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Mission: Accepted

"Does our mission and purpose continue to reflect who we serve, what we do, and our intended impact?"

That's the question we asked ourselves at our March Board of Directors and members meeting.

It's a question many nonprofits ask themselves at one time or another. Given that the Farmer Coalition has been in existence for 10 years and so much has changed within the organization and out in the field, we thought the time had come for us to reflect on this question, too.

From our discussion, we identified four things we wanted to modify in our mission:

- **Expand our environmental concerns to include soil health and climate smart farming, in addition to water quality.** So much of what we do on farms to support water quality has the added benefit of supporting soil health. And whatever we do to support soil health then addresses climate change and mitigates its impacts. It's all connected.

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Mission: Accepted (cont.)

- **Expand geographical reach from Lake Champlain to the Champlain Valley.** While we are indeed the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition, our mission statement only explicitly mentioned Lake Champlain. With a new mission that would include soil health and climate smart farming, we felt it was important to encompass both waterways and the land.
- **Highlight the importance of advocacy.** Educating and assisting farmers in implementing innovative agricultural practices is our top priority. And it is also important to ensure that legislators and policy makers fully understand what's happening on our farms and the steps we are taking to be good stewards of the land. When they know more, they are able to make better decisions.
- **Make it clear that our organization is open to all farmers who want to do their part to be good stewards of the environment.** No matter what we produce; no matter if we're conventional or organic; and no matter if we're a SFO, MFO, or LFO: We all have something new to learn and we all have something to contribute to support others' learning.

With these four changes in mind, a subcommittee of board members and staff worked together to revise the mission statement, which they presented to the full board at our April meeting for a vote. The proposed draft passed unanimously, and we are proud to present to you, our members, our new mission statement:

Our purpose is to assist all farmers in implementing innovative agricultural practices that enhance water quality, soil health, climate smart farming, and their economic resiliency in the Champlain Valley.

We accomplish this through a positive, unified voice that provides targeted

education and outreach to farmers and the public; advocates on behalf of farmers' environmental interests; and collaborates with community partners to achieve common goals.

We're Hiring!

The search for the New Executive Director begins!

It's official: we've started our search for our next full-time Executive Director. Our goal is to have the position filled no later than mid-July. The board has appointed an ad hoc hiring committee to oversee the process and conduct candidate interviews.

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will have overall operational responsibility for CVFC's mission, programs, member relations, communications, financial growth, grant management, and staff.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, but are due no later than May 20. To learn more and apply, visit www.cvfc-vt.com/careers/ or scan the QR code below with your smartphone or device.



Please also consider passing along news of this opportunity to anyone you know who might be interested!



Member Survey

This time of transition has provided CVFC the opportunity to review our mission, goals, and programming. Our members are at the core of what we do, and we would like to learn how we may serve you in the years to come. We truly value your feedback and will incorporate your insights into our future planning for the organization.

A hard copy of the member survey and a return envelope was mailed out to members in early April. Alternatively, if you would like to take the survey online, simply visit https://bit.ly/CVFC_membership_survey online or scan the QR code below with the camera on your smartphone. Only one form of the survey should be completed.



Thank you to everyone who has already participated in the survey!

CVFC Response to CLF Petition

The Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) has submitted a petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking that all water quality enforcement, including for farms, be transferred from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR).

The Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition was asked to comment on the matter, and we issued the following statement:

"The question of whether the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) or the

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) should administer the federal Clean Water Act in Vermont has been an ongoing issue, one that farmers have been feeling like we are caught in the middle of.

The Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition believes authority should remain with VAAFM. Since the EPA enacted the latest total maximum daily load (TMDL) for Lake Champlain, farmers all around the state have been working productively with VAAFM in implementing the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs). As a result of these efforts, agriculture is responsible for more than 95% of all phosphorus reduction in Lake Champlain. VAAFM has the technical support and funding to assist farmers with addressing these issues and adopting innovative agricultural practices.

Farmers would like to have this question settled. But we question the need for change. It is evident we have been successful and productive under the oversight of VAAFM. We believe this decision is best left to Governor Phil Scott because the two agencies are under his purview."



Public Notice: Medium CAFO General Permit

DEC's draft Medium Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) General Permit is now on formal public notice **(cont.)**

Public Notice (cont.)

through 5/10/22. A public hearing has been scheduled for 6:30 - 8:30 PM on April 26, 2022, with virtual and in-person options. Virtual attendance is encouraged. The hearing will consist of a short introduction by the CAFO Program followed by time for attendees to make comments and ask questions. Following the hearing, the CAFO Program will respond in writing to comments and questions received during the comment period and hearing.

For more information on the hearing and to read a current draft of the Medium CAFO General Permit, visit <https://bit.ly/3LW22N4>. You may send comments to the CAFO Program directly by submitting comments using the Environmental Notice Bulletin at <https://bit.ly/3Oclw0x> (you can search for the permit using ENB ID: PN22.0009785). Comments may also be mailed to VT DEC Watershed Management Division, CAFO Program, 1 National Life Drive, Davis 3, Montpelier, VT 05620-3522

Are You Ready to #Farm24VT?



After a wildly successful inaugural year in 2021, we're excited for the second annual #Farm24VT event. If you didn't get a chance to check it out

last year, #Farm24VT is a 24-hour social media celebration of agriculture, food, and dairy in Vermont! Farmers, food producers, agribusinesses, and others in the agricultural community share photos, videos, and stories, giving the community a behind-the-scenes look at how their favorite local foods get to their table. Throughout the day, viewers get a chance to enter to win lots of great Vermont farm and food products donated by our wonderful local farmers and agribusinesses.

#Farm24VT begins at 5:00 a.m. on May 18 and runs for 24 hours, concluding at 5:00 a.m. on May 19.

We'd love for our members to get involved. We are still looking for participants, sponsors, and prize donors. To learn more and sign up, visit Farm24VT.com.

#Farm24VT is a project of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition and the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance. It is sponsored by Farm Credit East, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Cabot, Hanover Co-op Food Stores of New Hampshire and Vermont, Reed's Equipment, North Country Organics, Vermont Economic Development Authority, Bourdeau Bros. of Middlebury, The Farmer's Feed, Seedway, New England States Holstein Association, and Northeast Agricultural Sales.





Pauline Stevens

Featured Farmer: Pauline Stevens

Golden Russet Farm, Shoreham
CVFC Member Since 2015

Vermont's farmers are accustomed to the seasonal ebbs and flows that characterize agriculture in our state. We experience periods of abundance, hibernation, and rebirth.

Nowhere was this perpetual cycle of life and energy more evident than at Golden Russet Farm—an 84-acre certified organic vegetable farm located in Shoreham—when we visited via Zoom in February 2022.

At the time, the rock-solid ground was blanketed in two feet of snow, but preparations were well underway for spring. In a matter of weeks, the greenhouses of Golden Russet would come alive, as the Stevens Family and their small team of devoted employees begin planting seeds.

Many of these seeds will soon burst forth as the vegetable starts, herbs, flowers, and hanging baskets they will sell in April through July, alongside fertilizer, potting soil, ceramics, and seed potatoes. Others are destined for the

nearly 10 acres of land devoted to growing cut flowers and fall vegetables: onions, beets, carrots, broccoli, cabbage, and squash, much of which Golden Russet sells wholesale to the Middlebury Co-op, City Market, or Healthy Living.

The Stevens Family—comprised of Will, Judy, and their children Anna, Freeman, and Pauline—have been stewards of this land for nearly 40 years. Will and Judy had been farming for three years over in Monkton before purchasing Golden Russet, a former dairy farm, in 1984. In the early days, they operated Golden Russet as a market garden, selling mostly to farmers markets before transitioning into wholesale. In 1987, they earned their organic certification.

As farm children often do, Anna, Freeman, and Pauline grew up and built lives of their own off the farm. While Anna and Freeman live out west, Pauline returned to Golden Russet in 2018. In fact, it is Pauline herself who is giving us this virtual tour. At the time of our visit, she is knee deep in the paperwork of taking the farm over from her parents. Will and Judy are easing toward retirement, with Will finding an exciting new undertaking off the farm and Judy helping out on a smaller and

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Pauline Stevens (cont.)

and smaller scale.

The significance of these life transitions are top of mind for Pauline.

"I feel super lucky that I'm able to take over this business basically because my parents were good stewards of the land. I can continue because the land still has something to offer," she says.

"They treated it well and maintained it in a way that it can continue to be productive. I am very appreciative of that, and realize that's a huge responsibility. I want to make sure that when I'm done farming, there's still something here that can be enjoyed and used."

But before Pauline can begin dreaming of her own retirement decades from now, there is still yet work to be done. Right now, she is busily inventorying seeds as they arrive, interviewing potential employees and checking their references, and continuing to sell some vegetables to the Middlebury Co-op. When time allows, you can find Pauline and her husband traversing the fields on their cross-country skis. It may seem like a given that a certified organic farm like Golden Russet would be committed to protecting water quality and soil health. Indeed, their philosophy is that healthy soil creates healthy food which creates healthy people. And while it is true that they follow numerous regulations in order to maintain their certification, there are still many opportunities for experimentation and innovation, especially where fertilizer and water are concerned.

The soil at Golden Russet has high levels of phosphorus, a nutrient that causes increased growth of algae, algae blooms, and other large aquatic plants, which can result in decreased



Will, Pauline, & Judy Stevens

levels of oxygen in bodies of water, like Lake Champlain. To offset these high levels of phosphorus, the farm stopped spreading manure on an annual basis several years ago.

For irrigation, Golden Russet has two methods for delivering water to thirsty vegetables. They have an overhead irrigation system comprised of aluminum pipes that can be set up to run the length of the field. They turn the system on for about an hour at a time so they do not oversaturate the ground, which can lead to nutrient run-off.

They also use a drip system, which is a plastic tube with holes every foot on the ground. The water slowly drips straight onto the roots. Because the delivery is more direct, this cuts down on water waste, soil erosion, and nutrient leeching.

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PAULINE STEVENS, GOLDEN RUSSET FARM

Pauline Stevens (cont.)

The need for efficient irrigation is of particular importance to the farm because of their raised bed system. Following Hurricane Irene in 2011, when some of their fields were completely submerged in stormwater, Golden Russet started growing their crops 6-8" above the tire tracks. On the one hand, the vegetables do not drown during wet years, but on the other hand, extra water is necessary when rain is elusive.

If you were to look around at Golden Russet, you would also see a lot of vegetated buffer zones. These serve as wind breaks to protect crops and soil, absorb excess water and run-off, and encourage biodiversity by acting as a home and source of food for birds, bees, and other animals.



Pauline Stevens

(In fact, biodiversity is so important to Golden Russet that Pauline has recently joined the Pollinator Pathway of Addison County, a group working to encourage everyone in the area to grow at least one native pollinator-friendly plant in their yard to keep bees circulating throughout the region.)

Golden Russet also engages in a lot of cover cropping, keeping the farm looking green throughout the year, even in winter. Cover crops serve many environmental functions, but their primary job is to prevent nutrient run-off and

soil erosion during wet winters and soggy springs.

Finally, over the last few years, Golden Russet has started using fabric weed mats between rows of black plastic mulch to suppress unwanted plant growth. Fewer weeds means less need to drive over their fields with the cultivator. Less use of the cultivator means a reduction in soil compaction, which can adversely affect the soil's ability to absorb water.

As Pauline looks to the future, there are a couple of practices she would like to experiment with or improve. Tarping, for example, is becoming more prevalent among vegetable farmers. They lay silage tarps over the ground, which heat up the soil and kill young weeds to create a stale seed bed to then plant crops into. She would also like to explore a better system for creating their raised beds. The heavy clay soils Addison County is practically famous for make this a challenging process, and finding the right combination of implements is necessary.

Pauline points to the collaborative and supportive culture of the farming community for Golden Russet's success in implementing environmentally friendly agricultural practices. If you have read any of our other farmer member spotlights, you will know this a familiar refrain. The insight and advice they have received from other farmers have given them to confidence to go "all in" on trying new things.

That speaks to Golden Russet's desire to join the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition nearly 10 years ago. They wanted to be a part of a local group in the industry and stay in the loop on water quality issues.

"It's so easy in farming to feel like

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Pauline Stevens (cont.)

you're out in your own silo," says Pauline. "But we are in it together. Everything we do affects everything else downstream or down wind. We might grow or produce different things, but we all rely on the same soil and clean water."

And because of their bedding plant business, Golden Russet's perspective and expertise extends to home gardeners.

"A lot of people come to us and look to us as a good resource," Pauline has observed. "If we can showcase good practices, that will ripple out into the community."

If another farmer were to ask Pauline for her advice on how to be a good steward of the land and water, she would offer three top tips:

- Develop a multi-year nutrient management plan so you can make smart decisions about what you're putting on your fields.
- Incorporate cover cropping into your annual plans.
- And create a multi-year planting schedule that allows for crop rotation.

It all comes down to preserving the special qualities that make Addison County, well, Addison County.

"The agricultural land makes up so much of that beauty," says Pauline. "If you're driving down 22A, you see all the rolling fields. It's such a unique place and I think it's so important that we treat it well so that we, as residents, can enjoy and appreciate it, as well as people who are just passing through."

To learn more about Golden Russet Farm, visit them on the web at goldenrussetfarm.com or follow along on Facebook or Instagram @goldenrussetfarm. Photos by Pauline Stevens, Cody Mears and Sabin Gratz.

Join Our Monthly Board Meetings

Our Board of Directors meets the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m., with options to attend in person at UVM Extension in Middlebury or on Zoom. All CVFC members are invited to attend; members of the public may join at 10:00. If you would like to attend these meetings, email info@cvfc-vt.com and we'll send you the link.

Watch: Vermont Farmer Watershed Org Annual Meeting

In March, we co-hosted the Vermont Farmer Watershed Organizations' Annual Meeting with our friends at the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance and the Franklin and Grand Isle Farmer's Watershed Alliance. Featured guests included Anson Tebbetts, Vermont's Secretary of Agriculture, Food & Markets, as well as Lauren Brey, Farmer, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Sustainability of the Dairy Business Association, and Managing Director for Farmers for Sustainable Food in Wisconsin. Farmers for Sustainable Food is a collaborative, nonprofit organization that provides resources, advocacy, support, and empowerment for farmers who are innovating and demonstrating sustainable farming practices during a time of increased interest in agriculture and food origins.

In case you missed it, you may view the recording at <https://bit.ly/3rrMo4c>.



Listen: CVFC on WVTK

CVFC's Board President Brian Kemp recently visited the 92.1 WVTK studios to talk about what's happening on Vermont farms this time of year. Brian discussed spring preparations, cover crops, the end of the manure spreading ban, and why the manure spreading ban is important for protecting water quality and soil health.



Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to listen in on his conversation with host Bruce Zeman.

Annual Calendar of Funding Opportunities

Stay on top of all the latest funding opportunities for agriculture! The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets has a calendar available on their website so you can see all of the programs in the year to come. View and bookmark the calendar at agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/calendar.

Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program

Champlain Housing Trust is accepting applications for the Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program. This program allows farmers to make essential repairs and necessary improvements to their farmworker housing. The goal of this program is to preserve this important affordable housing resource and to help improve the health and welfare of the

farm workforce. Applications are due April 29. Learn more and apply at https://bit.ly/VT_Farmworker_Housing.

Jeff Carter Retires

After more than 37 years of employment with UVM Extension, Jeff Carter will be retiring. Please join us for a celebration that is being held in his honor. This will also be an opportunity to say goodbye to Kirsten Workman as she departs for her new position at Cornell University. It's all happening on

**Thursday, May 12, 6:30-9:00 p.m.
at the
Middlebury Inn**

Kindly RSVP by April 27 to Karen Gallott, Karen.Gallott@uvm.edu.

