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In the Midst of Things

John Roberts, Executive Director

Have you had time to take a breath? I hope you are able to consider all that you've accomplished thus far in 2021. Some of it no doubt feels routine: milk the cows; feed the cows; spread the manure; manage the kidding or the lambing; plant the vegetables, plant the corn; and harvest that crucial first cut.

I know it has not all gone smoothly. There are so many potential pitfalls: the nut that wasn't tight; the frost that wasn't timely; the calf, lamb, or kid that came backwards; the seed delivery that didn't arrive when it should. But you persevered and got the job done, whatever the time, day or night.

To that end, the Coalition, in partnership with our friends at the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance, and with the great work of our Communications & Media Consultant Sarah Audet, hosted #Farm24VT on May 12. It was a 24-hour social media celebration of agriculture, food, and dairy in Vermont. I am not going to say much more about this now, as Sarah has written in more detail later on this newsletter.

I would, however, like to cover three issues that are foremost in the work I have been **(cont.)**

John Roberts Letter (cont.)

doing since January: the proposed Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) rules; the Vermont Climate Council and related committees; and the Task Force on Dairy Pricing.

CAFO Rules

As part of a five-year permit renewal process under the Clean Water Act, the Agency of Natural Resources is required to undergo a review of its CAFO permit by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). How extensive that review and revision needs to be is debatable. With Vermont achieving the water quality benchmarks set by the EPA, I am concerned about why it seems necessary to increase oversight.

It has been stated that farmers who are in compliance with their CAFO permit are protected if an unusual weather event should cause an unplanned discharge. I am concerned about what upgrades may be required to a production facility to obtain that CAFO permit in the first place. In reading the proposed rules, it appears that a production facility will need to manage more runoff from driveways and the like. This may well require much larger waste storage facilities. How will these facilities be paid for and will they be eligible for USDA-NRCS funding?

In addition, requiring an increase of buffers on cropped fields to 35 feet sounds tame, but it might result in the removal of several hundreds—if not thousands—of acres from cropping. This will not necessarily lead to a significant mitigation of runoff, and might depend on an extensive review of ditches and grassed waterways on a farm. These are just a few of the implications that need to be fully considered.

Nonetheless, I am not arguing that our present approach to water quality regulation is perfect. I do not think that there is a farmer today who would argue against the need for regulation. But the administration of regulations should be reviewed in the spirit of making it more timely, more transparent, and more cooperative. I also think it's time to reconsider how technical and financial advice is given to a farmer. Should there be a dedicated caseworker or point person for each farm coordinated through the conservation districts, for example?

Vermont Climate Council

The Vermont Climate Council is in full swing, working diligently towards producing an initial plan for emissions reduction and, hopefully, carbon sequestration by December 1. As a member of the Agriculture & Ecosystems Subcommittee, I am part of a team assessing the climate pros and cons of more than 100 different practices, including cover cropping, silvopasture, anaerobic digesters, and grazing management. We're taking a look at how increasing soil organic matter by modest amounts can possibly sequester a lot of carbon. And we're reviewing the impacts of climate change on different communities.

There are opportunities to participate and submit your comments. Coalition members can reach out to me at any time to talk or ask me to submit comments or ideas.

Dairy Pricing

Another committee I am a member of is the Task Force on Revitalizing Vermont's Dairy Industry. The committee is comprised of legislators, dairy business leaders, financial experts, and UVM Extension personnel. We have had one meeting at this point, and intend to meet on a monthly basis moving forward. This group was established at the behest of **(cont.)**

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the Legislature to continue discussions arising from a report earlier this year from the Office of the Director of Financial Regulation. One point I have mentioned to the group is “do no harm.”

In closing, there’s a lot going on! I’m always being approached with some new project, question, or insight about our farms. I am enjoying the challenge—you never know what the next thing might be.

Vermont Climate Council Public Meetings & Comments

Get involved in the work of the Vermont Climate Council by sharing your perspective and participating in open meetings! Here's how:

- All members of the public are welcome to submit comments and documents to the VCC to inform its work. Offer your input at: <https://bit.ly/3spouUy>
- CVFC's Executive Director John Roberts serves on the Agriculture & Ecosystems Subcommittee. The public is invited to join the subcommittee's weekly meetings, scheduled for 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. every Friday through August 27. To access the meeting agenda, link, and past meeting minutes, visit: <https://bit.ly/32hlteq>
- If you would like to learn more about the VCC, its other subcommittees, and how to access those public meetings, visit their website: <https://bit.ly/2OPKgDc>



Herbicide & Conservation Cropping: An Educational Series for Farmers

This spring, we hosted a new seminar series to help farmers understand, manage, use, and communicate better about the role and use of herbicides in your conservation cropping systems. We discussed:

- Management factors to reduce risks to the environment and considerations for using herbicides with cover crops.
- Communicating to the public about the pros/cons of herbicides in our cropping systems and the role they play in sustainable agriculture.
- Understanding how VAAFM tracks herbicide use, monitoring for ground and surface water contamination, and regulatory requirements for herbicide use in VT.

If you were unable to join us or would like to re-watch the seminars, you can view the recordings of all three on our website. Head to www.cvfc-vt.com and click "Members Only" in the menu. The password is: `cvfcfarmers2012`



Vermont Open Farm Week, August 8-15

Registration is now open for the 7th annual Vermont Open Farm Week, taking place at farms across Vermont, August 8-15, 2021! This special week in August creates an opportunity for folks to visit farms and connect with Vermont's working landscape, and it's a great way for farmers to engage with their customers and communities. We are all looking forward to getting out and enjoying Vermont this summer, and especially during Vermont Open Farm Week! Technical assistance for farms is available. Register NOW through July 1st: <http://ow.ly/cSt530o8EIK>.

Are you participating in Open Farm Week? Please let us know! Once you have registered, email John Roberts at john@cvfc-vt.com.



Future of Agriculture Commission

What does the future of agriculture in Vermont look like? Gov. Phil Scott recently appointed a team of commissioners charged with finding the answers to this lofty question. Among the newly appointed commissioners are a couple of CVFC members: Jed Davis of Cabot Creamery Cooperative and Josh Poulin of Poulin Grain. Learn more about the Future of Agriculture Commission and its new commissioners at: <https://bit.ly/3u64Y0a>

Community Events & Grants Calendar

Stay on top of all the latest and greatest events and grants for Vermont farmers! We're packing our website calendar with workshops, webinars, info sessions, meetings, and grant offerings related to agriculture, water quality, soil health, climate change, and the environment. Our goal is to help you find learning opportunities, connect with others, and get funding for your projects. Head to our website, cvfc-vt.com, and click "Events" in the main menu.

And if you have an upcoming event or grant deadline that you'd like to share with the Farmer Coalition community, we can help you spread the word! We invite you to submit calendar items—you can find the submission form just below our calendar. As space allows, we'll include event listings and grant deadlines in our newsletters and social media posts.



Featured Farmer: Chase Goodrich

Goodrich Family Farm

Goodrich Family Farm has been a member of CVFC since 2014. Chase has served on the Board of Directors for three years and was recently elected to a second term.

When we visited with Chase Goodrich of Goodrich Family Farm in Spring 2021, they were in the midst of activities one might typically see this time of year on a Vermont farm. Some field work. Some drainage work. Some no-till grass seeding in a few of their under-producing fields. There's one activity, though, we're not accustomed to seeing in Vermont.

Chase explains, "We're working on the final preparations here to get the digester up and producing gas on the line."

Come again?

Chase is referring to the farm's brand new, state-of-the-art anaerobic digester. There are more than a dozen farms in Vermont whose anaerobic digesters convert manure and food scraps into electricity for the grid. What sets the

Goodrich Family Farm's digester apart from the rest is that it's the first to produce renewable natural gas for heating and cooking. Much of the gas will travel via Vermont Gas' pipeline system to the main power plant at nearby Middlebury College.

This cutting-edge technology is a far cry from the farm's humble beginnings. Sitting atop the ledges of the Otter Creek and its flood plains, the farm was founded in 1956 by Chase's grandfather, Wilbur Goodrich. Back then, the farm featured a tie stall barn with twenty holsteins. The farm is now in its third generation and has grown to milking 800 cows, with 120 dry and 700 up-and-comers. To feed that many mouths, the Goodrich Family crops 700 acres of corn and 1800 acres of hay.

Chase owns the farm in partnership with his father, Ernie, and sister, Danielle. While Chase feeds the cows, handles the accounting and book work, and oversees the crops, Danielle is focused on herd health and management of the milking parlour. Ernie lends a hand wherever he can, especially with feeding cows and planting corn. Danielle's husband, Jason, is

Chase Goodrich (cont.)

responsible for the heifers, crop work, and the farm's maple sugar operation. The family sells their milk to Agri-Mark.

When Chase and Danielle returned home to the family farm back in 2009, it was a bad year economically for the dairy industry and there was increased scrutiny of agriculture's impact on water quality. The siblings were mulling their long-term strategies to ensure the farm's economic and environmental viability when Middlebury College and a developer approached them. They wanted to see if the College-whose goal at the time was to achieve carbon neutrality by 2016-and the farm could collaborate on a project to help one another achieve their aspirations. Could the farm install a digester to produce energy for the College?

We already know how this story ends, but it's worth acknowledging that the plot line is a decade. Why the long trajectory?

First, the key players—a farm, an educational institution, an energy company (Vanguard Renewables), and a group of entrepreneurs—needed to create a project in support of a common vision that enables each of them to achieve their own unique goals.

Then there was the permitting. "It's complicated," Chase adds with a laugh.

At last, there was financing and constructing the final product. The pandemic, of course, is prolonging this aspect. Right now, they are flaring off gas and working to install the compressor, which will scrub the gas into pipeline quality so it can be injected into Vermont Gas' distribution network. Chase estimates that the project will be fully operational in another month.

Although this decade-long dream will soon come to fruition, the Goodriches are not resting on their laurels. They continue to look to the future and what more they can do to protect water quality.

"Technology is always changing and improving," Chase says. "We're trying our best to stay on top of that and being informed about proper practice."

This year they are implementing a row shut-off GPS system on their no-till corn planter. At corners and edges of fields, the system will shut off individual rows to ensure a uniform planted field. This not only prevents double planting, but also double application of fertilizer in certain areas. The Goodriches also plan to continue experimenting with their use of draglining and manure injection.

This constant state of experimenting, adapting, and improving speaks to why the Goodrich Family Farm decided to join the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition seven years ago.

Chase explains, "There's a lot on the line with what we do on the fields. Farmers want to do what works to support our businesses and our animals. The Farmer Coalition was a great way to overcome those hurdles and gain the confidence to implement new practices."

Part of the appeal for Chase and his family was the opportunity to connect with other farmers and gain their perspectives. With many more years of experience under his own belt, Chase has advice to offer, too.

"Everybody's situation is going to be different, farm-to-farm. Don't be afraid to ask questions and talk to other farmers. Do your homework. Do your research. Don't be afraid to try new things and see what works."



#Farm24VT Recap: All in a Day's Work

A team of farmhands plants 18,000 onions in a single afternoon. A family-run dairy farm pasteurizes and bottles their own maple-flavored milk. A sweet herd of Brown Swiss cows grazes in a field of bright green grass and dandelions. A farmer levels their field to create a rice paddy. New life after new life emerges.

All of this—and more!—in a day's work for Vermont agriculture and food production. And during the recent #Farm24VT, more than 150,000 residents of Vermont, New York, New England, and beyond had a front row seat to see what it takes to bring local farm and food products to our tables.

Starting at 5:00 a.m. on May 12, 100 Vermont farmers, food producers, and agribusinesses took to social media to share photos, videos, and stories using the hashtag #Farm24VT. For a full 24 hours, they welcomed everyone behind-the-scenes to learn more about where our food comes from.

These farmers and food producers are located

all over the state and represent a broad range of foods and other products: dairy, meat, eggs, maple, honey, fruits, herbs, fungi, grain, wool, flowers, vegetables, Christmas trees, alpaca fiber, and more. Some are organic. Some are conventional. All are deeply committed to their work and proud to help educate the public about agriculture and food production.

While community members watching from home, work, and school learned more, they also had the opportunity to win lots of great prizes. Every hour, #Farm24VT gave away a Vermont farm or food product generously donated by a local business. Prizes included a year's supply of Cabot cheese, a two-night stay at Parker Hill Farm & Boutique Campground, a King Arthur Baking Bundle, and more.

The Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition is honored to have had the opportunity to partner with the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance to organize the first #Farm24VT. Together, we are grateful for all of the farmers, agribusinesses, and food producers who shared their stories. We are grateful for all of the community members who shared their enthusiasm, curiosity, and humor. We are grateful for all of the Vermont **(cont.)**

#Farm24VT Recap (cont.)

businesses who donated their locally grown and crafted products for us to give away.

Many thanks go to our sponsors who made #Farm24VT possible, especially Vermont Breakfast on the Farm for their generous grant and New England Dairy for all of the wisdom they shared with us and Vermont's farmers. The organizing committee looks forward to sharing more in the coming weeks and months about what's next for #Farm24VT.

And if you missed #Farm24VT, you're in luck! Just search for the hashtag on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to find all the photos, videos, and stories that were posted. Instagram was the most popular platform for participants, so you will find much of the day's activity there.

#Farm24VT is brought to you by CVFC and the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance with generous funding from Vermont Breakfast on the Farm and support from New England Dairy. Sponsored by Cabot Creamery, Hanover Co-op Food Stores of VT & NH, Lawes Agricultural Service, Reed's Equipment, Bourdeau Brothers of Middlebury, Feed Commodities, North Country Organics, Parker Hill Farm & Boutique Campground, Philo Ridge Farm, and the Vermont Sheep & Wool Festival.

Join Our Monthly Board Meetings

Our Board of Directors meets the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. via 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 Kirsten Workman, Board Secretary, at Kirsten.Workman@uvm.edu. She will send you the meeting link/phone number.

Grant Alert: Farm Agromomic Practices (FAP) Program

The FAP Program utilizes state funding to help Vermont farms implement soil-based agronomic practices that improve soil quality, increase crop production, and reduce erosion and agricultural waste discharges. The FAP program also provides education and instructional activity grants to support outreach regarding the impacts of agricultural practices on water quality and current state agricultural water quality regulations. Eligible practices include: cover cropping; conservation crop rotation; conservation crop rotation with nurse crop; conservation tillage; no till pasture and hayland renovation; rotational grazing; manure injection; and educational or instructional activities. Rotational grazing applications are due June 15; cover crop applications are due August 1; and all other FAP practices will be reviewed in order of receipt. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/2SVGji8>.

