

*Farmers  
Working  
Together*



*For a Thriving  
Agriculture and  
a Clean Lake  
Champlain*

## **2021 Annual Report** *January 19, 2022*

### **Membership**

Total Current Membership is at 144, with 93 farm members representing 56 Small Farms, 25 Medium Farms, and 12 Large Farms. Our members represent all types of agriculture including dairy, beef, poultry, vegetable, and small grains/cash crops. Member farms operate roughly 80,000 acres of corn, beans, vegetables, hay and pasture in the Lake Champlain watershed. We also have 8 individual members, 41 supporting business members and 2 special director members.

### **COVID's Continued Impact**

For the second year in a row the activities of the Coalition were overshadowed by the continued presence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uncertainty presented by the onset of variants that interfered with many in-person activities, including most monthly board meetings, field events and the ability to collect field practice data directly from farmer-members.

### **Farmer Education - Partner with UVM Extension Crop, Soil & Pasture Team**

During the summer and early fall, we were able to host a couple of in-person educational events.

- We held our July regular monthly meeting at Blue Spruce Farm where had a chicken BBQ expertly cooked by Ernie Audet and crew. The meeting was an opportunity for many of us to get together for the first time in a year. Dr. Joshua Faulkner shared his current research ongoing in Addison County, related to water quality and we also had an opportunity to meet the new Director of UVM Extension, Dr. Roy Beckford, and his family. The Audets gave the Beckford family a tour of Blue
- In September, we hosted at Meeting Place Pastures a contract grazing operation managed by Cheryl and Marc Cesario (CVFC members). This event aimed to show the virtues of managing pasture as part of a successful dairy heifer raising strategy. Paul Knox from Knoxville Farms in Bradford came to offer his experience and expertise. Paul manages an LFO dairy farm and grazes most of his dairy heifers, reducing costs and raising healthier and stronger heifers. Some interesting information was exchanged even though good weather and harvesting schedules sadly impacted participation.

### **Legislative Outreach & Committees**

The Executive Director (ED) and Directors participated in several legislative committees and discussion groups on agricultural water quality related subjects throughout the year. It was my intent to make sure that the CVFC's voice was heard in any arena that might have an impact on our members' ability to demonstrate their environmental and economic sustainability.

- The Climate Council, Ag & Ecosystems subcommittee: The ED was chosen participate on the Ag & Ecosystems subcommittee as one of only two farmer representatives on this subcommittee. There were ten other members and eleven support staff. We met every Friday morning from February on wards. Additional meetings also took place with sub-sub-committees and there was a lot of homework. Ag & Ecosystems submitted its recommendations to the full Climate Council (CC) in November. By the middle of December, the full CC submitted its report to the Legislature. All CVFC members can find the full recommendations at [www.climatechange.vermont.gov](http://www.climatechange.vermont.gov), I would urge you all to look at what has been recommended to the Legislature, particularly with reference to agriculture and forestry. Agriculture can make many significant reductions in its Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions through improvements in manure management, better ruminant feeding practices, improvements in soil health, including raising soil organic matter, reduced tillage, and rotational grazing, to name a few possibilities. One of the exciting things is the potential for agriculture to do its part and have the benefit of improved financial management as well.
- Task Force to Revitalize Vermont’s Dairy Industry: Around the beginning of March 2021 the Task Force started regular monthly meetings. The members of the Task Force were selected by the Legislature and included co-chairs, Senator Bobby Starr and Dan Smith, also Senator Brock, Representative Marcotte and Representative O’Brian, also Heather Darby, Jackie Folsom, Jo Bradly and me. We spent several meetings hearing a wide range of testimony from farmers, processors, industry heads and marketing specialists. A report was submitted with several suggested actions that might result in more money in farmer’s pockets. There was recognition of the fact that substantive price and Federal order changes are not under the control of Vermont but that we should continue to press for those actions. Clearly farmers who had taken advantage of the USDA-FSA risk management programs like the Dairy Margin Coverage Program had added significant dollars to farmers, significantly beyond the premium’s farmers paid. I will email a copy of the recommendations to all members.
- The Payment for Ecosystems Services Working group and the project team check-in group: Our President, Brian Kemp, CVFC’s designated member of the PES working group but, especially during the summer work rush, I often attended in his place. The PES meetings are very actively attended with often 25 – 35 attendees and a lot of suggestions on action and direction. A contract was awarded to UVM to do significant research on ecosystems, soil health, and are measurable. In addition, a contract was awarded to Jon Winsten, a planner, to provide options for developing a program to quantify measurable ecosystems and how farmers would be paid for them. The work of the PES working group has been extended for another year. CVFC should stay actively involved. An interim report on the work of the PES working group is available on the PES website, <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>. This work has potential for significant benefit to our farmers.

### **Regulatory Agency & Rulemaking**

- *Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) rule implementation*: Part of the year was spent working with AAFM and ANR on proposed CAFO rule updates. CVFC was instrumental in involving the other two watershed groups, the Franklin Watershed Alliance and the Connecticut River Farmers Watershed Alliance and other farmer organizations to provide a united front in expressing our

concerns over new rules which appeared to add additional confusion to the regulatory process, without any apparent additional environmental protection beyond what already exists. At the time of writing this report it appears that the process is on hold, but for how long?

- *Vermont Wetland rules update*: ANR and AAFM have been in a new wetlands rule discussion for several years now. New rules could have a significant impact many aspects of field management particularly because of the type of soils that predominate in Addison, Chittenden, and Rutland counties. CVFC involvement in this area of concern should continue. Currently further progress on these rules is on hold.

### **Public Education**

With most in-person group gatherings canceled (Vermont Farm Show, Addison County Fair & Field Days, Breakfast on the Farm, etc.), our direct outreach was limited. However, we adapted and had two successful public outreach campaigns. Both of these were spearheaded by our Communications Consultant, Sarah Audet.

- We rolled out a successful partnership with Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance to put on the inaugural #[Farm24VT](#) event on May 12, 2021 with much success. This 24-hour social media celebration of farming in Vermont successfully engaged 100 farmers and food producers who shared their stories, 150,000 people who watched from home, work or school and several media outlets who covered the event on television and radio. Click [here](#) for a full report.
- We started our first external-facing monthly newsletter. IN addition to our normal monthly member communication, we adapted our newsletter for community, public and legislative stakeholders to learn more about our organization, our members and sustainable farming practices.
- Our website continues to be built out with both internal and external resources to keep our members and the public informed about our organization and about sustainable farming. You can visit it at <https://cvfc-vt.com>

### **Partnerships**

The ED spent significant time communicating with and trying to find mutually beneficial partners to reach understanding, whenever possible, of matters that are of concern to CVFC membership. These groups have included the Vermont Healthy Soil Network, the Addison River Watch Collaborative, the Winooski, and Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation Districts, Rural Vermont and NOFA, and other groups.

### **Staff & UVM Extension Transitions**

The biggest issue confronting our organization is transition. As of January 2022, Kirsten Workman (Secretary and UVM Extension support) now works for PRO-DAIRY at Cornell University, though she intends to be around and support the Coalition at least until the summer. UVM Extension administration has assured us that they will take steps to immediately advertise to replace her position at UVM, to include continued support to CVFC. Jeff Carter (Treasurer and UVM Extension Faculty) will retire in June 2022. Jeff's position is a faculty position

which will take a more protracted timeline and process to fill, and could take 12 – 18 months. UVM Extension Director has assured the board that it is his intent to fill all the positions and assure the importance of Extension to the Vermont farm community.

The final transition is that I too will be leaving very shortly to take up a position at USDA. We will be discussing the hiring of an interim Executive Director at our February Board of Directors meeting. One of the important jobs of the IED will be to help find a permanent ED and to assist in bringing that person on board.

### **Funding**

Our current funding is primarily from a grant from the Agency of Agriculture’s Clean Water Initiative Program. Along with support from UVM Extension and from membership dues, we are able to have an organization that provides a complete and effective set of programs for its members. The current grant concludes at the end of May and our ED and Board are working on a new proposal (due the end of this month) to continue that funding.

### **Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition Staff & Board**

**23 Pond Lane, Suite 300, Middlebury, VT 05477 | [info@cvfc-vt.com](mailto:info@cvfc-vt.com)**

*Executive Director:* John Roberts

*President:* Brian Kemp, Mountain Meadows Farm

*Vice President:* Marie Audet, Blue Spruce Farm

*Treasurer:* Jeff Carter, UVM Extension

*Secretary:* Kirsten Workman, UVM Extension

### **Directors:**

Ray Brands, Deer Valley Farm Partnership

Eric Clifford, Clifford Farm

David Conant, Conant’s Riverside Farms

Ben Dykema, WilCon Farm

George Foster, Foster Bros. Farm & Vermont Natural Ag Products

Chase Goodrich, Goodrich Family Farms

Peter James, Monument Farms Dairy

Tim Kayhart, Kayhart Bros. Dairy

Rachel Reed, East Creek Stock Farm

Lorenzo Whitcomb, No. Williston Cattle Co.

Loren Wood, Woodnotch Farm

**Thank you members for your support!**