 initiatives for new RCPP: 1. water quality 2. habitat 3. flood resilience
 - 2 funding rounds

Vermont Agency of Agriculture (Presented by Nina Gage, Brittany Cole, Noah Gilbert-Fuller and others)

Two rules open for public comment (vote is Sept. 9th, 2024 for both).

- Best Management Practices (BMP) program rule
 - Public hearing on updated rule will be held on Thursday, August 29th, from 3-4:30 pm at 116 State Street in Montpelier. There will be a hybrid option via Microsoft Teams.
 - Provides EQIP assistance- \$200,000 additional assistance to project being implemented on farm
 - Provides state only projects up to \$100,000
 - Rule originally written in 1996, updating while not necessarily changing.
- Technical Service Provider (TSP) rule
 - Public hearing will be held on Thursday, August 29th from 1-3 pm at 116 State Street in Montpelier. There will be a hybrid option via Microsoft Teams.
 - Allows the state authority to regulate TSPs
 - Does not apply to District staff
 - Allows the state to audit anyone at any time to ensure compliance with the 590 standard.

Grant updates:

- Equipment-Only Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program is a grant for processing, value added production. The [Request for Applications \(RFA\)](#) is now available. Applications open on August 28th, 2024, and close on October 1st.

- [Capital Equipment Assistance Program \(CEAP\)](#) includes precision agriculture, conservation tillage, cover crop equipment, waste management, and feed management. This year the program will be accepting applications for skid shoes for producers to cut hay at a higher height.
- If people apply for the [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) through NRCS, the [Vermont Farmers Ecosystem Stewardship Program, also known as CSP Assist](#) is a state program that incentivizes involvement with CSP. It will likely no longer be available after this year, as there was a one-time pool of funds for this program. Probably not available longer than this year (one time bucket for that program)
- The deadline for NRCS applications is August 23rd. However, if someone has already applied for CSP, they can apply for the state-funded CSP Assist program after the NRCS deadline has passed.
- [Best Management Practices \(BMP\) program](#): provides technical and financial assistance in the implementation of structural improvements designed to decrease agricultural waste discharges to Vermont waters. Money is getting tighter on this program. For those working with [NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) and EQIP-Assist projects, it's important to connect with Ellen Friedrich as soon as possible. The state is getting to the point where they might not be able to offer assistance through this program. Priorities for funding include wider harvestable filter strips around fields and are offering to seed down into annual crop land with perennials.

Act 250 Updates (Presented by Noah Gilbert-Fuller, VAAFAM)

- In 2018, Act 143 created a specific zoning designation for [Accessory On Farm Business \(AOFBs\)](#). AOFBs can help to increase revenue and improve farm viability. Passed through Act 143 and the estimated land use category that separated commercial activities and made them a farming activity.
- In 2024, the Legislature passed Act 181, which expanded AOFBs' ability to sell qualifying products that are not produced on the farm where an AOFB is located, added new types of eligible products, and created related Act 250 exemptions
- Act 250 exemptions now include:
 - Construction of improvements for the storage or sale of qualifying products are exempt from Act 250 permitting
 - Construction of improvements for the preparation or processing of qualifying products are exempt from Act 250 permitting, provided that more than 50% of the total annual sales of the prepared or processed qualifying products come from products produced on the farm where the business is located
 - Construction of improvements related to hosting events or farm stays remain subject to Act 250 and were not impacted by the legal changes.
- For more information on recent changes, please refer to [this fact sheet on Act 181 and Accessory On Farm Businesses](#).
- And we've added additional information explaining the changes to our webpage about AOFB: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/development/accessory-farm-businesses>

Staffing Changes

- Connor Steckel was previously a Water Quality Specialist and is now a Grazing Specialist at VAAF.
- David Wardrop and Mianda Wood are Water Quality Specialists that split this area.
- Luke Hughes is also a Water Quality Specialist working in Northern Lake Champlain and the Islands.
- Lee King is a Water Quality Specialist working in Addison and Otter Creek.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS presented by Sarah Larose)

Travis Thomason, Vermont State Conservationist, announced that NRCS will be going through some structural changes. NRCS customers will not be affected, as the organization is hoping to make this transition as smooth as possible. These changes are scheduled to take effect on October 1st, 2024.

These changes include:

- Zones are being relabeled as Teams. The Northwest Zone is now the 'Northwest Team'
- Lamoille County will align with Orleans County, and David Blodgett will now start to oversee that region.
- Phyllicia Moore is the new Assistant State Conservationist- Field Operations
- Cheyanne Rico is new Outreach Coordinator
- Adam Dellinger is the new RCPP Coordinator at the office
- Diana Dellinger is the new Assistant for Conservation Processes
- Iliana Freiday, on-detail helping the wetlands team at the state office.
- Public Affairs Specialist Trevor Saylor is leaving at the end of September.
- Additional positions being advertised (4 District Conservationists, Soil Conservationist positions)

US Fish and Wildlife Service (Presented by Chris Smith)

General:

- At the national level, USFWS is closing out the fiscal year on September 30th. Most projects for this year are being completed, and planning for next year has begun.
- At the state level, the Lake Champlain Office has been operating without a supervisor for 2 years. It has just been filled by Laurie Burly.
- Waiting on a listing decision for three turtle species (wood turtle - uses riparian areas, spotted turtle, one other)
- Vermont Fish and Wildlife works with private landowners to do habitat restoration.

- Katie Kain is a biologist who does riparian buffers and works closely with the CREP program. Contact Katie if you need help planning or have questions about riparian buffers.
- Ryan Crehan is a wetlands specialist. He completes assessments, planning, designs, and surveys in conjunction with NRCS.

Area of Interest (Aquatic Organism Passage)

- David Minkoff and Julie Butler are Aquatic biologists working on [aquatic organism passages in Vermont](#). So far, they haven't done much work on private and farm roads, but there are many opportunities to provide aquatic passage on farm roads. They will be working on crossing structures that threaten water species (primarily brook trout)
- Contact David and Julie if you need help.

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP presented by Alli Lewis)

- Continuing to work on newsletter
- There are regular rotating webinars
- Working on finding a venue for the winter annual meeting in the 2nd week in March of 2025
- Working on developing Lunch and Learn webinar series for the winter, which will be science focused
- Previous webinars have been recorded and [are listed on the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership website](#).

USDA FSA (Presented by Ali Malone)

- Staff Updates
 - Avery Williams: Orleans and Lamoille counties
 - Heather Thomas: no longer with USDA FSA.
 - Denise Kellner: new Farm Loan Manager in Grand Isle County
 - Connie Brigham: Farm Loan Program Assistant in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties
 - Alexis Brown is new Farm Loan Officer Trainee
- Other Updates
 - Program technicians have been reclassified to program analysts. Other than these positions having more program responsibility, not much has changed.
 - The biggest update came on May 30th, 2024. Producers used to only be able to request [Emergency Conservation Program \(ECP\)](#) assistance twice in a 10-year timespan. This has been updated to allow producers to request ECP assistance as many times as they need.

- [CREP](#) payment limitation: payment incentives are considered annual rentals. The payment limit is \$50,000.
- The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has allocated \$11.8 million to farmers-essentially loan forgiveness.

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD presented by Emily Nummer)

- Emily is the Agriculture Program Manager with VACD
- Reminder that if you are a Technical Assistance (TA) provider for a particular agency and you are seeing needs that your organization cannot fill, Conservation Districts can help navigate for right place
- Introduces Julia King, who is the new Communications Manager for VACD
- Molly Varner is continuing as the District Manager for Grand Isle County NRCD.

Vermont Land Trust (VLT presented by Tucker Malone)

Reminder that as you are talking to farmers about recovery in riparian areas, connect them with VLT. Their easements might have different guidelines compared to state regulations.

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District (Presented by Molly Varner)

- Continuing to attend and host events- it's been a busy summer!
- She will be in North Hero tonight (August 22nd, 2024) with Friends of Northern Lake Champlain (FNLC) to [teach the community about LakeWise](#).
- Have received a few grants through Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) to grow organizational capacity.
- They are diving into pursuing more clean water projects in the Islands and will continue that for the next year or two.
- Continuing to partner with Franklin County NRCD on agricultural projects
- This is the first year of participating in the [Stream Wise program](#), which allows them to go out and provide free assessments for landowners to improve habitat and protect water quality.
 - Refer landowners in Grand Isle County who would like a free assessment to Molly
 - Partnering with FNLC and will complete 8 assessments by spring 2025.
- Peter Danforth from [Lamoille County NRCD](#) couldn't be here today, but is hiring two new agricultural positions, which will be advertised soon.

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District (Presented by Lauren Weston)

Staffing Changes

- Kerry Brosnan, who was an ECO AmeriCorps member last year, is now a full-time staff member. Her new title is Natural Resources Planner.
- Other new staff include Maria Burnett (Agricultural Programs Specialist), Morgan Pratt (Agricultural Programs Specialist), and Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Coordinator and Field Technician)
- There is an open board member position at the District, which is currently making big decisions regarding purchasing a building for a new office space. Anyone who is interested doesn't need to own land in Franklin County, however they do need to live in Franklin County and have time for monthly meetings. Contact Lauren Weston if you or someone you know is interested in becoming a board member.

General

- Working on purchasing our own building, updates to come.
- Continuing to work on the soil health training program.
 - The final field workshop will be from 9-1 on September 12th at Cedar Circle Farm.
 - The winter webinars are now complete, and [are online for anyone who would like to watch.](#)
 - There will hopefully be a smaller version in the future
- We have a [skidder bridge rental program](#). Rental costs are \$100/month. If you or anyone you know is doing forestry work and are interested, contact the District.

Program Updates

- Assisting 30 farms in the Vermont Pay for Performance program and farms are benefitting from the financial assistance.
- Continuing clean water work by doing a lot of stream restoration designs with contracted engineers.
- Dorothy Kinney-Landis is updating the [Assistance for Agricultural Producers Guide](#) for 2025.
- A draft will be sent out to partner organizations in the fall, but in the meantime, please send program updates or info on new programs to Dorothy (dorothy@franklincountynrcd.org)

Upcoming Events

- Saturday, August 24th: Bike Along the Black Creek
- Wednesday, September 4th: Small Scale Dairy Processor Symposium at Shelburne Museum
- Monday, September 9th: Friends of Northern Lake Champlain Annual Meeting
- Saturday, September 21st: Christmas Tree Growers Panel in Georgia, VT
- Wednesday, September 25th: Funding Opportunities for Maple Producers

- September 26th-27th and October 17th -18th : Agronomic Principles for Hayland and Pasture Management Course
- October 7th: Vermont Conservation Conference: Sowing Seeds- Conservation Connections for a Resilient Future
- Wednesday, October 9th: Forestry Management for Maple Producers
- Wednesday, October 23rd: Organic Maple event
- Thursday, November 7th: Water Quality for Maple Producers
- November 20th - 21st: Annual Farm to Plate Network Gathering

Final comments (Lauren Weston and Alli Lewis)

- Please complete the VAWQP survey. These results go to management and leadership, who are actively renewing our strategic plan. Results from this survey will be informing our priorities moving forward.

[Fall 2024 VAWQP Regional Coordination Survey](#)