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A Letter from John Roberts, Executive Director

The days are gradually getting longer, and though there is still a healthy blanket of snow, we are moving steadily towards spring and, hopefully, a new beginning.

So much has already been said about 2020 that I almost apologize for adding to the reams of words. It brought about a dramatic hiccup to our lifestyles and the way farming looked like it was going to go even in January 2020. With the arrival of the pandemic and the statewide lockdown that started mid-March, a lot was thrown into disarray. Reliable outlets for our milk, like schools and restaurants, disappeared. This also impacted other farm-sourced products, like meats and vegetables. Farm processors, like cheesemakers for example, also had to suddenly adapt.

In the middle of the summer, I left working for the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and took the position as Executive Director of our Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition. I have hardly left my basement since! The Coalition's plans for in-field and on-farm educational programs had been scrapped. Most of the summer was spent ensuring that farmers were able to apply for any Federal and State COVID-19 relief funds. There had been significant disruptions to the milk market that resulted in abrupt price fluctuations. Hopefully, the financial assistance helped cushion the losses, though I am sure it was not enough. **(cont.)**

John Roberts Letter (cont.)

Many of the farmers and processors pivoted successfully from selling in local markets to online and curbside pickup. Access to good, reliable internet service became a key factor for many of these businesses. I even had one beef and pork producer who admitted that after the first couple of weeks his business took off and he was having one of the best years ever. However, whenever there is a precipitous change, there will always be new challenges. Farm-raised livestock producers were challenged in getting their animals processed and inspected for market by a system that was already close to peak capacity.

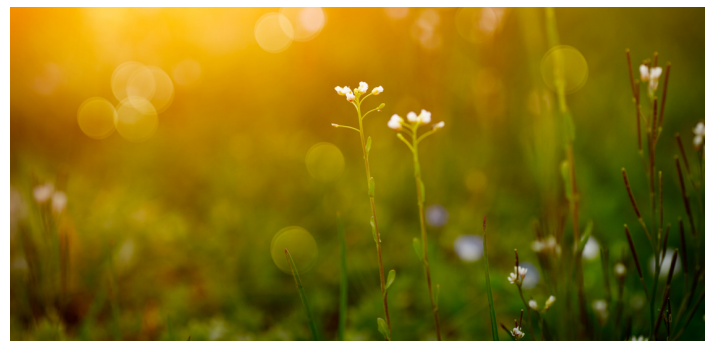
There were some notable and positive outcomes that I hope the Coalition and our farmer members can build on. Consumers were alerted to the value of their local food system, the benefits of shorter supply chains, the quality of local food, and the importance of their local farmers. Consumption of dairy products, including fluid milk, increased, as well as sales of locally raised meat, vegetables, flour, and other farm products. And, of course, we have all been made acutely aware of how much we rely on and need better internet service.

Amongst all of the strife and trials of last year, farmers nonetheless continued their good work on water quality. The 2020 Clean Water Performance Report issued by various state agencies, including Agriculture and Natural Resources, shows a further reduction of 28.2 metric tons of phosphorus, more than 95% of which is attributed to the work of farmers. That work includes cover cropping, manure injection, conservation tillage, no-till planting, grazing management, crop rotation, and other practices. On top of which, there have been substantial improvements to barnyards and production facilities. The goal is a reduction of

201 metric tons of phosphorus by 2038; there's a lot of work yet to be done, but farmers are engaged and enthusiastic. After all, those farms are their environment, and they are proud of it.

So now what? We are into 2021 and very soon maple sugaring will begin, followed by spring field work, grazing livestock turn out, planting, haying, and onward. We are all hoping for a good crop season, but we are realists-prepare for the best and plan to reduce your risk! The Coalition hopes to get back to in-field and on-farm educational programs soon, discussing new soil management techniques, manure management, pest and weed management, grazing management, and forage quality improvement. For example, improving the quality, timing, and storage of homegrown forage would have a direct financial benefit to a livestock producer in reducing the number of off-farm inputs, like grain, that would need to be bought. We will release a plan for these educational sessions shortly. A conversation that the Coalition continues to be heavily involved in is the renewed interest in soil health and, in particular, the role of improved soil health in reducing farmers' climate impact. The Coalition plans to continue to have the voice of our members and the example of practices on members farms to show what can be done responsibly.

In our next newsletter, we will have a good idea how the year is shaping up. I wish you all a good start to the summer season and keep in touch.



Nutrient Management Minute

Kirsten Workman - UVM Extension
Agronomy Specialist and CCA

As you all know, the Vermont manure spreading ban ends on April 1st. Weather allowing, manure spreading will start shortly thereafter. As many farms around the state (LFO, MFO, and CSFO) are updating your nutrient management plans (NMP) for the 2021 cropping season, it is important to talk about manure sampling. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) recently updated the standard that outlines what is required in an NMP, also known as the 590 standard. The language outlining manure sampling requirements was also updated, and is as follows:

“Manure or other agricultural waste storages will be sampled annually as close as possible to the time of application (upon thorough agitation of liquid systems) or more frequently if needed to account for operational changes (e.g., feed management, animal type, manure handling strategy, etc.) impacting manure nutrient concentrations. Satellite waste storage facilities must be sampled if the manure is stored there more than 3 months; however, if the storage is used temporarily then it can use the main storage where it was transferred from as the sample for planning purposes. An average of all of the waste storage facilities on the farm shall not be used to develop the NMP. Weighted averages of manure samples may be used when storage facilities are mixed, for example when storage facilities are physically connected, or waste is transferred between storages. Weighted averages must consider the volume of manure per the sample value to give a new weighted average. Actual manure sample values collected by the farm must be used in the

NMP in lieu of textbook values when available sample values are less than five years old. Sample values older than five years cannot be used in developing an average manure value. Out of the five most recent annual sample manure values, the highest and lowest values are to be removed, leaving three values left to be averaged and used as the final manure sample value, allowing for a realistic manure sample average to be established.”

That's a long description, so I will try and highlight the important parts here:

- Each manure storage on the farm should be sampled every year. These samples should be used in developing the NMP. No sample older than five years should be used in this planning.
- You should sample a well agitated pit (liquid) or well-mixed/composite stack (dry) as close to the time of spreading as is practical.
- Satellite storage facilities should be sampled separately if manure is stored there longer than three months.
- If storages are mixed prior to spreading, a weighted average that represents this mixing can be used.
- You may create an 'average' manure value for each manure storage. This average should use the samples from the last five years, omitting the highest and lowest values and averaging the remaining three values. You should not average all storages across a farm.

The key to manure sampling is making sure the sample comes as close to representing what the plants in the field will see when the manure is spread. Remember...this one sample often represents millions of gallons or several hundred tons of manure on your farm. **(cont.)**

Nutrient Management Minute (cont.)

There are a lot of 'what ifs' when spreading manure, so my suggestion is to sample how you spread. If you take manure from a barn and stack in multiple piles over the winter to then spread in the spring, sample a few loads as they come out of the spreader, mix them together, and submit that sample. If you do things differently in the spring vs. summer vs. fall, you may want to sample during each season. If you agitate the pit and spread all your corn ground, but agitate less when spreading on hay fields in the summer, then sample those separately as well. More sampling data is always good. And even if you are required to sample a storage separately to meet the 590 standard, but you spread in a different way – do both.

As you start to build your 'library' of samples, you can develop some 'averages' for your farm to make informed decisions and provide good information for your farm, your nutrient management planner, and your custom manure spreader. All of these professionals (yourselves included) can work together to get sound information for more accurate nutrient management. **Got manure sampling questions? Give me a call! 802-388-4969x347**



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.

Check Out ACORN's Eat Local App

CVFC member ACORN (Addison County Relocalization Network) recently released their NEW Eat Local VT app to help make it easier to find local food in our area! It features nearly 250 farmers and food producers in our community. Search the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store for Eat Local VT to download for free!

Farm for Thought

- Bob Foster of Foster Brothers Farm in Middlebury penned an op-ed in VTDigger about the role of cover cropping in supporting soil health and water quality. Read more at bit.ly/2P2xVLE.
- Marie Audet of Blue Spruce Farm in Bridport published an op-ed in multiple outlets about how healthy soils can address climate change. Read more at: bit.ly/3bTJZIO
- John Roberts wrote a letter to the Addison Independent about enteric methane from ruminants. Read more at: bit.ly/3cK5ael



Featured Farmer: Lorenzo Whitcomb

North Williston Cattle Co.

The North Williston Cattle Company in Williston, VT has been a member of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition since the organization's founding in 2012. Lorenzo Whitcomb has served on the Board of Directors since 2013.

Like many farms in Vermont, Lorenzo Whitcomb's North Williston Cattle Company is a family affair. He farms in partnership with his brother Onan and his nephew Ben. His sister-in-law Mary cares for and feeds the calves on a full-time basis. She also regales the farm's Facebook followers with insightful and humorous stories of holstein hijinks. Since no farm operation could be successful without some degree of paperwork and behind-the-scenes management, Lorenzo's wife, also named Mary, shares in the office duties and moonlights as a pumpkin farmer on a six-acre plot. His sons, who have careers off the farm, operate a challenging corn maze on site. For his part,

Lorenzo oversees the crops, equipment maintenance, and the office.

Together, they are a team responsible for milking 240 holsteins, raising 260 young stock, and stewarding 800 acres of land along the Winooski River, which flows into Lake Champlain. They have been at it for a very long time, too. The farm dates back to the post-Civil War era when Lorenzo and Onan's great-great-grandfather purchased 4-5 farms in Essex Junction. It was only 25 years ago that the family purchased the property in Williston.

At the time of our virtual visit with Lorenzo in December 2020, he was in a moment of transition, having just started a part-time gig as a groomer at a local ski resort. (When does he have time to sleep? "We're working on that," he quips.) Still, work on the farm hums along steadily. Just that week, they had emptied their manure pit and hauled the sand out from the bottom, the manure-sand concoction to be used as a rich topsoil elsewhere.

Improving water quality and supporting soil health have been features for much of **(cont.)**

Lorenzo Whitcomb (cont.)

Lorenzo's farming life. It all started 35 years ago, when his family began to fence the livestock out of nearby streams and instead supplied water to their pastures for cows to drink. About the same time, they began working with the University of Vermont Extension on soil sampling in order to develop the right mix of nutrients to fertilize each field with. Around 15 years ago, the Whitcomb family started installing riparian buffers along their fields adjacent to the Winooski River which is notorious for flooding its banks. In more recent years, Lorenzo and his family have started using manure injection. With a grant from the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, they were able to purchase a no-till drill which they use to plant cover crops, soybeans, and new hay seedings.

In the near future, Lorenzo and his family hope to implement a dragline system for spreading manure. They currently haul manure by truck on Williston's bustling roads, which is nearly impossible during peak traffic hours. Draglining will not only make their transport of manure more efficient, but also eliminate soil compaction caused by heavy manure trucks driving on the fields.

Lorenzo and his family have a proud history and bright future of protecting water quality and soil health, but he admits that the journey has not been easy. They have encountered several obstacles along the way: obtaining state-of-the-art equipment that functions properly; purchasing cover crop seeds with the adequate rates of germination; and finding more of the precious resource that always seems to be in short supply-time

On that front, Lorenzo credits his brother Onan

and nephew Ben with the farm's environmental successes. By working as a cohesive team, they are able to ensure that everything that needs to get done in the course of a typical farming day gets done while allowing for the extra time required to accomplish special projects.

Lorenzo also credits his membership in the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition. When he and his family were thinking of adopting manure injection and no-till planting methods, they were hesitant at first. They needed someone to talk to share advice, rather than relying strictly on their own trial and error, but they were not sure where to turn. Through the Coalition, they were able to befriend other farmers who had experience with these practices. Those farmers shared the wisdom and knowledge that comes from both success and the gifts of failure.

Now that Lorenzo has many more years of experience under his belt, he is able to pay it forward to newer members of the coalition. His biggest pieces of advice? "Start with one practice that will help save you money. Get into a program that will pay you. Then you need to find the time to make it happen."

When asked why it's important to him as a farmer to be a good steward of the environment, Lorenzo points to his three sons.

"We're doing it for ourselves; we're doing it for the future," he says.

Indeed, we are all downstream.

If you'd like to learn more about the North Williston Cattle Company and read Mary Whitcomb's witty farm fables, find them on Facebook.

Follow Us on the Web!

New Website + Social Media

Have you *herd* the BIG news? We have a new website located at www.cvfc-vt.com! And we've taken our first muddy boot steps into social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

We invite you to follow along to learn more about what Vermont farmers just like you are doing to protect water quality and soil health today and for future generations. We'll also share industry news and insights, as well as some farm humor as we go. We encourage you to like, share, and comment on our posts.

And when you find yourself engaged in work on your farm that highlights water quality and soil health, we encourage you to let us know. Simply tag us in a photo or video on your own social media account, or email them to info@cvfc-vt.com and we'll add them to our website and social media pages.



Take the Pledge to #Farm24VT!

There's going to be a party on social media and everyone in Vermont agriculture is invited! Vermont farmers, agribusinesses, food producers, and other friends in the ag community will share photos, videos, and stories on social media showing the passion and hard work that goes into bringing Vermont foods and products to tables throughout the region. And we'd LOVE to have you join in! The fun gets underway bright 'n early at 5:00 a.m. on May 12 and runs for a full 24 hours. Participating is FREE and we'll provide you with all kinds of resources to ensure you have a fun and successful #Farm24VT. Visit us on the web at www.farm24vt.com.

#Farm24VT is a project of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition and the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance.

For Members Only

Speaking of our new website, it includes a special "Members Only" section with information exclusively for you. To access the page, click "Members Only" in the main menu and enter the password: [cvfcfarmers2012](#).

Watch Our Annual Meeting

Did you miss our annual meeting with the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance and the Franklin-Grand Isle Farmer's Watershed Alliance? You can view the recording at bit.ly/3q5l8EB.