

Northwest Region

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership Meeting

Location: American Legion, St. Albans

Date: August 27th, 2025

Attendance List

VAWQP Partners

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

- Lee King (lee.king@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Maddie Beaudry (maddie.beaudry@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Gillian D'Acierno (Gillian.Dacierno@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Mianda Wood (mianda.wood@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist
- Nina Gage (nina.gage@vermont.gov), Water Quality Deputy Director
- Sumner LeBaron-Brien (sumner.lebaron-brien@vermont.gov), Water Quality Program Coordinator
- Steve Cash (steve.cash@vermont.gov), Water Quality Specialist Supervisor
- Noah Gilbert-Fuller (noah.gilbert-fuller@vermont.gov), Water Quality Program Coordinator
- Dillan Westcom (dillan.westcom@vermont.gov), Engineer

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

- Marli Rupe (marli.rupe@vermont.gov), Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief
- Katherine King (katherine.king@vermont.gov), Nonpoint Source Project Developer
- Christy Witters (christy.witters@vermont.gov), Stormwater Permit Coordinator

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR)

- Rose Watts (rose.watts@vermont.gov), River Corridor and Floodplain Manager
- Evan Horne (evan.horne@vermont.gov), Resilient Lands Coordinator, Climate Action Office

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD)

- Jamie Cohen (jamie.cohen@vacd.org), Ag Resource Specialist/VPFP Programs
- Julia King (julia.king@vacd.org), Communications Manager
- Michelle Monroe (michelle.monroe@vacd.org), Executive Director

- Emily Jaquish (emily.jaquish@vt.nacdnet.net), Program Assistant, St. Albans NRCS Field Office
- Mike Dickhaut (michael.dickhaut@vt.nacdnet.net), Conservation Planner (St. Albans)
- Alli Wells (alli.wells@vacd.org), Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership Coordinator

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District (FCNRCD)

- Lauren Weston (lauren@franklincountynrcd.org), District Manager
- Kate Wettergreen (kate@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Manager
- Morgan Pratt (morgan@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Maria Burnett (maria@franklincountynrcd.org), Agricultural Programs Specialist
- Mel Auffredou (mel@franklincountynrcd.org), Senior Natural Resources Planner
- Kerry Brosnan (kerry@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Planner
- Dorothy Kinney-Landis (dorothy@franklincountynrcd.org), Natural Resources Planner
- Orenna Brand (orenna@franklincountynrcd.org), Community Engagement Specialist
- Viva Goetze (viva@franklincountynrcd.org), Summer Stewardship Intern

Lamoille County Natural Resources Conservation District (LCNRCD)

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

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

- Ali Malone (alison.malone@usda.gov), County Executive Director
- Ryan Howrigan (ryan.howrigan@usda.gov), District Director
- Connie Brigham (constance.brigham@usda.gov), Program Technician

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Sarah Larose (sarah.larose@usda.gov), Northwest Zone District Conservationist
- Illiana Freiday (iliana.freiday@usda.gov), Natural Resources Specialist
- Cheyanne Rico (cheyanne.rico@usda.gov), Outreach Coordinator

- Chris Evans (christopher.evans2@usda.gov), Forester
- Felix Jimenez (felix.jimenez@usda.gov), State Grazing Specialist
- Jimmy Young (james.young2@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Lauren Gibson (lauren.gibson@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist
- Logan Reese (logan.reese@usda.gov), Natural Resource Specialist
- Luis Aponte (luis.aponte@usda.gov), Assistant State Conservationist - Partnerships
- Renee Bolduc (renee.bolduc@usda.gov), Soil Conservationist

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

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

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

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

University of Vermont (UVM) Extension

- Jeff Sanders (jeffrey.sanders@uvm.edu), Agronomy Specialist
- Daniel Bliss (daniel.bliss@uvm.edu), Precision Ag Specialist

Non VAWQP Partners

Vermont Land Trust (VLT)

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

Friends of Northern Lake Champlain (FNLC)

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

Farmers Watershed Alliance (FWA)

- Andre Bolduc (andre@farmerswatershedalliance.org), Precision Agriculture Specialist
- Emily Klein (emily@farmerswatershedalliance.org), Program Coordinator
- Scott Magnan (scottmagnan@gmail.com), Chair of the FWA and Owner of Scott Magnan's Custom Service

Franklin Watershed Committee

- Ava Walsh (awalshfwc@gmail.com), Coordinator

Ben & Jerry's

- Rebecca Manning (rebecca.manning@benjerry.com), Low Carbon Dairy Program Coordinator

Farmwise Solutions

- John Roberts (farmwisesolutions51@gmail.com), Owner

AgriLab Technologies

- Brian Jerosse (brian@agrilabtech.com), President

Missisquoi River Basin Association

- Sarah Lunn (sarah@mrbavt.com), Watershed Restoration Manager

Windfall Acres Farm

- Nancy Fiske (windfallacres@franklvt.net)

Meeting Minutes

Welcome – FCNRCD

- Lauren Weston thanks everyone for being here, and shared the agenda for the VAWQP/Partner Org staff meeting

Land Acknowledgement – Alli Wells, VACD

- VACD has a land acknowledgement that Alli shared out.
- Land acknowledgement: Each day, we rise and begin our work across Vermont's lands and waters. Vermont's Conservation Districts embrace the role of protecting natural resources and recognize the Indigenous Abenaki Community on whose land we gather. We thank the Abenaki people for inspiring us to continue work that began over 10,000 years ago. As the original stewards of the land, they have cared for *Ndakinna*, the place we now call Vermont, shaping its culture, agriculture, food systems, arts, and landscapes across countless generations. We recognize, respect, and honor the history of the Abenaki and commit ourselves to maintaining the responsible use of the land.
- Alli mentioned that The N in the front of the word 'Ndakinna' has the connotation of 'my', people have been shifting to K in the front that has the connotation of 'our'

- Alli thanks Lauren Weston for continuing to host these meetings. Partnership takes investment and nurturing. Partner engagement in this work is important to the organizations and leaders of the VAWQP and supports VAWQP Strategic Plan Objectives.

VAWQP 2026-2030 Strategic Plan *Draft* – Alli Wells, VACD

- The draft of this Strategic Plan utilized extensive surveying from the partnership
- Regional meeting reports helped to identify topics of interest for Lunch and Learn webinars and trainings
- The draft of the Strategic Plan will be shared via an upcoming newsletter Strategic Plan

Vision

- o We envision a future where Vermont's vibrant working lands serve as a cornerstone of environmental stewardship and conservation, enhancing water quality and wildlife habitats. These agricultural and forestry enterprises will support a thriving economy, foster connected and resilient ecosystems and contribute to the overall well-being of Vermont and its residents.
- o The main difference in this version compared to the previous version is that the inclusion of forestry and land stewards is more explicit. It's not specifically agriculture, water quality, and farmers.

Purpose and Mission

- o Coordinate partner efforts to improve agricultural water quality in Vermont by providing education, technical and financial assistance to land stewards.

Overarching Goals

1. Improve water quality and wildlife habitats on working lands
2. Provide technical and financial assistance efficiently and effectively
3. Deliver high-quality service to working lands stewards

Strategic Plan Objectives

1. Sustain and Strengthen Collaborative Relationships
 - a. Highlighted addition: statewide regional coordination meetings

2. Identify research needs and questions, coordinate research efforts, and share findings and learning across the VAWQP partner and others to evaluate, adjust and innovate program, practices and tools
 - a. Highlighted changes: combining research and practice/funding priorities. Emphasis on aligning prioritization
3. Ensure staff training across partner organizations
 - a. Highlighted changes: continue to be responsive to training needs of the VAWQP and prioritize development of in-field trainings
4. Create consistent, coherent, meaningful messages for partner staff, farmers and the public
 - a. Highlights: continue to adapt communication resources to better serve the VAWQP, i.e. adding research to newsletters, developing Lunch & Learn Webinars
5. Align Tactical Basin Planning and prioritization efforts to ensure effectiveness of jointly targeted watershed strategies
 - a. Highlights: prioritizing enhanced understanding, collaboration and alignment of prioritization methods

Personal Identifying Information/1619 guidance – Alli Wells and Luis Aponte

- 1619 has been a huge topic of conversation for everyone
- VACD and NRCS recognizes that allowing time for discussions throughout all the partners is important
- RCPP is a different beast
- The 1619 training is in the VAWQP orientation
- Luis is the point of contact for 1619 questions

Alli Sharing the Partnership Section of 1619

- Promote greater collaboration across partners
- A policy that explains how we're going to share information with partners
- NRCS is under a new administration. NRCS has been doing their best to make sure that everyone stays informed
- PII is not to be shared with other organizations outside of the 9 partners
- Nonregulatory partners should not be sharing information that could result in regulatory consequence
- When in doubt, get a release form, reach out to your organization and understand how your organization interprets 1619

- 1619 should not silo you, should not restrict you from doing your work
- Situational awareness is super important
- If you need some of the obligation numbers from NRCS for a presentation or event, request them early. Sharing general information is different than operation/land steward specific

From the slides:

- 1619 MOU Purpose: to promote greater and more efficient cooperation among partners in Vermont on addressing agricultural water quality concerns
- General Guidance:
 - Farm information/PII cannot be shared with partners outside of VAWQP/1619 agreement
 - VAWQP partners can share among themselves *non regulatory* information for the purpose of “providing technical or financial assistance with respect to the agricultural operation, agricultural land or farming or conservation practices”.
 - Non regulatory partners providing TA/FA assistance cannot share information that could be used in a regulatory manner with VAWQP partners who have regulatory authority (VAAF, DEC).
 - Know your organization’s interpretation
 - When in doubt, get a release form.

Quiz

- Question: What is the primary purpose of Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008?
 - Answer: To protect personal and confidential information collected by USDA agencies
- Question: Which of the following types of data is protected under Section 1619?
 - Answer: Geospatial information about agricultural land
- Question: John Partner, who has an agreement including the “acknowledgement of Section 1619”, would like to request information on Jim Bean’s active EQIP contract as he is wondering what this producer is implementing these days. Is he allowed to access this information without an authorization for release of information?
 - Answer: No, we cannot give him this information and he is not providing technical assistance to implement this conservation plan/contract, but elevating it to your supervisor before providing a response is also acceptable!

- Question: Who of the following does not have access data protected by Section 1619? (w/o release of information form)
 - Answer: Third parties, vendors and TSP's
- Question: What types of agreements contain "Acknowledgement of Section 1619"?
 - Answer: Unfunded Cooperative Agreements (UCA), USDA grants, contribution agreements, and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

More Stream Restoration / Strategic Wood Additions / Tree Planting Collaborations – Katherine King

- Katherine is with the Watershed Planning Program at DEC, and is filling in for Karen Bates
- Lamoille and Missisquoi Tactical Basin Plans in June 2026
- The DEC is working on some guidance around strategic wood addition.
- Basin 6 and 7 partner meetings are coming up – contact Karen Bates at karen.bates@vermont.gov for more information.
- Michelle Monroe: there's still a lot of stormwater work to be done, and is wondering why basin planners are shifting away from stormwater.
- The DEC is interested in supporting more Natural Resources projects, and is wanting to learn more about how this group can be leveraged by learning what's already happening, and make some connections.

Partnerships shared from around the room

- Farm teams have helped to make project implementations more efficient
- Nina Gage: it can be hard to identify which clean water project is the best fit for which program. Which projects should be prioritized for CWSP vs Trees for Streams vs NRCS vs CREP. There have been a lot of applications from Franklin County NRCD – the organization is great at identifying the best fit for each project.
- Lauren Weston: FCNRCD has been working on a stream restoration project with Ben Gabos and Phil Wilson from VAAFM, Tucker Malone from VLT, and Staci Pomeroy from the Rivers Program at the DEC. This is a great example of collaboration with trying to time multiple easements and fitting all the pieces together to get the project going in Franklin. *"We're all hanging out on the same site visit."*
- The Franklin County NRCD also completed a project at River Berry Farm. The district organized 6 volunteers, and coordinated with US Fish and Wildlife, Pur Projet, and FSA on a conserved farm

- Alli Wells: there is a space in the VAWQP newsletter for a farmer success story with these types of collaborations. There is a form available that's asking for suggestions!
- Peter Danforth: LCNRCDD started a community informed project in Oxbow Riverfront Park in Morrisville. What started out as a tree planting project turned into something else entirely after a survey was conducted on what the community wants at Oxbow Park – revegetation and flood mitigation were at the top of the list. It was a bottom-up process versus top-down. Lamoille County NRCDD is hoping that the park will provide opportunities for a food forest and education.
- Lauren Weston provided feedback for DEC: please make CWSP funding and processes easier. Take the barriers down.
- Marli Rupe from DEC: there is money in various places right now to provide education and outreach to partners. You know better than we do about what you need to know, so please ask for it!
- Bridget Butler from FNLC suggested a training on GIS mapping for strategic wood addition. This can be really compelling for community members.
- Orenna Brand from FCNRCDD requested additional training on the CWSP verification process. Having some guidance and best practices on the use of tree tubes would be valuable.
- Mel Auffredou from FCNRCDD asked which CWSP projects require an engineer, which projects don't? Which projects need PE-stamped plans, which ones can be more streamlined to save time for implementation.
- Sarah Lunn from MRBA brought up dredging and river dynamics. Why we should or should not dredge. Bridget Butler from FNLC built off of that, asking how we build good messages, and how do we do that collaboratively?
- Katherine King took away the following notes:
 - Any improvements to make CWSP funding process simpler and easier
 - Training in GIS mapping software - interested in this as a way to build more internal capacity for this kind of work
 - Any training or guidance that can be provided on Strategic Wood Addition
 - Online training
 - In person training - this could also be a good opportunity to engage community members
 - More training on the CWSP verification process
 - Specifically on tree tube use and stakes - partners are hearing different things about what is recommended for this

- Guidance and standards for dredging practices as they relate to river dynamics
 - It would be helpful to have statewide standards of when to dredge and when not to dredge
- Training or workshops for building cohesive messaging
 - Determining which project types/topics for which more consistent messaging is needed
 - Collaboratively developing messaging that can be used by all
 - Develop standard language for communications that can be used by all

Organization Updates

Department of Environmental Conservation: Marli Rupe

- There is information on the [Clean Water Board on the DEC website](#). Marli suggests that everyone reads about it and pays attention to the process, which is starting in October. \$35 million is available for the current Clean Water Budget, which ‘provides funding to help municipalities, farmers, and others implement projects that will restore, enhance, and protect Vermont’s water quality, including addressing priority sources of nutrient and sediment pollution’. (dec.vermont.gov)
- There is a public meeting on November 7th, 2025. If you’re not signed up for [updates from the listerv](#), it’s on the website.
- Lake Carmi is receiving an alum treatment in September. The DEC is currently working on finalizing the contract with the applicator. There has been so much great work that the agricultural community has done, and everyone needs to continue to do the work.
- There probably won’t be a public meeting at this time, but there will be information that’s shared throughout the process.
- State employees are moving back to state offices.

Friends of Northern Lake Champlain: Bridget Butler

- Updates on the Rock River sub watershed include water quality monitoring through RCPP, and drainage assessments through LCBP. This is work that has been going on for 5 years. FNLC is monitoring 10 sites from April through October.

- FNLC is working with Fitzgerald Environmental Associates on ditch and drainage sites among some of the smaller Rock River tributaries.
- Funded by RCPP, FNLC is looking into data and summarizing what's been happening throughout the years.

Missisquoi River Basin Association: Sarah Lunn

- Organizational updates: MRBA has hired a nursery manager.
- There is a dam removal beginning this week
- There are a couple of small planning projects happening this fall

Vermont Land Trust: Tucker Malone

- There seems to be a sentiment among farmers that the organization ran out of money for conservation projects but that is not true.
- VLT is doing okay and is still open for conservation. There haven't been a lot of inquiries this summer.
- Even though funding through the Inflation Reduction Act disappeared, there has been some special funding for buffers that VLT has been able to acquire.

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board: Holly McClintock

- VHCB has a pretty robust pipeline for conservation projects
- The organization has done a lot of policy work, including some recent listening sessions on Act 59.
- VHCB will be presenting at the Farm to Plate Conference this year and will have more listening sessions in December.
- Farmers who complete the [Farm and Forest Viability program](#) can receive an implementation grant – mention this to your farmers
- There was \$40,000 for the VHCB Water Quality grant last year. The funding amount for this year hasn't been announced yet.
- VHCB won't be doing a Great Lakes Program this upcoming year.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service: Chris Smith

- USFWS is one of 11 federal bureaus
- Reorganization plans developed over the first 6 months of the new federal administration. A lot of positions at the leadership level have shifted.
- Waiting to hear more about the director's priorities in the coming months
- USFWS has received the FY25 budget, and they are waiting to see what the FY26 budget looks like.

- There has been some ebb and flow with CREP sign ups this year.
- Working very closely with NRCS and WRE. There are currently 4 restoration projects.

Lamoille County Natural Resources Conservation District: Peter Danforth

- Hired three new staff members
- LCNRCD has a new nursery
- Applying for LCBP funding, and would like to get more involved in flood resilience work.
- Started the District's first Farm Team
- Focusing on forestry practices and advancing agroforestry projects.

Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District: Maria Burnett reading for Molly Varner

- It's been a fun and busy summer for Grand Isle County NRCD! Here are a few highlights of what we've been working on:
- We proposed, and were approved, to offer Grand Isle County landowners \$300,000 in federal funding through USDA-NRCS to support soil health practices through 10 practices including cover cropping, reduced till, pest and nutrient management, high tunnels, and more. Applications were due August 22 for FY25 projects.
- We continue to build our partnerships with farmers in Grand Isle County, whether through soil sampling, NMPs, grant assistance, and more. Thank you to the agencies who keep us in mind and invite us along for field visits - please keep them coming!
- We are moving forward with three clean water projects in South Hero, spanning implementation, final design, and project development. We're also partnering with Friends of Northern Lake Champlain on a Lake Watershed Action Plan for Carry Bay and Pelot's Bay in North Hero. This plan will help us identify future clean water projects across wetlands, streams, shorelines, roads, and farmland. We are also collaborating on Stream Wise and Lake Wise assessments.
- Through a grant with VAAFM, we're partnering with Healthy Roots Collaborative and South Hero Land Trust to support farm-to-school initiatives in Grand Isle County. Specifically, we're working with Alburgh School and a local farm to host field trips, in-class presentations, and a harvest dinner.
- We have a couple events in the works for later this fall so stay tuned!

Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District: Lauren Weston

- Starting the 2026 update to the Guide for Agricultural Producers. Has drafted a proposal to turn it into an app
- Has been a busy year with soil sampling and NMP updates
- Continuing to work with 33 farms across Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Franklin Counties in the Vermont Pay for Performance Program.
- Exploring collaborations with flower farmers
- The Natural Resources team has been busy with maple producer workshops and site visits, as well as forestry/logging AMP visits
- [Skidder bridge program](#): FCNRCD has a skidder bridge available for rent.
- Project design work on 6+ Natural Resources projects in the Lake Carmi Watershed
- Tree plantings and supporting stewardship across the Lake Champlain Basin
- Working on a dam removal in Berkshire
- Dorothy Kinney-Landis has been the lead on a food forest project at Hard'Ack Recreation Area
- Land and Water Conversation Series with the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi
- Project development with municipalities across Franklin County
- Watershed 101 field trips and lessons with students (including farm visits)

Farmers Watershed Alliance Summer Meeting + VAWQP Meeting

Location: American Legion in St. Albans

Date: August 27th, 2025

USDA - Farm Service Agency (FSA) Organization Update – Ali Malone

- Leadership Updates
 - Brooke Rollins is the new Secretary of Agriculture.
 - No plans to reorganize county offices.
 - Ryan Howrigan is serving as acting leader.
- Staffing
 - Hiring a temporary FSA loan analyst, funded through end of calendar year.
- Emergency Commodity Assistance Program
 - Covered planted corn and soybeans.
 - Application deadline passed 1–2 weeks ago.
 - Distributed \$1.68 million statewide.
 - Eligibility: any farmer who received crop insurance or NAPP indemnity payments in 2023 or 2024.
 - Sent \$500,000 to Franklin and Grand Isle counties.

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Organization Update – Sarah Larose

- FY26 Activities
 - CSP renewals.
 - Contract management.
 - Construction projects.
- FY27 Outlook
 - Exciting new funding for local communities.
 - Importance of attending local meetings emphasized.
 - Two additional priority watersheds: Jewett Brook and Mill River.
 - Watershed assessments with dedicated funds through NWQI.
 - Work tied to Lake Champlain TMDL goals.
 - Additional focus on Hungerford and Rock River watersheds still occurring

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFM) Organization Update – Nina Gage

- General Updates
 - Emphasis on strong relationships and appreciation for partnership.
 - Finalizing supplemental assistance, support for infrastructure losses in progress.
- Drought Task Force
 - First meeting held this week.
 - Despite very dry conditions, Vermont is only at D0 classification (must reach D2 for financial support).
 - Farmers shared anecdotal experiences. (Staff who received anecdotes include Steve Cash and Scott Waterman).
- Programs & Funding
 - BMP Hearings: series of public meetings on neonicotinoids, draft rule open for public comment.
 - CEAP: deadline November 1st.
 - ♣ Increased cost-share rates (tariff-related).
 - ♣ Categories similar to past years.
 - ♣ New bedded pack management category for equipment.
 - AgCWIP: preparing to release funding November 1st.
 - ♣ \$8 million available statewide.
- Staffing Snapshot (last year)
 - 420 technical assistance staff total.
 - 130 agency staff; remainder were partner staff.
- Regional Outcomes (last year)
 - 10 CEAP projects.
 - 4 BMP projects.
 - 4 pasture projects.
 - 5 CSP projects.
 - 11 new VPFP participants.
 - 95 FAP projects.
 - \$2 million distributed in this region.
- VPFP
 - Social and economic analysis project (federally funded) is wrapping up.

- ♣ Andrew Gerlicz from UVM has been conducting the study, taking responses from TA providers and farmers in the VPFP program.
- o Some changes coming, but support will continue to be offered to farmers.

Locally Led Conservation: Presented by Lauren Weston

- Conservation Needs Assessment
 - o A comprehensive analysis that evaluates the natural resource concerns in a specific geographic area, based on public input and scientific data. Some categories of needs include: soil, water, animal, plant, air, energy, and humans.
- Conservation Action Plan
 - o Community stakeholders plan for the needed programs and services to address the problems identified by their local conservation needs assessment. This includes identifying priorities and funding and technical assistance opportunities and needs.
- Plan Implementation
 - o Implement and evaluate the action plan with stakeholders such as state and federal partners. In Vermont, USDA-NRCS has rolled out Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pools, an initiative to direct special EQIP funding to a particular watershed or county, allowing for applicants to be ranked without competing in statewide funding pools.
- Respondent Demographics: 142 responses (and counting)
 - o Franklin County: 60%
 - o Grand Isle County: 19%
 - o Lamoille County: 21%

Top 5 Concerns from Needs Assessment

1. Field sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss
2. Terrestrial habitat
3. Soil quality limitations
4. Degraded plant condition
5. Source water depletion

Northwest Region Fund Pools by County

- Franklin County – Farmstead & Infrastructure Improvements Local Fund Pool: \$1,500,000
- Grand Isle County – Soil Health Local Fund Pool: \$300,000
- Lamoille County – Forest Structure & Health Local Fund Pool: \$200,000

Other Local Fund Pools (outside Northwest Region)

- Bennington County – Agroforestry & Flood Resilience EQIP: \$250,000
- Caledonia County – Community-Scale Agricultural Resiliency: \$200,000
- Orleans County
 - Slow the Flow: \$200,000
 - Slow the Spread: \$200,000
 - Support Small Farms: \$200,000
- Poultney, Mettowee & Rutland – Conservation Efforts in Rutland County: \$500,000
- White River & Ottauquechee – Conservation Planning: \$75,000
- Windham County
 - Forest Management Plans: \$25,000
 - Forest Health: \$350,000
 - Small Agriculture: \$200,000
- Winooski – Stream & Riverside Plantings: \$200,000

Farmer's Watershed Alliance (FWA) Organization Update - Scott Magnan

- The organization is a nonprofit made up of people in the agricultural community who are engaged in water quality issues and projects.

Two new staff hired this quarter

- Andre Bolduc – Precision Ag Specialist/Coordinator
- Emily Klein – Program Coordinator

2025 Staff Accomplishments:

- Working on implementing AgCWIP grant duties, including:
 - Completed 28 farm visits, consulting with 15+ farmers

- Providing guidance on planting systems, manure applications, variable rate fertilizer, tillage
- Built a precision sprayer (for pesticide/herbicide application) – demonstration on site
- Collaborated with UVM on a variable rate fertilizer trial
 - Gathering results with GPS monitoring equipment
- Published monthly newsletter (started by Sara Gratz, former staff member)

2025 Board Accomplishments:

- Active board representation in the community
 - Neonics meeting (August 27th 4:30-6:30pm at St. Albans Free Library)
 - Participated in UVM Field Day at Borderview Research Farm
 - Greenfield Robotics meeting (exploring ag robotics)
 - EPA meeting
- Onboarding staff
- Very busy implementing practices

Ongoing Projects:

- Updating website
 - Adding Precision Ag tutorials
 - Newsletters
- Partnering with UVM to develop outreach materials
 - Precision ag network
 - Trials for the precision ag network
- Continuing stakeholder meetings
- During the winter of 2025-26, there will be the organization's annual meeting and an event on precision ag so stay tuned.

Sustainability from a Brand's Point of View: Presented by Rebecca Manning

- Presenter: **Rebecca Manning, Low Carbon Dairy Coordinator, Ben & Jerry's**

- Contact: rebecca.manning@benjerry.com
- **PLEASE NOTE – the presentation is for professional use and should not be shared on social media.**

Topics covered:

- Ben & Jerry's Values
- Caring Dairy Program
- Tackling Emissions in the Dairy Supply Chain
- Low Carbon Dairy Project

Ben & Jerry's – Values & Mission

- Strong brand commitment to sustainability.
- Ben & Jerry's operates on a three-part mission that aims to create linked prosperity for everyone that's connected to our business: suppliers, employees, farmers, franchisees, customers, and neighbors alike.
- Three-Part Mission: social, product, and economic.
- Caring Dairy Program: supports farmers in adopting sustainable practices.
- Milk with Dignity Standards Council partnership.

Caring Dairy

History

- Founded in 2006 (EU), 2011 (US)
- Evolved from holistic practice-based program to impact-based
- Incorporates environmental, labor, and animal care standards
- Proven mechanism for reputational risk mitigation and supply resiliency

Program Pillars

- Dignified livelihoods
- Excellent life for cows
- Regenerative and circular agriculture
- Low carbon farming

Tackling Emissions – Why Now?

- Ice cream ingredients & packaging = **over 80% of company's GHG emissions**.
- 2021 emissions: ~640,000 metric tons (≈ 3.2 lbs CO₂e per pint).
- Major on-farm contributors:
 - Enteric emissions
 - Manure management
 - Cropping practices
 - On-farm energy use

Low Carbon Dairy Project Overview

	United States	European Union/United Kingdom
Term	2022-2025	2022-2025
Number of Farms	7 farms	10 farms
Geography	Vermont	Netherlands
Farm Size	60-1000 milking cows	75-400 milking cows

Goals:

- **Near-term (3 years):** reduce dairy GHG factor by 50% below industry average, while improving productivity, financial performance, and resilience.
- **Long-term:** scale across Ben & Jerry's supply chain, progress toward net-zero GHG.

Key Farm Attributes

- Collaboration
- Trust & good communication
- Learning & adapting
- Open to farm tours & sharing success publicly
- Mutual benefit
- Commitment to environmental protection
- Transparency in finances & farm management
- Strong record keeping

Whole-farm approach to GHG emissions

1. **Regenerative Agriculture** – crop management, soil health, synthetic inputs
 - a. Crop management: crop rotation, renovate perennial grass stand
 - b. Soil health: cover cropping, reduced/no-till
 - c. Reduce synthetic inputs: Manure Urease inhibitor, PSNT testing
2. **Nutritious Homegrown Feed** – optimize quality & quantity of grass in the diet
 - a. Increase quantity of homegrown feed: rejuvenate perennial grass stands
 - b. Increase quality of homegrown feed: baseline feed loss, make feed storage improvements, increase forage quality
 - c. Increase feed consistency: initiate use of a Scio cup, make regular feed pushups
3. **Enteric Emissions** – trial rumen modifiers, maximize forage quality
 - a. Trial enteric methane solutions
 - b. Collaborating with Blue Ocean Barns
 - c. Hopeful for approval of more enteric feed additives
 - d. Working with farms and nutrition teams to increase FPCM
4. **Manure Management** – digesters, separators, new manure technologies
 - a. Assess manure technologies: work with a third party to assess viable tech on a farm-by-farm basis
 - b. Implement manure solutions: work directly with farms to implement manure solutions
5. **Animal Welfare & Longevity** – GAP Certification, Novus C.O.W.S Assessments
 - a. GAP Certification: audit process, annual audits on every farm, farms working towards GAP certification
 - b. Novus C.O.W.S Assessments: assess each farm, work with the farm to make improvements
6. **Renewable Energy** – expand on-farm renewable energy use
 - a. Energy audits: third party energy audits of each farm, improvements from energy audits
 - b. Renewables: assess renewable energy options on each farm, rooftop solar arrays
7. **Nature & Biodiversity** – baseline assessments and improvements
 - a. Biodiversity assessment: Cool Farm Tool biodiversity assessment, create individual farm biodiversity baselines
 - b. Biodiversity improvements: increasing diversity in cover crops and perennial grass stands, farmers in program are required to have an active biodiversity action plan for 7.5% of their owned farm land.

Emission Sources

- 47% – Enteric emissions
- 26% – Manure
- 18% – Cropping
- 9% – Other

Low Carbon Dairy Project

- **Baseline (2015 Caring Dairy):** 1.01 kg CO₂e/kg FPCM
- **Current weighted average (all farms):** 0.85 kg CO₂e/kg FPCM
- **Results:** participating farms have reduced emissions by an average of **16% since 2015**.

Conclusion

- Our farmers are driving positive impacts across all pillars and all intervention categories
- Ben & Jerry's is proud of the farmers who collaborate with us through our Caring Dairy and Low Carbon Dairy programs
- We are continuing to learn and implement new strategies with our farmer partners
- Looking forward to scaling successful and feasible strategies across the greater Caring Dairy program
- The Low Carbon Dairy Project demonstrates that significant reductions in GHG emissions are possible.
- Progress toward **net-zero dairy supply chain** while maintaining farm viability and resilience.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Updates – Steve Cash and Marli Rupe

Updates from Steve Cash, VAAFM

Current field season

- AAFM is conducting joint visits with DEC's CAFO program this field season. The plan is to do somewhere in the range of 10-15 visits. On those visits, DEC is the lead. Outwardly, a CAFO led inspection may not look very different from a AAFM inspection except that communication with a farm or technical service provider about the visit is led by a DEC inspector and not an AAFM inspector. In recent years, the Agency of Ag has done 200-300 visits annually. If there are visits that involve only AAFM it simply means it is not one of the 10-15 joint visits.
- The joint visit process is similar to visits that AAFM has done with EPA over the years, where EPA has been the lead. Two reports often result from those joint visits and that is the same with DEC/AAFM joint visits.
- There may be investigations that are conducted with representatives from both DEC and AAFM. These visits take place when both entities have an interest in an issue and are something AAFM has done with various programs in DEC over the years.

Going forward

- AAFM and DEC will continue to collaborate and I'm assuming that collaboration will increase, and DEC will take the lead in more situations.
- Collaboration with ANR/DEC is something that AAFM navigates on a regular basis. In addition to overseeing some of the water quality inspection staff, I also oversee the Non-sewage waste program, which regulates off-farm waste that goes to pits and digesters. This is an area where I work frequently with DEC's Solid waste and Residuals programs. It requires consistent dialogue between DEC and AAFM to navigate the areas where jurisdictions touch and overlap.
- I encourage people to participate in the stakeholder and public comment process that DEC is planning

Updates from Marli Rupe, DEC

- Act 67 Deadlines: The program is on track to meet the timelines and deliverables required under Act 67. Staff are coordinating across agencies to ensure that statutory requirements are achieved on schedule. The schedule timeline is extremely challenging but we are on track.
- Stakeholder Facilitation: ANR will be working with an independent facilitator to convene and guide stakeholder discussions. This will ensure balanced input from farmers, partners, and interested organizations. We recognize that farmers, TSPs

and interested parties need as much time as possible, and the facilitator will be scheduling meetings asap.

- **Public Participation:** A clear format will be established for public comment and participation, providing transparent opportunities for Vermonters to contribute throughout the process.

AgConnect: Home of Vermont's On-Farm Research Network: Presented by Jeff Sanders

Overview:

- AgConnect is a user-friendly software that will simplify on-farm research for farmers and facilitators.
- This software will have the capability to conduct, store, analyze, and share on-farm research to empower farmers and agricultural communities to make better-informed decisions. Managing research opportunities, data collection, and results can be overwhelming, so we're creating a single place where you can do it all.
- This software is still in development and is currently being tested by farmers and researchers. Stay tuned for updates!

Three Main Functions of AgConnect

1. **Join Research Trials** – After making an account on AgConnect, farmers can browse actively recruiting research projects that align with their management practices. They can explore the website by filtering through research projects and choosing which one works for them.
2. **Suggest Research Trials** –AgConnect connects farmers with researchers to make their ideas a reality and prioritize their research questions. Farmers can submit research requests to the AgConnect team, and a researcher will connect with them to specify the details of the experiment.
3. **Share & Access Local Data** – Farmers can contribute to and benefit from a shared pool of regional research data. AgConnect will feature a regional on-farm research database that will be populated with results of research trials conducted on local farms. This will help farmers make decisions based on local data and give stakeholders access to key information about Vermont agriculture.

Benefits for Farmers

- Join trials that align with their farm practices and interests.
- Centralized place to store research protocols and materials.
- Easier and faster field data collection and submission.
- Direct contact with research leads (one click away).

- Immediate access to local research results.
- Ability to share their own ideas and contribute to research design.

Benefits for Facilitators

- Reduce outreach fatigue by reaching many farmers in one place.
- Simplify data collection via AgConnect's data log portal.
- Use experiment templates to standardize trials.
- Communicate efficiently with participants.
- Develop and distribute research reports directly to farmers.

Compost Aeration and Nutrient Recovery Projects: Presented by Brian Jerosé

- Presented by Brian Jerosé, President, Agrilab Technologies Inc.
- **Brian Jerosé** – President & Co-founder, Agrilab Technologies Inc.
- Phone: (802) 933-8336
- Email: brian@agrilabtech.com
- Website: www.agrilabtech.com

Agrilab Technologies Inc. (AGT) – What We Do

- Manufacturer of modular compost aeration systems (including Compost Aeration & Heat Recovery – CAHR)
- Customers: commercial, municipal, institutional, on-farm
- Headquarters: Enosburg Falls, VT; fabrication/assembly: Cambridge, VT
- Member of Greentown Labs (Somerville, MA)
- Services: technical support on composting & manure management, project planning/design/installation
- Vermont Phosphorus Innovation Challenge project
- Equipment installations in: Northeast US, Michigan, Montana, Ontario

CAHR System Examples

- **Example Layout:** Primarily in negative aeration mode
- **Working Pad Surface:** recessed aeration channels (Foster Brothers Farms, VT Natural Ag Products)
- **Aeration Pipes:** sump box collects condensate/leachate from pipes, ductwork & blower
- **Hot Water Connection:**
 - Two heating loops (bagging facility)
 - Eight aeration zones with reversing capability
 - Four drying zones; two covered zones used primarily for drying
- **Feedstocks Used:** manure solids, dewatered digestate, forest product residuals, horse & poultry manure, waste feed, municipal food scraps (multiple recipes)

AGT Hot Box Installations

- **Hot Box 250-R:** connected to vapor pipes, plumbing, electrical, data
- **Windrows:** release moisture, CO₂, thermal energy; vapor pulled into CAHR, energy recovered to heat drying air

Case Studies

- **Country Oaks Landscape Supply (Burton, MI):**
 - Renewable thermal energy for shop/sales building, aquaponics greenhouse, compost drying, cold-weather support
 - **Hot Box 250-8RD:** aerates 8 compost zones (200–300 yd³ each)
 - Provides thermal energy to shop & greenhouse (new in 2021)
- **YES Compost (Bozeman, MT):**
 - Variable speed blower, single compost zone, hydronic heating loop
 - Temperature, oxygen, flow sensors
 - Off-grid with battery, PV, generator backup
 - Winter 2024 startup: -23°F outside, compost 140°F, fluid loop 124°F
- **Windham SWMD (Brattleboro, VT):**
 - Delivery of Hot Box 250-4R (fabricated in Cambridge, VT)
 - Flanged couplings connect HDPE aeration pipes
 - Startup in Feb 2025: biofilter thawed by late Feb with bark scent
 - Monitoring: temperature, oxygen, flow data for 3 compost batches
- **Lands Sake Farm (Weston, MA):**
 - Diversified vegetable & poultry farm using AGT mini-system

Observations & Preliminary Conclusions

- Nutrient recovery is technically feasible; phosphorus separation & concentration confirmed in labs
- Technology adoption expanding in Vermont and other states
- Composting & nutrient recovery systems give farmers more control over fertility inputs & application timing
- Systems are complex; interconnected components may create weak links
- Economic review & strong O&M planning are critical before adoption