



Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition Inc.

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

AGENDA

ZOOM LOCATION:

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://uvm-edu.zoom.us/j/7672674868>

Dial in by phone: 1 (929) 436-2866 | Meeting ID: 767 267 4868

Directors & Membership Business Meeting

In attendance: Kirsten Workman, Brian Kemp, Jeff Carter, John Roberts, Loren Wood, Darren Ucinowicz, Lorenzo Whitcomb, Matthew Biette, Jed Davis, Tom Eaton, David Conant, Jed Rubin, Marie Audet, Eric Clifford, Ray Brands, George Foster

9:33 am

Call to order & President's Report

Brian Kemp

Missed last month's meeting since we are chopping. Glad folks were able to meet in person. Lots going on still. PES took a break for the summer, but reconvening in September. Meeting Thursday for Future of Ag Commission, request to join working group for Pay for Performance workgroup with VAAFM, wetlands continue.

Secretary Report

Kirsten Workman

- Review and approve July meeting minutes (*attached*)
Motion to approve July Minutes: David Conant
Second: Marie Audet
Discussion:
Passed (5/0/0)

- Approve membership applications:

Reciprocal Membership request with Rural Vermont <https://www.ruralvermont.org/>

John introduced Rural VT and where our goals align and that we have been trying to work together with them on particular issues. Trying to keep communication open.

Group discussion:

On the fence...communication is important, but membership could imply endorsement of initiatives that we may or may not agree with. We may want to revisit other reciprocal memberships that are similar.

No motion to approve this reciprocal membership request.

John will reach out to Graham to communicate our hope for continued communication and cooperation on specific issues.

Treasurer Report

Jeff Carter

- Review current financial reports (*attached*)
- Completed Workers Comp audit - \$72,000 payroll over the last 12 months.

- \$98,976 balance, \$42,809 in savings. Still waiting for VAAFM invoice payment. Two more after that.
- \$6000 monthly expenses on average
- WE still have \$13,000 in unpaid dues....perennial question on whether to take them off the books or continue to pursue them. John updated that he and Sarah are working on outreach materials which should help.
- \$11,850 in dues in 2021 (goes in savings)
- Will update to newest version of QuickBooks

Motion to approve July Treasurer's Report: Loren Wood

Second: Marie Audet

Discussion: Do we need to purge membership list of non-paying members? Reciprocal memberships with the other watershed groups? Even right now we should be talking about a joint annual meeting for 2022. Future funding may be joint...a separate issue. Also investigating other funding sources ...

Passed (7/0/0)

Communications Update

John Roberts for Sarah Audet

July Projects

- In lieu of a Featured Farmer story this month, we shared a recap with photos of the in-person board meeting, which included a visit with Dr. Roy Beckford, a brief presentation by Dr. Joshua Faulkner, and a tour of Blue Spruce Farm.
- Distributed monthly e-newsletters to members and non-members on July 28.
- John and I met with Jennifer Byrne of the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance to discuss their online member forum: how it operates, member engagement, how much work is involved, etc. There is interest between the two groups of collaborating on a single forum to share responsibility, increase engagement, and increase the depth and breadth of knowledge represented in the forum. John will share some initial thoughts and seek input during the board meeting.
- Beginning preparations for the next installment of the public education campaign with WVTK. The next set of ads will run in September and October, and will address cover crops, explaining why farmers who just harvested their crops are planting again with winter on the horizon. In his on-air interview, John will discuss topics including chopping corn, final harvest of feed for winter, manure application, cover crops, and climate change.
- The #Farm24VT Steering Committee met to consider funding sources, community partners, and potential new members of the steering committee for next year's event. Vermont Breakfast on the Farm did not fundraise this past year, so they are no longer a source of funding. However, with a very successful first year under our belts, we are confident that we can identify new sources of funding—other grants, increased sponsorships, etc.

August Projects

- Featured farmer
- Monthly e-newsletter
- Radio campaign
- Drafting quarterly print newsletter to go out in September or October
- Online member forum
- #Farm24VT

Executive Director Report

John Roberts

- Joint letter to Governor Scott, Sec. Tebbetts and Sec. Moore re: CAFO, wetlands, regulatory confusion between agencies and subsequent communications with leadership. (letter attached).
 - Pleasantly surprised by general consensus and approval by all signers.
 - Letter sent two weeks ago. Emailed to Governor, Sec. Tebbetts, Sec. Moore. Mailed hard copies as well
 - Immediate response from Governor that he had received it and would be in touch. Julie Moore also responded immediately. Anson Tebbetts received confirmation of receipt, but no follow up.
 - It has created some action in Montpelier. Gov. called both secretaries in and asked them for resolution
 - Met with Julie Moore for over an hour yesterday. Emphasized the need to establish a collaborative process for answering questions on CAFO and Wetlands. There will be some alterations to CAFO rules, but will continue with the permit. In order to satisfy EPA, they need a CAFO program in addition to VAAFMs permits. Voluntary, unless you have a discharge/violation. Not completely satisfied, but it may not be the final word. Buffer issue (35-foot) may not need to apply to MFOs, but it would apply to LFOs. She feels EPA requires that. Wetlands...Open to a more detailed discussion. John committed to a more specific response to the draft rules. More input in the future as it moves forward. Her priority issues are building of manure pits and farm structures on land that is currently exempt (farm/cropland). Once a structure is built it should not be considered 'exempt'. Ongoing discussions need to happen on that issue. He emphasized he wants to hear from Anson and that he wants VAAFMs, ANR and farmers together to work through some of the issues. He will follow up with an email to her. Continue to pursue a collaborative process. He hopes to catch Anson tomorrow at an event. If not, he'll give him a call.
 - Questions:
 - Marie: Letter was good, but didn't hear any confirmation from Julie on acknowledgements on the parts that relate to the great progress farmers are making. John: Julie recognized that farmers are making progress, but she seems committed to the idea that EPA requires this permit. Just a preliminary meeting...still ongoing.
 - Tom E: They are mandated by EPA to update CAFO permit. But we need to figure out their timeline. Where we go from here...how do we get involved. There are a lot of rules of policy writing, some of the comments about buffers don't quite match up. Letter was to slow things up a bit and be able to insert into the process. They are just moving too fast. John...she did say they were going to keep moving forward, hoping to send update to EPA in the next 30 days. When he asked about slowing down the process, she did not respond. He will reiterate that point in his follow-up email. Jeff: don't they have to submit to EPA before public comment (true).
 - She was more open to discussion on extending the Wetland discussion than the CAFO permit. Also referenced 'exemptions' as already in existence for things like walkways.
 - Brian...it will be key to bring other groups in to request extensions on the discussions around these issues. John...many groups (like NRCDs, etc) had not even heard about wetlands rules being changed.

- Harvey was asking if we could get some legal advice to look at the rules and go through it more finely.
- VDPA Legal Counsel
 - Looking to hire legal counsel to do research into implications around wetlands issues and rules. Will cost \$5000 and want to know if CVFC would contribute to that? No litigation, but to do the research specifically around authority of ANR and whether there are concerns with the existing proposed rules. He sees both sides of that issue.
 - Marie...has moved beyond the idea that having legal counsel makes us litigious. ANR has tons of lawyers, we don't
 - Brian...feels similarly, but we cannot use CWIP funds. Are our funds separated enough to be able to justify that?
 - Jeff...he has tracked things very closely by funding source. It would be justifiable financially
 - Harvey also should have legal counsel available. Could leg legal counsel work together with farmer legal counsel to take a look at it. Apparently they are 'too busy' to look closely. However, if he introduced legislation they might need to.
 - Darren...we would need to be clear on the goals of this review so as not get too deep (\$\$) but focus the research. Loren...similarly would want to know specifically what the investment would be spent on.
 - John...we would ask for a written proposal that was explicit about breadth, depth and that it would not be litigation.
 - David...I am not in favor of it as an organization. If individual members/farms want to contribute. But he's not ready to sign on to it as an organization.
 - Jeff...it does put us in a position of the potential to pursue litigation and could endanger our funding in the future.
 - John...a firm believer in having robust conversations around the table, so are the other two watershed groups.
 - Brian...we want to be well-informed, identify unintended consequences,
 - Eric...if it is only investigation, he's ok.
 - Jed Rubin...wouldn't it be helpful for farmers to be better informed before giving testimony? The lawyers wouldn't need to present, but just provide us that basic information.
 - John will synthesize our thoughts and concerns and go to VDPA and ask for a more formal (written) proposal with scope and \$\$\$. Also talk to Harvey to share why he thinks legal counsel is so important at this juncture.
 - Loren...agrees with David regarding risks to funding. Individual contributions might be the way to go.
 - Jeff...we have entered into contracts without legal counsel. Beyond this issue, there are other issues that might be areas on need of review. We are likely not adequately understanding our liability and risk generally.
- Payment for Ecosystem Services Update (Brian)
 - Summer hiatus, broke into subcommittees
 - Soil Health subcommittee is trying identify the factors of soil health that are measureable and could/should be paid for.
 - Research and Technical services committee has put out an RFP for a consultant to review and identify what is a soil health unit and what is it worth?

- Some in the group are concerned there is not enough farmer engagement, so they will be working to broaden that input.
 - Moving forward to fall, trying to narrow down 'which practices' and how it will be funded. John Winsten made a proposal last fall that made a lot of sense, but it has since gotten lost in the weeds.
 - Unfortunately, there seems to be some tension within the group. We struggle to move forward and instead spend a lot of time defending past decisions.
 - Jeff...both this group and Climate groups (and NRCS) are very focused on soil health.
 - Tomorrow's Future of Ag commission meeting asked for Climate Council and PES to give updates. Paul Doton and Brian will be there. Ryan Patch will present as well.
- Climate Action Council(s) Update
 - Sits on subcommittee.
 - Pressure building to put a plan together.
 - There is a concern about ANR staff writing a plan that represents the agency's point of view.
 - Seems rushed (due Dec. 1)...including public comment. That would mean a plan out be Sept/Oct
 - Pleased with the general acceptance that ag is going to be a major player and there are significant opportunities to manage CO2 output in a constructive way. The proof will be in the plan.
 - LOTS of information and activity: <https://aoa.vermont.gov/content/vermont-climate-council>
 - Addison County Climate Economy Action Center (Jeff Carter) <https://ceacac.org/>
 - Developing a plan for this fall
 - Headlong rush locally to come up with a plan
 - 40+ interviews so far (not all ag)
 - How do we get feedback to these groups
 - Leahy event (8/19/21 @ Echo)...with Sec. Vilsack
 - John and David Conant will be there to contribute on a roundtable
 - What Vermont has done for improvements in environmental practices, water quality...not a place to discuss ongoing conflicts with agencies.
 - Promote to Sec. Vilsack that Federal \$\$ sent to Vermont have been well-spent. When you give us \$\$ we do good things with it.
 - We are making tremendous progress.
 - Committee to revitalize Dairy Industry
 - Conventional

Anaerobic Digesters for Small and Medium Sized Farms.

Jeff Carter

- Met with Jim Muir, Agricultural Digesters at ACFFD... <https://agriculturaldigesters.com/>
- Systems for 200-750 cow farms
- Money coming to help fund
- He was throwing around numbers about payments....\$0.20 per kwh, \$0.07 premium for 100% cow manure. VT Electric Coop is supposedly easier than GMP.
- Tom...his numbers tend to be a little pie in the sky.
- Matthew Biette...infrastructure (grid) tends to be the limiting factor

- Marie: remind folks the benefits of a digester. Upcycle our crops, renewable energy with revenue, bedding for animals, odor reductions, neighbor relations. Anything we can do to encourage farmers to try this technology and has large potential for the future

Other Updates:

All

- Sonia Howlett VAAF, stakeholder advisory panel for Payment for Performance working group. Meeting 3 times/year
 - September 15th first meeting
 - Lorenzo agreed to represent CVFC
 - Kirsten represent UVM Extension
- September Field Day – Grazing for Profit - Date TBD
- Jeff Carter Crops Exhibit (<https://youtu.be/UsRL2CwlgeQ>)
- Vermont Farm Show Crops Exhibit – submit samples for Feb 1-3
- Matthew Biette – EarthWise Global
 - Nanobubbles, stay in solution
 - Algae in ponds....looking for a pond with algae to try some technology. Just needs 240 power nearby.
 - Small or big.
 - Ideally between Middlebury and ??
- Jed Davis – joint meeting @ Farm Show
- Bourdeau Bros Ag Showcase (Sept. 9th); Vermont Farm Show (Feb 1-3)
- Eric...Citizens Advisory Committee
 - New members...Chris Bray included
 - Goals...glyphosate ban, support for dairy needs to stop since they are the environmental problem, sounded a lot like James Maroney, all the money spent
 - Marie...this winter he had a big op-ed and completely ignored the role ag has to play in solutions for climate change, etc.

12:20 PM Motion to ADJOURN Meeting: Lorenzo Whitcomb

Second: Marie Audet

Passed (7/0/0)

- Next Meeting...September 1st, 2021