

Northwest Region VAWQP Winter 25-26

Tuesday, February 24, 2026, 9am – 1pm

Mill River Brewing Taphouse, St Albans City, VT

Attendance List

VAWQP Partners

* = attending on zoom

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFMM)

- Gillian D’Acierno (gillian.dacierno@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- David Wardrop (David.Wardrop@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Ben Gabos (ben.gabos@vermont.gov), Program Coordinator
- Noah Gilbert-Fuller (Noah.Gilbert-Fuller@vermont.gov), Program Coordinator
- Mianda Wood (mianda.wood@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Sumner Kravitz* (sumner.kravitz@vermont.gov), Program Coordinator

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Felix Jimenez (felix.jimenez@usda.gov), State Grazing Specialist
- Joe Bondi (joseph.bondi@usda.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Diana Dellinger (diana.dellinger@usda.gov), Assistant State Conservationist - Programs
- Eve Gagne (eve.gagne@usda.gov), Management Analyst
- Renee Bolduc (renee.boldue@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Logan Reece (logan.reece@usda.gov), Natural Resource Specialist
- Lauren Gibson (lauren.gibson@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Kia Olsson (kia.olsson@usda.gov), Program Assistant
- Jimmy Young (james.young2@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Lauren Weston (lauren@franklincountynrcd.org), District Manager
- Kate Wettergreen (kate@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Manager
- Dorothy Kinney-Landis (dorothy@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Planner
- Mel Auffredou (mel@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Program Manager

- Morgan Pratt (morgan@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Maria Burnett (maria@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Orenna Brand (orenna@franklincountynrcd.org), Community Engagement Coordinator and Field Technician
- Kerry Brosnan (kerry@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Planner
- Viva Goetze (viva@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Sadie Preece (sadie@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resource Technician

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Michelle Monroe (michelle.monroe@vacd.org), Executive Director
- Mike Dickhaut (micheal.dickhaut@nacd.net), Conservation Planner (NRCS/VACD)
- Julia King (julia.king@vacd.org), Communications Manager
- Emily Jaquish* (emily.jaquish@vt.nacdnet.net), Program Assistant

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC)

- Marli Rupe (marli.rupe@vermont.gov), Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief
- Rose Watts (rose.watts@vermont.gov), River Corridor & Floodplain Manager
- Staci Pomeroy (staci.pomeroy@vermont.gov), Supervising River Scientist
- Karen Bates (Karen.Bates@Vermont.gov), Watershed Coordinator
- Katherine King* (Katherine.King@vermont.gov), Nonpoint Source Project Developer

Lamoille County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Emily Lugthart (emilyl.lccd@gmail.com), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Sarah Skelding (lccd.ag.ss@gmail.com), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Emily Porter-Goff (emilylccdedu@gmail.com), Education Program Coordinator
- Willow Longo (willowl.lccd@gmail.com), Public Relations and Education Coordinator

Grand Isle Natural Resources Conservation District

- Molly Varner (molly@grandislecountynrcd.org), District Manager

University of Vermont Extension

- Whitney Hull (whitney.hull@uvm.edu), Dairy Herd Management Technical Assistance

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

- Holly McClintock (Holly@VHCB.org), Agricultural Program Coordinator

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

- Mae Kate Campbell (mkcampbell@lcbp.org), Associate Scientist

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Chris Smith (Chris_E_Smith@fws.gov), Supervisory Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Non-VAWQP Partners

Farmers Watershed Alliance

- Emily Klein (emily@farmerswatershedalliance.org), Program Coordinator

Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR)

- Silas Rainville (silas.rainville@vermont.gov), Watershed Forestry Specialist

Missisquoi River Basin Association (MRBA)

- Ruby Bratcher (ruby@mrbavt.com), Watershed Engagement Coordinator
- Natalie Hammond (natalie@mrbavt.com), Watershed Engagement Coordinator

Intervale Center

- Christine Porcaro (christinep@intervale.org), Farm Business Specialist

Welcome -- Lauren Weston, Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District

- Reminder to sign up for Annual VAWQP Meeting at Killington (March 31)
- Context from the Landscape and the Past
 - Our organizations once encouraged phosphorus use and helped support the blasting, digging, and straightening of our streams. It is important to remember that we are all doing what we can with the information we have.
 - A decade of progress: 10 Years since Vermont's Clean Water Act (VAAF)
 - We have made and are making lots of progress in Ag, and are still working to continue to make progress

The State of Dairy: A look at Vermont Dairy over the last 30 years – Whitney Hull, UVM Extension

- Changes to dairy farms (1997 – 2026)
- 1997:
 - o County wide 116,987 dairy farms, ~18 million cows
 - o Most farms were milking 20-100 cows, only a very small percent of farms milking over 1000 cows
 - o Shipping 157 billion pounds of milk
- 2025:
 - o 24,000 dairy farms, ~9.56 million cows
 - o Most farms are milking 50-200 cows and more large farms with a greater number of cows
 - o Shipping 231 billion pounds of milk
- National Dairy trends from 1997 to 2026:
 - o Dairy consumption is up overall: Fluid milk consumption has decreased, cheese and yogurt consumption has increased
 - o Large decrease in the number of dairy farms, but an increase of pounds of milk produced -> cows and farmers are more efficient
 - o Milk prices remain variable
- Vermont Dairy trends from 1997 to 2026:
 - o We are losing dairy farms but have not lost many cows in the state -> dairies are consolidating.
 - o VT has more organic farms compared to the rest of the USA. Organic dairies are at risk from environmental factors, especially by drought.
- Challenges Farms are facing:
 - o Climate change -> drought, flooding
 - o Rising input costs
 - o Infrastructure needs -> roads, investments in the barn, milk storage, aging equipment and parlors
 - o Labor -> 5000 dairy jobs unfilled by 2030, 51% immigrant workforce produced 79% of the milk
 - o Aging population -> average age of a dairy farmer is 57.7, farm transfer can take many years, lack of next generation to take over the farm
 - o Regulations -> Increased oversight by multiple agencies, cost of implementing corrections, increased reporting, lack of funding sources
- UVM Agricultural Business Technical Assistance – UVM extension provides support to farmers on their business planning (contact Zac Smith, Zachary.M.Smith@uvm.edu)
- What's Next?

- Automation -> milking robots, manure vacuum, automatic feed pushers, collars or ear tags to monitor health
- Precision technology -> drone to spray only where necessary, weeding robots
- Artificial Intelligence -> tracks milkers' efficiency, track cow locomotion and health indications
- Alternative revenue streams -> beef on dairy
- Adapting to consumer preferences -> people are looking for more higher protein options

Partner Updates

Sumner Kravitz - Agency of Agriculture Water Quality

- AgCWIP is currently in the process of reviewing applications for technical assistance grants for providers. They received 11 million in requests for 8 million in funding. Awards should be notified in mid-March.
- BMP applications are due by May 1, and awardees informed by July 1
- Offering one time, per acre payments for farmers to support the establishment of filter strips, grassed waterways, or pasture/hayland plantings through the Seeding and Filter Strip (SFS) program.
- Farm Agronomics Practices (FAP) Program applications are due April 1.
- Water quality
 - Custom manure application was due Jan 1
 - LFO forms were due Feb 15
- Pay for Performance is moving into a second round.
 - PFP 2.0 will be accepting applications in June 2026. All current PFP participants will be eligible to apply for 2.0.
 - The program will run for 5 total years, including 1 planning year and 4 years of implementation.
 - Payments are made up of a data entry payment, practice payment, and stewardship payment (up to \$13,000 for data and practice + \$30,000 for stewardship).
 - Payments will not be based on P loss produced, instead based on stewardship. Scaled based on P loss.
 - Enrollment in FAP or other practice-based programs is not permitted.

Julia King, VACD - VAWQP

- Reminder to sign up for the annual meeting on Tuesday, March 31.

- Registration ends on March 11.
- Lunch and Learn GIS series coming up in March.
- 2026 – 2030 strategic plan is up on the VAWQP website.

Lauren Gibson - NRCS

- The next ranking round for EQIP is April 10th.
- The next CSP ranking deadline is May 8th.
- For CSP and EQIP, applications are accepted year round.
- New priorities:
 - Preserve and protect agricultural land
 - Modernize infrastructure and technology
 - Strengthen partnerships
 - Shift to outcome-based conservation and farmer empowerment
- Announcement of Regenerative Pilot Program -> NRCS is putting 700 million dollars into EQIP and CSP
- Working with conservation districts on Locally Led conservation projects
- Felix Jimenez, NRCS - Pushing for virtual fence technology. Video of 3 farms trying the technology is available on the Northwest Crops and Soils website (linked [here](#)).

Marli Rupe - DEC

- In the last year of RCPP program
- Allocated 5 million in BMP grants
- Their 3rd RCPP agreement was rescinded by the federal government. They are working on appealing this decision.
- Jill Langlais is the new Ag Grants coordinator
- Clean Water initiative finding policy – comments are open until Feb 27
- Request to notify them of funding gaps.
- Planning Missisquoi bay tactical basin plan release – new modeling program
- If you have areas in the Missisquoi of concern, contact Karen Bates (Karen.Bates@Vermont.gov)
- DEC has funding to work on natural resources restoration – interested in working with Clean Water Service providers to restore these areas
- If there are ag projects happening in mapped floodplain areas or stream corridors, contact the state to determine if you need a permit

Michelle Monroe - VACD

- Sign up for the March GIS sessions
- VACD hired an engineer in southern VT to work with smaller farms

- Clean Water initiative funding – highlighting multiuse buffers and invasive species for comments
- VAWQP meeting coming up March 31 – please register

Emily Porter-Goff - LCNRCD

- Peter Danforth has moved on, looking for new leadership

Molly Varner - GICNRCD

- Working on a couple water quality projects and educational events
- Supporting farms in Grand Isle, with help of FCNRCD
- Received \$300,000 for soil health, looking to continue to support soil health in Grand Isle

Lauren Weston - FCNRCD

- Forestry and Maple visits coming up. FCNRCD will also be at the maple open house
- The tree sale will be at Hudak farm this year
- Working through floodplain design and tree plantings
- Precision ag meeting at Scott Magnan's on March 12
- Hosting listening sessions around 30 by 30
- Working on 26 CWSP projects
- Working on Local Led
- Beginning work with USFW on woody editions and brook trout
- Flower farming event coming up at the end of March
- FCNRCD Annual meeting coming up on July 13
- 2026 Ag guides are available
- Working on an online program library/ap based on the ag guide

Ruby Bratcher- MRBA

- Removed a dam in Newport center on Mud Creek
- Lots of tree plantings coming up
- Working on Nursery
- Natalie joined as an AmeriCorps member
- Turning 30 this year

Holly McClintock - VHCB

- Farm and forest viability program – 2 years of free business planning
- Viability program: Evaluating water quality grants
- Act 59: 30 by 30 is a huge focus. Holding regional listening sessions

- Gave some grants for stakeholder listening sessions
- Draft plan out now (vermontconservationplan.com). Plan to completed by June.
- Easements – going ahead with pre and full applications
- Started assisting donated easements assisted cost program to help with associated costs
- Staffing at VHCB – hiring a viability grants specialist and an ag program manager

Mae Kate Campbell - LCBP

- Offers annual grant opportunities – just wrapped request for proposals
- Clean water planning RFP – late august
- Last year of IGA opportunities
- Several new staff members
- Still accepting applications for seasonal boat launch stewards
- Technical meeting on March 4 – focus on putting soil health into farm prep and SLR instream into floodplains initiative tool
- Share results of technical research funded on their science blog
- 2 more events in “Love the Lake” series on March 12, March 19

Chris Smith - US Fish and Wildlife

- Offering technical assistance through their biologists
- Financial assistance for projects with co-benefits for water quality and benefits to fish and wildlife
- Expect to receive their operating budget in the next month
- Katie Kain working on riparian buffer projects
- Ryan Creehan working on wetland projects
- Interest in farm or forest roads acting as aquatic barriers – contact Chris Smith (Chris_E_Smith@fws.gov) if you are seeing roads acting as barriers

Emily Klein - FWA

- The FWA annual meeting happened on Feb 12
- Precision Ag workshop for farmers and partners on March 12. Speakers from UVM extension and John Deere
-

Online Program Library - Orenna, FCNRCD Community Engagement Specialist

- FCNRCD is developing an online program library that will be a filterable, searchable version of the Ag Guide

- Currently collecting feedback. Fill out the [survey](#) with any features, abilities, or programs you are interested in.
- 2 stakeholder input sessions
 - o NRCD/VACD staff: March 10
 - o VAAFM & Other Ag Staff: March 10

Acceptable Management Practices (AMPs) & FPR Water Quality Assistance Program – Silas Rainville, Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation Watershed Forestry Specialist

- Background on FPRs Watershed forestry program and administering VTs AMPs
- Goal to provide technical assistance, education, and outreach for loggers and landowners.
- Also have a regulatory and enforcement program
- Administer a number of cost share and grant programs around AMPs.
- Administer VT heavy cut law – permit required for anyone looking to heavy cut/clear cut on greater than 40 acres.
- AMPs are to provide guidelines for loggers, foresters, and landowners to comply with VTs water quality standards. They protect water quality, prevent soil erosion, and minimize stream impacts from forest use.
- AMPs offer some legal protection, when put in place correctly
- AMPs apply to all logging operations on public and private lands
- Loggers are responsible for implementing AMPs when they are operating, however landowners are ultimately responsible for any discharge that occurs on their land
- There is an AMP smartphone app for the AMPs.
- Water quality assistance program developed in 2017
 - o Provided financial and technical assistance for loggers following AMPs
- Skidder bridges available through conservation districts
- Heavy duty temporary bridge rental program through FPR offers steel bridges
- FPR has a cost share program to help loggers acquire bridges
- FPR has a temporary steel culverts cost-share program
- 2026 crane mat cost share program -> improve operability, protect soil and water quality
- Water quality assistance program expansion (2024)
 - o Slocamp -> funding projects to support projects for loggers in compliance with AMPs
 - o These projects are for logging contractors to implement proactive practices to prepare sites for harvest
 - o Focus on long term forest management

- Eligible practices: hardening truck roads, skid trail improvements, temporary and permanent (only on intermittent) stream crossings
 - Hoping to extend program into the future
- For more information on the Bridges, please reach out to Dave Wilcox at david.wilcox@vermont.gov