

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

Thursday, February 3, 2023

Attendees (*Indicates Zoom participant)

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM)

- Brittany Cole (Brittany.cole@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- David Wardrop (David.Wardrop@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Connor Steckel (connor.steckel@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Dillan Westcom (Dillan.Westcom@vermont.gov), Ag. Engineer
- Brodie Haenke (Brodie.Haenke@vermont.gov), WQ Program Coordinator
- Luke Hughes (Luke.Hughes@vermont.gov), Inspector
- Annika Fuller (Annika.Fuller@vermont.gov), ECO AmeriCorps
- Noah Gilbert-Fuller (noah.gilbert-fuller@vermont.gov), Water Quality Program Coordinator

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Travis Thomason (travis.thomason@usda.gov), State Conservationist
- Sarah Larose (sarah.larose@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Jowin Hernandez (jowin.hernandez@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Jimmy Young (james.young2@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Sean Pease (sean.pease@usda.gov), Soil Con Technician
- Nancy Allen (Nancy.allen@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Meryl Braconnier (Meryl.Braconnier@usda.gov), Conservation Planner

Lamoille County Conservation District (LCCD)

- Peter Danforth (lccddirector@gmail.com), District Manager
- Emma Sandman (emma.sandman32@gmail.com), Agriculture Specialist

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District

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

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

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

Franklin County Natural Resource Conservation District (FCNRCD)

- Lauren Weston (lauren.weston@usda.gov), District Manager
- Katy Dynarski (katherine.dynarski@usda.gov), Projects Coordinator
- Kate Wettergreen (katherine.wettergreen@usda.gov), Project Technician
- Mel Auffredou (temporary: fcncdstaff@gmail.com), Project Technician

Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Sarah Damsell (sarah.damsell@vt.nacdn.net), Conservation Specialist*

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

- Karen Bates (karen.bates@vermont.gov), Watershed Planner
- Staci Pomeroy (staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov), Regional River Scientist
- Marli Rupe (marli.rupe@vermont.gov), Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief
- Clarice Cutler (Clarice.Cutler@vermont.gov), CAFO Program Manager

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

- No one present

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

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

University of Vermont Extension – Northwest Crops and Soils Program

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

Vermont Farm Service Agency (FSA)

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

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Ryan Crehan (ryan_crehan@fws.gov), Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Minutes recorded by FCNRCD staff

11:00 – 11:28 Guests begin entering the meeting space, mingling, and finding seats.

11:28 – 11:29 Lauren thanks everyone for coming and introduces herself and the space.

11:29 – 11:31 Alli Lewis reads a land acknowledgment for the areas covered by the Northwest Zone.

Round Table Organization Updates

Each organization's representative provides a brief update on programs, staff, events, grants, and/or project updates.

11:31 – 11:36 VAQWP, Alli Lewis

VAQWP is focusing on funding and collaboration, as well as soil health and research.

The annual report is coming out very soon. The annual report is a great resource for anyone working with partners or the community. It is a single-page, double-sided report with all statistics for agricultural water quality reductions on the front. There is also a featured farmer story on the back of the report. There will be additional talking points and other related materials as well. There will most likely be an accompanying press release.

For the Lunch and Learn Series, there will be a short two-part series coming up this month. This series will focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We are working with Joshua Allen at NRCS to discuss NRCS tools related to this topic.

The Annual Partnership Meeting will be in person this year on March 21st at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. We have sent a couple "Save the Date" notifications in the newsletter. Those who are not receiving the newsletter should contact Alli to be added to the newsletter list. This year's theme is climate resiliency. Joshua Faulkner will give an hour-long keynote address about climate change in Vermont. This keynote will feature recent tile drain data from the VAAF study. It will also include a couple of studies that Joshua Faulkner and Alissa White (UVM) have conducted about what farmers are doing to increase climate resiliency in Vermont and New England. There will also be a panel in the afternoon to discuss how different organizations approach the idea of accessibility. This panel will include VAQWP partners as well as other organizational partners. The rest of the meeting will be organized into breakout discussions so guests can discuss data utilization for program implementation, improving collaboration, and meeting goals. The agenda and registration will be shared soon.

Alli shares a friendly reminder to please read the VAWQP newsletter. VAQWP is updating the newsletter to make it easier to pull information. At the top of the newsletter, there is a bulleted list of all upcoming meetings and associated contacts. This will also include funding opportunities and deadlines, employment opportunities, and links to partnership information and the Lake Champlain Basin science blog.

For new staff, VAQWP offers a robust, self-guided orientation program. If any partner has new staff, please get in touch with Alli to ensure that new staff have access to these resources (or see below).

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*)

11:36 – 11:38 VHCB Update, Holly McClintock

VHCB is looking for a Clean Water Program Director. VHCB has been looking to fill this position for around six months. It has been changed from a Manager position to a Director position. This position will be working on VHCB's role as a CWSP in the Memphremagog basin.

The Farm and Forest Viability Program's water quality grant applications for FY2023 closed on January 27th. VHCB is beginning the internal review process and decisions will be made in April. Please let producers that have applied for this grant know about this timeline.

The ACEP-ALE NRCS deadline is on February 10th. VHCB has been preparing for this deadline and receiving many pre-applications for easements. VHCB is also preparing for its March board meeting.

VHCB is working on a Payment for Ecosystem Services pilot program. VHCB presented this research to the legislature in January. Look out for a potential new grant program.

Holly tells guests to reach out to her with any related questions.

11:38 – 11:44 UVM Extension Update, Ivy Krezinski

Ivy introduces herself. She represents the Northwest Crops and Soils Team.

There will be many in-person and virtual events in February and March. There are flyers available and information is available on the UVM Extension website. These include the Dry Bean webinar, virtual Hemp Conference, No-Till and Cover Crop Conference (in-person, March 2nd), the Organic Dairy Producers Conference (in-person, at Vermont Technical College), and a Grain Producer webinar series (end of March).

UVM Extension is currently conducting nutrient management planning classes.

There are currently 27 people signed up for custom applicator certification exams. Those who are interested and want to be put on the listserv should email Lindsey Ruhl (lindsey.ruhl@uvm.edu). These exams will take place throughout February.

The DBIC Cohort project is a project that Heather Darby, Jeff Sanders, and Sara Zeigler are working on. Last March, they were awarded a 20-month grant through the DBIC (Northeast Dairy Business and Innovation Center) to increase quality forage on farms in Vermont and New York. The goal is to increase forage production and the quality of forage in order to reduce imported grain and nutrients. This project includes 11 farms ranging from small farms to LFOs. These include a wide range of production systems (conventional, organic, and organic grass-fed). All these farms can benefit from improving forage quality. The project seeks to identify individual farm needs and get funding to implement improvements. This group is also working with animal nutritionists, grazing experts, and agronomists, including Sarah Flack, Patrice Vincent (agronomist and nutritionist from Quebec), and Kurt Cotanch (dairy nutritionist consultant that specializes in forage quality and rumen function). This cohort developed farm forage plans specific to each farm. These plans address challenges to adopting better quality forage production. This group of folks is not at the VAQWP meeting today because they are applying for the DBIC grants to help farmers receive funding. Farmers primarily lack funds for improved feed storage. Feed storage is important because it reduces the quality of the feed and results in the farms having to buy more grain. This project, therefore, hopes to indirectly improve forage quality by improving feed storage. This cohort is additionally working to help farmers receive VHCB grants to improve feed storage. Heather is also applying for a DBIC grant so that UVM Extension can provide technical assistance and purchase equipment to help the farms address these issues.

Those with questions should reach out to Sara, Jeff, or Heather.

11:44 – 11:48 USFWS Update, Ryan Crehan

Ryan introduces himself. He is here on behalf of his supervisor, Chris Smith.

First, Ryan asks guests what can happen when clearing out nesting boxes during cold weather. The eggs may explode during cold weather, so be careful!

Katie Kain is mostly working on planning for spring planting projects in partnership with CREP and other partners.

Ryan is focused on design work for wetland restoration projects. There is one upcoming project in Fairfield. Construction (earthwork) will take place this summer. The earthwork for USFWS's largest project in Addison County was completed last fall. This was a 320-acre project.

USFWS is currently in the process of hiring a couple of seasonal employees to help with stewardship and newly planted riparian buffers.

The Farm Bill expires at the end of September. USFWS has a national team working on recommendations to the USDA as to how the Farm Bill can support fish and wildlife concerns.

11:48 – 11:50 DEC Update, Karen Bates

Karen Bates introduces herself. Staci Pomeroy (WSMD), Marli Rupe (WID), and Clarice Cutler (WSMD) are also present.

For any questions about the newly released MFO CAFO permit, please see Clarice.

Karen is the watershed planner for the Missisquoi basin and is also now the watershed planner for the Lamoille basin.

The Missisquoi tactical basin plan was completed last year. Karen is in contact with FCNRCD as well as other watershed partners to address strategies associated with agricultural land. Those with general questions or concerns about water quality in the watershed should go to Karen.

CWSPs are another funding source. This funding is more for natural resource restoration in agricultural areas. They have released RFPs for applications. For those looking to fund projects, Karen is happy to answer any questions (and see presentation notes from Dean at the end of these notes).

The Lamoille tactical basin planning process was completed. To review these plans: Lamoille: <https://dec.vermont.gov/water-investment/watershed-planning/tactical-basin-planning/basin7>

Missisquoi: <https://dec.vermont.gov/water-investment/watershed-planning/tactical-basin-planning/basin6>

11:50 – 11:52 RCPP Update, Marli Rupe

Marli thanks NRCS and VACD staff for helping with their program. Marli thanks Travis and Sarah in particular for their help.

RCPP has received 220 applications. Marli states this is wonderful but more than RCPP can currently handle. This indicates there is a significant need, particularly for smaller farmers and forest landowners that were not receiving opportunities under NRCS. The enormous sign-up is a demonstration of the need that is present and the need for RCPP to continue the program and develop adequate capacity.

There will be a lot of funding coming in the following years from legislation (ARPA, IRA, etc.).

11:52 – 12:01 Agency of Ag Update, Brittany Cole

Brittany introduces herself. She works on the regulatory side of VAAFM.

The LFO webpage has been updated with all current information (<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/lfo>). Answers to any questions about permitting, annual reporting, or the program, in general, can be found on the website. Those with further questions can reach out to Brittany.

VAAFM now has a non-sewage waste program. It regulates the generator or hauler (e.g., Casella) of non-sewage waste to farms. The process proceeds as follows: the generator or hauler identifies farmers that can take the non-sewage waste and submits an application to VAAFM; VAAFM checks if the farm has storage requirements and land base requirements. Jessica Mason is the statewide contact for the non-sewage waste program. More information on this will come online at the end of February.

VAAFM is hiring two new inspectors. This may cause a shift in territories. VAAFM will try to keep this consistent, but things are always evolving.

Brittany reminds guests that all VAAFM inspection reports and enforcement actions are public records. These may be a resource to help partners doing planning work with farms. These records identify what VAAFM considers a resource concern on a farm, or what may be under enforcement. Email anyone on the regulatory side of VAAFM to receive those documents.

The TSP Certification program is in limbo. It is tied to the RAP update. If RAPs get pushed through this year, the TSP Certification program will hopefully begin as well. This regulates technical service providers, including agricultural consulting services and farm compliance services that are writing nutrient management plans for farms. These TSPs will therefore be regulated by VAAFM. This does not include Conservation Districts who help with NMPs. This program is still in development. It will audit all farm NMPs written by TSPs to ensure compliance with the 590 standard. This will make sure all farms are getting a consistent product that they can actually use.

Brittany has been working with Tom Akin to provide a regulatory lens on the 590 and keep it realistic.

Brittany calls for any further input from inspectors or engineering if needed.

VAAFM Water Quality Programs Team, Brodie Hanke

Brodie introduces himself. The Water Quality Programs Team is the voluntary side of VAAFM.

Brodie introduces a new staff member and ECO AmeriCorps member. Noah Gilbert-Fuller is the new Water Quality Coordinator and Annika Fuller is the new ECO AmeriCorps member in the Water Quality Division.

The annual reporting process is now complete. This summarizes all work of VAAFM and its partners. This report collects information from NRCS on phosphorus reductions. This annual report has been reformatted into Power BI

(<https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjojOGU4ZGVlOWYtNzFkZC00ODM4LTg1NDctYmI3YWZhNThmYTU5IiwidCI6IjIwYiQ5MzNiLWJhYWQtNDMzYy05YzAyLTcwZWZrIjYzc1NTIjNiJ9>), creating a more interactive report with information about the breakdown of work in different watersheds, breakdowns

of funding from different programs that have gone to those areas, and associated phosphorus reductions. This information stretches back to 2016/17. This can be accessed via the VAAFAM website. To find this report, search “Vermont Agency of Agriculture Annual Report”.

For other programs, VAAFAM is in the middle of reporting for work that happened in 2022. The Power BI does not yet include work that happened in 2022. It will not be fully up to date until the end of summer.

Brodie manages the VT Pay for Performance Program. He thanks the Conservation Districts. PFP is close to wrapping up its first year of enrollment. There are currently 50 farms actively participating. PFP just completed applications for the second year. In March, the data will be completely updated. For those who don't know, PFP is a pilot program running the next 4 to 5 field seasons, funded by a USDA-RCPP grant. The goal of this program is for farmers to use the online web application FarmPREP to enter field data, soil data, and farm management information. FarmPREP then models phosphorus loss on a field-by-field basis. PFP then compares current phosphorus losses to an estimate of phosphorus losses on that farm based on the assumptions of the Lake Champlain TMDL. This scores each farm against the expectations set for them by the TMDL. This shows farmers the good work they are doing, all the phosphorus they've kept in the soil. This is also a new way to compensate farmers for this work in terms of pounds of phosphorus. Brodie thanks Lauren who has been a big supporter of PFP. In 2023, there will be more farms participating in Franklin County than any other county in the state.

12:01 – 12:03, DEC Rivers program Update, Staci Pomeroy

Act 135 Surface Water Withdrawal Registration and Reporting is a new requirement for those withdrawing water from rivers at a significant amount. Removals must be reported so DEC can track water withdrawal levels throughout the state. Reporting must begin Jan 1st.

This is relevant for surface water withdrawals for irrigating farms, livestock watering, and other uses. It is required to report these to use VAAFAM. This a reminder for those working with farms that use water withdrawals as part of their farming practices. They may need to report these withdrawal amounts under this new requirement.

For more information, go to Vermont's Rivers Streamflow page:
<https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/rivers/streamflow-protection>

12:03 – 12: 05 NRCS Update, Sarah Larose

Sarah introduces herself as District Conservationist, Northwest Zone.

Sarah introduces new employees in the Northwest Zone. Sean Pease is the new Soil Conservationist in the Morrisville office. Jowin Hernandez is the new Soil Conservationist in the St. Albans office. NRCS lost their program assistant, Liza Lemieux, so that position will be advertised soon. Travis Thomason is the new State Conservationist. Chris Evans is the new Forester in the Morrisville office. NRCS will be onboarding a couple of new 401 planners soon in the St. Albans office.

NRCS is in dire need of engineers. Sarah requests any help with recruitment guests can offer.

NRCS is currently working on EQIP and CSP planning, assessing, and ranking. RCPP has a slightly different timeline than EQIP and CSP.

NRCS has a somewhat new, unexpected workload. NRCS provides technical assistance for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). After Storm Eliot, a lot of sugarbushes received wind damage. Currently, in Franklin County, 80 people have reached out to FSA about damage from Storm Eliot. Chris Evans and others have been conducting these ECP visits.

12: 05 – 12:12 Sarah asks for questions about NRCS programs

Q - What is the Inflation Reduction Act and what does it mean for NRCS?

Sarah responds: IRA will most likely provide additional funding for NRCS. There will most likely be EQIP and CSP specific to IRA funding. This is yet to be announced, but there will likely be additional funding for the states. This will potentially open up additional funding for landowners that missed regular EQIP or CSP rounds.

Q – What is a 401 position?

A – The official title is Natural Resource Specialist. NRCS is shifting from soil conservationist (457) to lessen educational requirements. Generally, a 401 requires fewer soil courses than a 457.

Q – Is the Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group resulting in a CSP+ program?

A – There is \$1 million available through a private program through VAAF: Payment for Ecosystem Services. This will provide payment (>\$1000) for producers to go through the assessment portion of CSP. Once producers sign the contract, they will receive an additional payment. VAAF may also bring additional money to the table in annual payments. This will help get producers through the door to learn about CSP. CSP is not particularly popular in Vermont, this affects how much funds NRCS can get for EQIP. There will be more information to come. There will be training for Conservation District, NRCS, and VAAF staff on this in the future.

Q – Will this be rolled out for FY2023?

A – VAAF has to spend money sometime this year. Likely, we will roll in an IRA CSP along with the Payment for Ecosystem Services (CSP+). These funds will focus on agricultural lands, not forest lands.

12:12 – 12:15 VACD, Molly Varner

Molly is here in place of Emily Nummer, Ag Program Coordinator, who typically gives VACD updates.

VACD and districts are heavily involved in the legislative process this year. VACD and NRCDs are giving testimony to hopefully increasing core base funding. There was some success last year, and VACD/NRCC/NRCDs are asking for additional funding this year. This is very much needed for districts to continue the great work they're doing. VACD and NRCDs will be asking for sign-ons to demonstrate support, so guests may hear from districts in the near future.

There are currently lots of transitions from the district end. There are many new staff members and also current staff members leaving. Winooski NRCD and Ottauquechee NRCD are currently hiring new district managers. Caledonia County NRCD is hiring an Agricultural Specialist. There are also new staff members present whom Lauren and Peter will introduce. VACD is in the process of hiring a new GIS technician. A new Program Assistant started in the Brattleboro office.

Districts are currently supporting farmers in NMP classes.

VACD will host a webinar with Audubon and NFWF on February 22nd. This will be a training that highlights key organisms that rely on riparian ecosystems, like the eastern brook trout, describes their habitat requirements, and reviews best management practices for tree plantings and restoration. Please reach out to VACD if this interests you.

Next week is VACD's hard launch of the annual report next week, which highlights the VACD and NRCD work over FY2022. After a hard launch and internal meeting next week, it will be shared more publicly.

12:16 – 12:21 Franklin County NRCD Update, Lauren Weston

The DEC Clean Water Performance report is also available now.

Lauren introduces herself. She introduces Kate, Katy, and Mel as a new staff members that started last week. Franklin County NRCD lost Megan in November.

Franklin County NRCD is working with Heather Darby's team at the Northwest Crops and Soils Program on tandem soil health projects. One project will recruit farmers to be in soil health cohorts with staff to create soil health plans loosely based on NRCS plans and learn more about how to assess their own soil health. In another project, Katy will create curricula for all technical service providers to better understand and discuss soil health with farmers. This will include a 12-part webinar series next winter and 5 field days.

Franklin County NRCD is working with farms on PFP applications and existing data entry. Franklin County NRCD is also working on new NMPs and updating previous NMPs. Franklin County NRCD has also been working on Lake Carmi.

Franklin County NRCD's Tree Sale will come up in May. A banner for the tree sale can be seen on Main St, St. Albans. Molly Varner will be doing a pickup in Grand Isle County for Franklin County NRCD's tree sale this year. Franklin County NRCD will be planting 12 acres of trees this spring. For those interested in participating in tree plantings, contact Franklin County NRCD staff. Two of these tree plantings will be on farms and one will be at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

Franklin County NRCD is also conducting a feasibility study for another dam removal.

Upcoming events include:

- Agroforestry webinar co hosted by Franklin County NRCD, Juan Alvez (UVM), White River NRCD, and Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition (2/24, 3/3);
- UVM Extension No-Till and Cover Crop Conference (3/2);
- NRCS Bedded Pack Training at Choiniere Family Farm (3/16);
- VAQWP Annual Meeting (3/21);
- Willow Bioengineering Workshop at Paul-Lin Dairy (3/21);
- Local-Led Meeting in Grand Isle County (4/11);
- BioBlitz and Events across eastern Franklin County (Summer 2023);
- Franklin County NRCD Tree Sale Pick Up (5/5-5/6);
- Richford BioBlitz (5/20, tentative);
- Enosburg Dairy Days (6/2-6/4);

- Franklin County NRCD will officially table at Dairy Days this year.
- Enosburg Fishing Festival (6/17, tentative).

Lauren tells guests to also keep an eye out for a precision agriculture event with Scott Magnan.

12:21 – 12:24 Civilian Conservation Corps Update, Katy Dynarski

Katy is working with folks to establish brand new Civilian Conservation Corps in Northwest Vermont. This new conservation corps will be similar to VYCC. It is founded by the founder of VYCC. This group is intended to work in tandem with VYCC to recruit youth from Franklin County and Grand Isle County.

This is an attempt to get young people involved in conservation projects where help is needed and build capacity. It will give youth career experience in the conservation field. The process of recruiting youth is still in the distant future.

CCC is currently working on a unique funding model. CCC will be funded by a thrift and liquidation store in St. Albans. Possible locations include the old Staples store on Route 7 and the empty building on Lake Street. The targeted opening date is sometime this summer or fall.

Currently, CCC is looking to increase awareness of this project in the community. CCC is looking for people to serve as strategic advisors. Strategic advisors will receive a quarterly update email, give feedback on ideas or documents, tell people in the community about the new CCC, and tell people to shop at the thrift store.

Updates will be available on Facebook.

12:25 – 12:28 Local funding pool, Lauren Weston

The conservation districts and NRCS are thinking about a local-led funding pool for the area. This would be a separate pool of funding from NRCS to prioritize local needs based on feedback from farmers, landowners, land stewards, and NRCS staff.

Lauren asks for feedback later on in the meeting.

Franklin County Project Ideas:

- Biodiversity and plantings
 - Pollinator plantings on farms
 - Other plantings around farms (agroforestry, silvopasture)
- Trails and crossings
 - Forest trails
 - Stream crossing (forests and ag lands)
- Improved perennial ground
 - Pasture and hay land plantings (frost seeding, multispecies)
 - Soil Amendments (ash, lime)

This funding pool would be, in theory, less competitive than the statewide funding pool. Lauren asks guests to give feedback about other things in the area that need additional funding.

12:29 – 12:36 Lamoille NRCD Update, Peter Danforth

Lamoille NRCD now has 3 full-time employees. Emma Sandman is the new Ag Outreach Specialist, hired in the fall. Emily Porter-Goff is the Education and Outreach Coordinator, who could not make it to the meeting.

Lamoille NRCD has done two Lake Watershed Action Plans (LWAPs) for Lake Elmore and Lake Eden. Two projects were started in the fall and will be completed in the coming fall. There are five more projects currently in the works, and four more projects in development. This work includes stormwater work, lakeshore BMP work, erosion culvert replacements, and stream restoration work.

For River and Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) work, there is one culvert replacement that is 100% designed and will hopefully be completed by FY24. There is also one dam removal that is 30% designed. Lamoille County NRCD hopes to bring this dam removal to the next stage. Lamoille County NRCD also has 3 Trees For Streams woody buffer plantings. Two of these plantings are being matched by US Fish and Wildlife and Vermont Fish and Wildlife funds. These represent a total of about 12 to 13 acres. These plantings will happen in the spring and fall of next year. Lamoille County NRCD has a floodplain wetland design in progress and an instream restoration process in design as well.

Lamoille NRCD is working on multiple stormwater master plans in Johnson, Hyde Park, Morrisville, and Stowe. There are at least two large projects being implemented this spring. There are also numerous projects in various stages of development.

For agricultural work, Lamoille County NRCD is planning a two-stage no-till drill workshop soon. Lamoille County NRCD is also working on river corridor easements, wetland easements, stream restoration, and culvert replacement. Emma is doing an NMP with one farm in Lamoille County and also getting Land Treatment Planning and Soil Conservation Planning training going as well.

Peter is the chair of BWQC in Lamoille. The Lamoille CWSP just released its clean water funding a couple of days ago. Applications are due in March. The first year will be half the amount of funding in order to deduce how many people apply and how many projects are worthy of funding. This funding will probably go quickly, especially because stormwater projects are particularly expensive.

Emily Porter-Goff is running the Lamoille County NRCD's Nature Center. This center received capital appropriations from the state last year for new educational materials and a new pavilion that will be built in spring. The Nature Center is also looking to raise additional funding and has received an anonymous donation of \$6,000. The pavilion will be located right where the teepee is. It will be a place to have meetings and conventions. The Center purchased a solar power generator to provide electricity. The Center is looking for additional funding to purchase solar panels. The Center will have to work through issues with parking if many people come to events there. The Center also received a couple thousand dollars toward scholarships from an anonymous grant for children to go to camp. Camps are usually four weeks but this year is six weeks.

Camp is almost full already this year. The camp opportunities are available all season, including forest camps in the fall, spring, and hopefully in the winter. One reason to keep the Center open all season is that it currently needs to be cleaned up every spring due to nefarious activities (beer cans, drug

paraphernalia) that occur there during the off-season. The Center is trying to change this pattern by creating better signage and making the place more approachable.

12:36 – 12:39 Local Work Groups, Pollinator Pathways, Peter Danforth

Pollinator Pathways is a national group that provides insight and support for localized Pollinator Pathways groups to form and create public and private pesticide-free corridors of native plants that provide nutrition and habitat for pollinating insects and birds. This includes flower boxes and curb strips.

In Vermont, Burlington, Addison County, and Woodstock have Pollinator Pathways groups. The Addison County group is very active and gave a presentation the other night.

This project is essentially for private landowners that want to do small projects on their land. Peter thought about how this was related to the work that Lamoille County NRCD does. For instance, the installation of bioretention feature filled with native plants, planting of native pollinating trees on rivers and lakes, etc.

Lamoille County NRCD will start a steering commission in the next couple of weeks. Peter will be a part of this commission and invites other groups in Lamoille to participate. The goal of the commission would be to determine whether landowners are interested in this project. From there, the commission will determine whether this can be grown into a pollinator pathway with adjoining landowners. The goal is to promote buffer and pollinator plantings in Lamoille County.

The Pollinator Pathways national program has many resources, including lists of native plants, methods for planting, etc.

12:40 – 12:44 GICNRCD Update, Molly Varner

GICNRCD is in project development for a subwatershed Lake Watershed Action Plan for Keeler Bay. Field visits were completed this past winter. The next steps will be to map out potential projects, prioritize these projects, and seek landowner interest. This will wrap up this summer and hopefully result in a suite of projects for which to apply for funding.

Pending a few current grant applications, GICNRCD hopes to lead/participate in summer educational events about water quality in 2023 and 2024.

GICNRCD is growing agricultural programming in the islands. Historically, there hasn't been much agricultural programming through the District. Kate Wettergreen of Franklin County NRCD will be coming on board and bringing services to farmers on the islands. There was a collaborative meeting last week with on-ground partners (e.g., South Hero Land Trust). This will help to build more connections with farmers.

Molly serves as the Vice Chair for Basin 5 BWQC. Basin 5 BWQC is now accepting applications. There will be a second round of applications opening in February. Proposed projects may include: the design and implementation of practices on developed lands, forested lands, along streams and lakeshores, and on farms that reduce phosphorus concentrations in surface waters. There is about \$500,000 of available funding for this fiscal year. The BWQC will be voting on which projects to move forward at their March meeting.

Grand Isle County NRCD is hosting the third local-led work group. According to the surveys that came from Grand Isle, residents had varying priorities. Grand Isle County NRCD also had varying priorities. Molly asks the attendants for ideas to explore opportunities for the upcoming funding pool. Molly may work collaboratively with Peter Danforth and Lauren Weston across the Northwest zone.

12:45 – 1:30 Break and Round Table Discussions

1:31 – 2:30 Presentation from FSA

Laurie Lock introduces herself as the County Executive Director in St. Albans for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Heather Thomas Mateja introduces herself as County Executive Director for Lamoille County.

The FAS Agency Vision: a customer-driven agency with a diverse and multi talented workforce, dedicated to achieving an economically and environmentally sound future for American agriculture.

During Covid, FSA had to work with customers remotely. Farmers are calling and emailing instead of coming into the office. Farmers are still not coming into the office like they used to. If someone wants to get into the USDA system to work with NRCS, they must go to FSA.

CCC-860

The producer self-certifies that they belong to any of the following groups: limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged, or veteran farmers and ranchers. Some women choose not to be recognized as socially disadvantaged. Laurie and Heather do not have much experience with veteran farmers or ranchers. Veterans must also be new farmers and must provide proof via a government form. Some programs waive the admin fee for those that have filed the CCC-860 with the FSA office. Other programs allow for higher payment limitations

Dairy Margin Coverage

Dairy Margin Coverage is risk management coverage that pays producers if the difference between the national price of milk and the average cost of feed falls below the producer-selected level. Coverage levels range from \$4.00 to \$9.50/cwt, in \$0.50 increments. Coverage percentage (of dairy operations historic production) ranges from 5% to 95%, in 5% increments. For Franklin and Grand Isle County, everyone is at \$9.50 and 95%. This is the highest coverage available. The price of feed is currently very high, so FSA has not made payments for a couple of months.

There is a \$100 admin fee to be paid annually. This fee is waived by CCC-860. If milk prices drop or feed prices rise, farmers will receive a payment. There is a cost to the farmer in the form of a premium buyout, but VAAFMM covered this last year for farmers and will hopefully cover this cost for 2023. This program is first come first serve. There is now no risk of farmers paying in and not getting money.

Anything that is below \$9.50 generates a payment; anything above \$9.50, no payment is given. This is a prediction and is thus not always 100% accurate.

Livestock Indemnity Program

LIP provides benefits for farmers that suffer eligible livestock deaths and more than normal mortality. For example, a barn collapsed in Franklin County and quite a few dairy cows were killed. FSA was able to get documentation from the producer to help them and give the farmer a payment. This will also help producers that have to sell livestock at a reduced price due to injury from an eligible loss condition. Eligible disasters include extreme heat/cold, hurricanes, floods, blizzards, lightning, and winter storms. Eligible diseases include those that have been exacerbated by an eligible disaster. Examples include anthrax, cyanobacteria, larkspur poisoning, and Mycoplasma Bovis.

If something goes wrong with a farmer you are working with, check with FSA to see if they can fit into this or another program.

The FSA disaster programs move slowly and do not provide quick payments to farmers. Some payments can take up to 6 months.

Livestock Forage Disaster Program

LFP is for livestock owners and contract growers who raise eligible livestock and are also producers of grazed forage (both native and improved pasture land with permanent vegetative cover). The program provides payments for losses of grazed forage due to a qualifying drought.

Completed application for payment and required supporting documentation must be received at the FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year the grazing loss was suffered.

Vermont (Franklin County in particular) has had very dry conditions in the last few years. However, this does not meet the severe drought level required for this program. Therefore, this program cannot be implemented in Vermont.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish

Laurie does not work with farm-raised fish, but they do work with honeybee producers in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Payments to these producers usually result from colony collapse disorder. The payments are not large but can still provide assistance.

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish for losses that are due to an eligible loss condition. This program is for covering losses that are not covered under LIP and IFP.

For honeybees, the final date to file a notice of loss is 15 days after the loss is apparent. For livestock and farm-raised fish losses, loss notice must be filed 30 days after the loss is apparent. This program is not only for honeybees, but that is mostly how this program is used in VT.

Farm Storage Facility Loan

The FSFL program provides low-interest financing for producers to store, handle, and/or transport eligible commodities they produce. A producer may borrow up to \$500,000 per loan with 15% down and up to a 12-year loan term. The microloan option for amounts up to \$50,000 with 5% down and shorter

loan terms. Producers need to show a need for increased storage based on the last three years of production. Producers must apply to work with FSA before the project is started.

Q – Can this money be used to repair silage/storage instead of increasing storage?

A – Yes, it can be used as long as there is a need. If the producer is buying feed, they are not eligible. Producers have to grow the additional feed. Examples of past FSFLs include milk tanks, upright silos, refrigerated trucks, and cold storage for hydroponic farmers (pending).

Loan Deficiency Payments

LDP works so that instead of securing a MAL a producer would receive an LDP. This payment would be the difference the producer would have received if a loan was repaid at the lower market price. Eligible commodities include wheat, corn, grain, sorghum, barley, oats, soybeans, oilseeds, lentils, dry peas, chickpeas, graded and non-graded wool, mohair, unshorn pelts, and honey.

For example, a producer has 900 lbs of ungraded Dorset wool after shearing. Their payment would be calculated by multiplying the 900 lbs by the LDP rate of \$0.40 to get \$360.

Payments are small, but to some sheep farmers, they are very helpful. This is currently not a large program but has been in the past when corn prices were very low.

Emergency Conservation Program

The ECP provides emergency funding and technical assistance to producers for rehabilitating farmland and conservation structures damaged by natural disasters. The purpose of the program is to get land back into production following a natural disaster. Producers that suffer damage to their land that impacts their production should contact their local FSA office.

Laurie and Heather are currently working on ECP for Maple. FSA is paying producers to move debris from maple sugar orchards to tap their trees. Wind damage in sugar bushes has been the cause of the majority of ECP applications received this year. The program helps with the cost of getting trees and branches off the lines and access roads. It also helps with the cost of new taps and tubing to replace those that were damaged in the storm.

If a project begins before the producer contacts FSA, there must be good documentation to demonstrate the damage. Producers can only participate in this program 2 times in a 10-year period.

Q – Will climate change and increasing frequency change the program?

A – The answer to this depends on the future federal administration and also depends on the location of the disaster. Flooding on floodplains is to be expected.

Q – Are there programs to support farmers with injured workers?

A – Funding for this is not available with FSA, but there may be other programs with available support.

Q – Are buildings covered?

A – No. This program is only for agricultural products that were previously being produced before the emergency. If building debris covers cropland, the program can be used to remove that debris.

Q – Is there anything in FSA where structures are covered?

A – No. Everyone should have insurance on their structures. If a producer has loans with FSA, they have insurance on their structures.

Q – How much money is allocated to this program?

A – The County Committees request a dollar amount.

Q – What are County Committees?

A – FSA has County Committees. They hire and oversee FSA employees. They are elected producers in the county that work in agriculture. They still have to follow all the rules but they have approval authority. Farmers can come to county committees to appeal decisions they disagree with. County Committees had to approve this program and determine funding based on requests.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

This is also an insurance program. It provides financial assistance to producers for non-insurable crops to protect against natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevented planting. Most producers in this program produce maple, fruits, and/or vegetables. This program assists with certain crops that other crop insurance doesn't cover.

Basic coverage (50/55) kicks in when the loss exceeds 50% of expected production and pays at 55% of the average market price. SDA producers will automatically be enrolled in this coverage if they have a CCC-860 on file. This coverage does not pay very well because a producer suffers a 55% loss and FSA pays the rest.

For Buy-up coverage, producers can select to cover within 50% to 65% of production, in 5% increments, and it will be 100% of the average market value. Laurie and Heather have a few maple producers that have chosen the 65/100 coverage this year.

Conservation Reserve Program

CRP pays a yearly rental payment to farmers that agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production, as well as plant species that will improve environmental health. The goal of the program is to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

Contracts can range from 10 to 15 years and enrollment is continuous.

CRP is not commonly used in Vermont. FSA has a few general signups, but there is a bigger incentive to participate in CREP. Franklin County has 47 CRP contracts and Grand Isle County recently had its first contract.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

CREP is a component of CRP. CREP is a public-private partnership program that allows states, Tribal governments, nonprofit and private entities to partner with FSA to implement CRP practices that address high-priority conservation and environmental objectives. Many people are re-enrolling after the end of their contracts.

CREP is currently active in Franklin County and Grand Isle County.

The Signing Incentive Payment is a one-time incentive payment made to eligible participants that enroll their land devoted to an eligible continuous CRP signup practice. The Practice Incentive Payment is a payment for completing the installation for a CRP practice that is an eligible continuous CRP signup practice. PIP is authorized for re-enrolled eligible continuous CRP signup practices only if a new C/S is approved for the re-enrolled eligible practice.

Q – What about CRP?

A – In CRP's general signup, landowners are competing across the nation. Landowners with more acres (i.e., in Wisconsin) will generally ask for less payment per acre. However, the new Farm Bill will be passed this year so things could change. CREP gives more money to the producer for those with a smaller land base.

Q – Is there a local funding pool for FSA?

A – No. FSA programs are all Farm Bill-based. There is a limit on CRP and CREP on how many acres FSA can have, but FSA is not close to hitting it. The new administration raised the limit.

Q – How does FSA come up with the payment rate?

A – There are soil rental rates for cropland that can change per county per soil type. For pasture land, each county gets its own rate. Addison County gets more per acre than Lamoille County.

Q – What is the difference between CREP and CSP?

A – CREP is specifically a buffer program. If the land is in CSP, it cannot be in CREP. There can be no double dipping.

Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage

This program is for producers with base acres. ARC is an income support program that provides payments when actual crop revenue falls below a specified guaranteed level. There is ARC County and

ARCIC, which is for individuals. Franklin County has previously had Arc County. It is yield-based and established by the County Committee.

PLC provides income support payments when the effective price for a covered commodity falls below its effective reference price. Enrollment period for the program year 2023 is October 17th, 2022 – March 15th, 2023. For the last few years, no payments have been given in Franklin County or Grand Isle County.

This is a program for big commodity crops: mostly corn, and maybe some soy. It does not cost anything for producers to sign up.

Emergency Relief Program

This is a new program for Laurie and Heather. The application period for Phase One closed on December 16th, 2022. If a producer had a crop insurance indemnity for corn or soybeans, ERP would provide additional money based on that information. If a producer had NAP insurance and filed a claim, ERP would provide additional money. There were about 20 producers in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties participating in this program.

Phase two is now open and will close on June 2nd, 2023. This is a tax-based certification program that aids producers who suffered a loss in revenue due to a natural disaster that affected their eligible crop. To qualify this disaster had to occur in the 2020 or 2021 calendar year.

Producers who receive payments will be required to obtain crop insurance for the next two crop years. This is a new program intended to fill gaps and reach people that have not worked with FSA.

Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program

The PARP provides direct financial assistance to producers of eligible agricultural commodities who suffered at least a 15% loss in gross revenue in the calendar year 2020 due to the pandemic. Payments will be based upon a comparison of the producer's gross revenue in 2020 compared to either 2018 or 2019.

This application period is open from January 23rd to June 2nd, 2023. This may be very applicable to small vegetable farmers. It is free to apply.

Open for Questions to FSA

Q – Would growing marijuana on land affect eligibility for USDA programs?

A – Yes, producers should not disclose this as it will affect their eligibility. However, hemp fiber is fine.

Q – What are FSA records like?

A – FSA records information on what people grow and where they grow it. This is called crop reporting. FSA also makes sure everyone has a field and tract number, and that fields are outlined correctly. FSA map records go back to the 40s. FSA records are only as accurate as farmers have reported. If farmers change something and do not report it to FSA, FSA's records do not include those changes.

Q – Do farmers give FSA all this information about their farms?

A – If they want to be eligible for USDA funding, they have to. FSA stays in contact with farmers via phone calls, email, and mail to keep the information up to date.

Q – How long does it take to get a crop report?

A – It doesn't take much time, but the farmer must give explicit permission if anyone other than the farmer is requesting it.

2:25 – FSA Presentation ends, short 5-minute break

2:30 – 3:00 CWSP Update On-Farm Natural Resource Projects – Dean Pierce

Lauren introduces Dean as a Senior Planner at Northwest Regional Planning Commission, which is the Missisquoi and Lamoille Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP). He grew up in Franklin County.

Dean shows attendees photos of cyanobacteria blooms.

The Lake Champlain TMDL is a map/model that quantifies the magnitude of the phosphorus loading problem. The chart on the slide shows phosphorus levels in the Missisquoi Bay Basin and indicates large reductions in phosphorus are still needed.

When it comes to phosphorus reduction targets, this cannot be addressed by one sector alone. Both regulated and nonregulatory realms, both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors can contribute to solutions.

Act 76 provides a long-term funding source for Water Quality Projects, prioritizes financial support for voluntary efforts, and establishes a network of decentralized CWSPs and Basin Water Quality Councils (BWQCs). Act 76 is meant to decentralize decision-making processes. As a result, there are many requirements and barriers that narrow the path forward.

NRPC serves as CWSP for more than one basin (Missisquoi, Lamoille, North Lake). CWSPs establish partnerships with groups and landowners, support BWQCs, identify and implement projects to meet P reduction targets established to clean up Lake Champlain, verify/inspect projects over time, ensure consistency with TBPs, and more.

Basin 6's (Missisquoi) Year 1 Funding and Targets

Funding for design/engineering and construction is around ~\$1.54 million. Funding for project ID/development is around \$120,500. Total Project Funding is around \$1.66 million

Eligible non-regulatory projects are diverse, including stormwater practice for developed land and roads, floodplain restoration, riparian buffers, wetland restoration, forestland conservation, and projects on farms/in farm settings.

Is the proposed project located on a jurisdictional farm operation/required to meet RAPs?

Any case that requires consultation with VAAFM will occur via the farm determination process. Please note this form must be submitted by the farm operation/landowner seeking the determination.

Agricultural projects are not eligible. But “natural resource, innovative, or other project types” are potentially eligible. However, they require review and approval from VAAFM “to ensure a consistent approach on farms statewide that follows rules, regulations, and laws in place.”

Farm Determination

Small farm operations (SFOs) are farms defined as persons engaged in farming who meet one of the threshold criteria for the applicability of the Required Agricultural Practices below:

- Annual Gross income from the sale of agricultural products is \$2,000 or greater in an average year. component; or
- Preparing, tilling, fertilizing, planting, protecting, irrigating, and harvesting crops for sale on a farm that is no less than 4.0 contiguous acres in size; or
- Raising feeding, or managing at least the following number of adult livestock on a farm at least 4.0 contiguous acres in size (four equines; five cattle, cows, or American bison; 15 swine; 15 goats; 15 sheep, etc.); or
- Raising, feeding, or managing other livestock types, combinations, and numbers, or managing crops or engaging in other agricultural practices on less than 4.0 contiguous acres in size that the Secretary has determined, after the opportunity for a hearing, to be causing adverse water quality impacts and in a municipality where no ordinances are in place to manage the activities causing the water quality impacts; or
- Managed by a farmer filing a 1040(F) tax document in at least one of the two previous years; or
- Has a prospective business or farm management plan approved by the Secretary

So who or what is left?

There are homesteaders and projects on farms that are not related to any agronomic practices. These include River Corridor and Wetland Easements Design, River Corridor and Wetland Easements Implementation, Etc.

For a homesteader, it is possible to do an agricultural project because it is not in conflict with the RAPs.

Applications

Missisquoi Bay Watershed (~\$1.6 million available for 1st year)

- The deadline for responses is March 6, 2023, at 5 pm.

Lamoille River Watershed (~\$550,000 available for 1st year)

- The deadline for responses is March 13, 2023, at 5 pm.

2:47 – Partners

CWSPs and BWQCs could not do their work without the cooperation of numerous partners, which include: Franklin County NRCD, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, Missisquoi River Basin Association, Franklin Watershed Committee, municipalities (including Selectboards and Conservation Commissions), Land Trusts, and others.

2:48 – Dean invites attendants to ask questions.

Q – Is funding available to farmers that want to implement practices to reduce phosphorus as long as it's not directly related to agronomic practices required to follow a RAP?

A – Yes, but most applications will not be from farmers. The application would require documentation that it qualifies.

Q – What kind of projects are you hoping to get?

A – Initially, NRPC won't be picky. The cost-effectiveness to reduce phosphorus will be highly considered. Something that is more beneficial to wildlife would instead be placed in an Enhancement grant. If the co-benefits outweigh the phosphorus element, apply for Enhancement grants.

Q – Are there payment rates associated with specific practices or is it based on the amount of phosphorus reduced by that practice?

A – The numbers are not concrete.

Q – What kind of outreach has been done to pull in applications?

A – NRPC has done email blasts to every municipality, every conservation district, and every watershed organization. Blasts are not being sent to individual property owners. NRPC is also trying to get the media interested (e.g., VTDigger). NVDA is doing outreach to towns in Missisquoi in their area. NRPC would like to create economic incentives for property owners to allow NRPC to use their land to reduce phosphorus

Q – This money isn't going away, correct?

A – Yes, there will be multiple requests per year. Applications should be allowed on a rolling basis, but not sure if that is going to be pulled off.

3:01 Lauren concludes the VAQWP meeting