

We're
moving! →

7056 US-7

Ferrisburgh, VT 05473



(802) 989-6712

info@cvfc-vt.com



Annual Meeting Recap

Thank you to everyone who joined us at our Annual Meeting on January 30! We're hearing from our members and guests that it was a wonderful opportunity to see long-time friends in agriculture and forge some new connections.

We're very grateful for all of the speakers who joined us to share their insights from where they sit in the agricultural community. It is clear there are challenges for farmer economic and environmental resilience in the months and years ahead.

At the same time, there is tremendous resolve, knowledge, experience, and opportunity within our state, and we are confident we can all rise to the occasion, as we have done throughout the past three pandemic years. Thanks again to Secretary Anson Tebbetts, Secretary Julie Moore, Travis Thomason, and Dr. Roy Beckford for being generous with their time and expertise.

We'd also like to congratulate and welcome our newly elected board members LeAnna Compagna, Jon Lucas, and Ramsay Mellish, as well as Abigail Augarten, who was appointed to the board by UVM Extension. Many thanks go to our long-serving board members who were re-elected at the meeting, including Marie Audet, Ray Brands, Eric Clifford, Dave Conant, **(cont.)**

Annual Meeting Recap (cont.)

Ben Dykema, and Peter James. Their continued leadership is a testament to what can be accomplished through collaboration and respectful dialogue.

We were fortunate to have Marin Howell of the *Addison Independent* in attendance at our meeting who captured many of the evening's highlights in the article. Scan the QR code with your smart device to read the full article (please note it's behind a paywall).



Listen: What's Happening on Farms This Winter?

CVFC's Executive Director Vijay Nazareth recently visited the 92.1 WVTM studios to talk about what's happening on Vermont farms this time of year. Vijay discussed winter preparations, planning ahead for spring, cover crops, and climate smart farming.

Scan the QR code with your smart device to hear the full interview.



Introducing Abby and Anna of UVM Ext.



Abigail Augarten (left) and Anna Elewski (right) (courtesy)

Our friends at UVM Extension in Middlebury recently hired two new staff members, and we're thrilled to introduce them to you! Both of them will work closely with the farming community and our coalition.

Abigail (Abby) Augarten has joined UVM Extension as an agronomy specialist and is working with farmers in the Champlain Valley to provide agronomy outreach and technical assistance to improve farm viability and water quality. She is excited to get to know CVFC members and develop outreach and research programming that meets their agronomic and natural resources conservation goals.

Abby received a bachelor's degree in International Agriculture from Cornell University and a master's degree in Agroecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was a Research and Outreach Specialist with University of Wisconsin Extension's Discovery Farms Program, performing on-farm agriculture, water quality, and soil health research and outreach. She also served two years in the Peace Corps in Senegal as a sustainable agriculture extension agent. Abby is excited to be in Vermont and loves trail running, hiking, gardening, reading, and knitting.

Anna Elewski is excited to join UVM Extension as their new Soil Health and Water Quality Outreach specialist. **(cont.)**

Meet Abby and Anna (cont.)

Her work will focus on natural resource conservation and agronomy outreach to support farmers in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Anna recently moved to Vermont for the second time after working on a small organic farm near Mount Hood, Oregon. Before farming, she worked for the USGS doing salmon conservation research on the Columbia River. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology, with a concentration in conservation ecology, from Vassar College in 2021. After graduating, she moved to Burlington to work a seasonal forestry position and quickly came to love Vermont. She is passionate about building sustainable food systems and community-centered responses to the climate crisis. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, knitting, and making pickles.

Farmers Connect

Monday, March 13, 6-8 p.m.
CVFC Offices at 7056 US-7 in Ferrisburgh

Join us for *Farmers Connect*, an after hours gathering for Vermont farmers. Connect with other farmers, ask questions, share ideas, and learn something new! Delicious food and beverage provided.

This month, we'll be joined by Nina Gage, Deputy Director of VAAFM's Water Quality Program, Tom Eaton, Crop Consultant & Nutrient Management Planner at Agricultural Consulting Services, and George Tucker, Soil Conservationist at NRCS.

Kindly RSVP to info@cvfc-vt.com or call/text 802-989-6712.



SALEM
FARM SUPPLY



1-800-999-FARM ♦ SALEM FARMSUPPLY.COM



OUR SERVICE SELLS SINCE 1953!



SALEM, NY & CLAVERACK, NY



Featured Farmer: Jon Lucas

Lucas Dairy, Orwell

Jon Lucas is a rare breed among farmers.

Especially dairy farmers.

If you read our Featured Farmer stories on a regular basis, you know that many of our members come from long lines of agriculturally inclined folks.

Their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even great-great-grandparents have handed land, barns, and wisdom down through the generations.

Not so for Jon: He's a first generation dairyman and Vermonter who, as of our annual meeting in January, is also a newly elected CVFC Board Member.

Having grown up in New Hampshire, Jon attended Vermont Technical College for Dairy Farm Management. He returned to his home state to work on two farms.

"Then I got the bright idea that I should farm on my own," he says through a chuckle.

He moved to Starksboro, Vermont where he worked on David Russell's farm for several years. Eventually, in 2012, Jon founded Lucas Dairy, purchased David's herd, and rented his farm.

In 2016, he moved to his current location in Orwell, which he rents with the option to buy from fellow Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition members Tom and Mike Audet. The farm, part of the East Creek Watershed, is bordered entirely by the creek on the east. Just across the street sits Lake Champlain.

"When you're trying to work in the field, weather dictates what direction you're going to go. If the soil's too wet, you can't plant. If it's too dry, nothing wants to grow. It's about learning how to work with your soils, learning when it's time to go, and when it's not time to go."

JON LUCAS, LUCAS DAIRY

For the time being, Lucas Dairy, with its 300 cows and 890 acres, is entirely owned and operated by Jon, with the assistance of **(cont.)**

Jon Lucas (cont.)

six full-time employees. He hires custom operators to handle manure spreading and chopping, while seeding and tillage is done in-house. Jon sells his milk to the Agrimark Co-op to make Cabot cheese.

“My kids and I enjoy Lake Champlain—we do a lot of swimming, fishing, and recreation. We want to do the kind of work that we can be proud of.”

JON LUCAS, LUCAS DAIRY

When we visited Jon in mid-December 2022, the landscape was newly frozen and covered with a fresh coat of snow, with a significant storm looming on the horizon.

“We’re in full-on winter mode, trying to get everything buttoned up,” explains Jon. This included putting the finishing touches on a project at the heifer barn to reconfigure the old drainage system and bring it into alignment with current state requirements. Once complete, all run-off from the open barnyard will flow into the manure pond.

It is also worth remarking on what was *not* happening on Jon’s farm at the time of our visit.

“We were able to put in a satellite manure pond this year,” notes Jon. “Normally, this week, the week of the 15th [when Vermont’s manure spreading ban goes into effect], we would be trying to get all of our ponds empty. We don’t have to do that anymore because we have plenty of storage.”

This means that Jon was able to spread his manure when the ground was dry, rather than wet or frozen—a practice that is not allowed by Vermont’s required agricultural practices.

Spring feels far away right now, but Jon hopes to incorporate manure injection and draglining

into his practices next year when the manure spreading ban is lifted.

Jon’s investment in infrastructure improvements will do a lot to protect water quality and support soil health, but his steady, persistent efforts on a seasonal basis will, too.

Chief among those is no-till corn planting. Jon started the practice when his farm was located in Starksboro. Initially, he no-tilled into sod after first cut. Within 2-3 years, he was planting 100% of his corn with no-till.

Moving the farm from Starksboro to Orwell was a game changer.



Jon Lucas (left, with his son) (courtesy)

“It’s a different soil structure here, with very heavy clay,” says Jon. “There was a learning curve.”

When he first moved, Jon anticipated that he would have to plow everything in the fall, till in the spring, grow corn for two years, and then rotate back into grass.

But it just so happens that the Audets had planted cover crops in the fall before. In turn, Jon did a mix of conventionally planted (cont.)

Jon Lucas (cont.)

corn and no-till into cover crops.

“Once I got to learn the soil better, I did everything no-till,” Jon says.

And he skipped rotating back into grass every two years.

“I have some land that’s in its fourth and fifth years of corn, and we have just as good of a crop,” he explains, adding, “Every two years of crop rotation is expensive. Being able to grow corn on the same ground just makes sense.”

In this way, it’s just Jon in his corn planter. He doesn’t have harrows and plows running, and it doesn’t take multiple people to complete the task at hand.

Like most farmers, Jon is the kind of person who does what it takes to get the job done, with a fair amount of experimenting and tweaking to overcome the obstacles in his path.

At the top of the list is weather.

“When you’re trying to work in the field, weather dictates what direction you’re going to go,” he says. “If the soil’s too wet, you can’t plant. If it’s too dry, nothing wants to grow. It’s about learning how to work with your soils, learning when it’s time to go, and when it’s not time to go.”

Next are the up-front equipment costs. Jon purchased his no-till corn planter out of pocket before grant money became available. He has since invested additional money in the planter, changing around row cleaners and different closing wheels.

Still, Jon acknowledges that “compared to what it costs to keep extra harrows and tractors we’re not using maintained, it more than covers itself.”

At the same time, if grant funding had not been available to support the purchase of his no-till drill, it likely would not have been a priority.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle Jon has experienced when it comes to addressing water quality is investing in infrastructure improvements, which come with significant price tags. It’s difficult to obtain loans for such projects. He has benefited from the support of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Vermont’s Farmstead Best Management Practices (BMP) Program, which provides engineering services on a priority basis for the design of BMPs at no cost to the farmer and can cost share on the construction of eligible practices.

In addition to grant funding, Jon has also benefited from learning from other farmers and agriculture professionals. Especially before the pandemic, there were a lot of in-person educational opportunities, like the No-Till Conference, field visits, and 1:1 support from UVM Extension.

“It’s hard for farmers to adapt until they see someone else doing it,” Jon says.

That is precisely why Jon appreciates being a member of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition. He initially became involved back in 2012 when Vermont’s Required Agricultural Practices took effect and many farmers felt unsure of how to proceed. These farmers united to offer mentoring and peer support in finding a path forward.

Despite the obstacles and near constant trial-and-error, it is well worth it to Jon to be a good steward of the environment in his work as a farmer.

“We have a responsibility to the environment and the waterways. Nobody wants to pollute,” says Jon. “My kids and I enjoy Lake Champlain—we do a lot of swimming, fishing, and recreation. We want to do the kind of work that we can be proud of.”

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.



Vermont Organic Dairy Producers Conference

Thursday, Mar 9, 2023

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Registration begins at 9:00 a.m.

**Vermont Technical College
Judd Hall, 124 Admin Drive
Randolph Ctr, VT 05061**

Please join the University of Vermont Ext. for the 11th annual Vermont Organic Dairy Producers Conference on March 9, 2023! Presentation highlights include improving pasture management using satellite imagery, managing high feed costs in 2023, parasite management and the pasture ecosystem, dairy health issues during the grazing season, research updates, and organic dairy farm management decisions.

Registration is \$25 per person and includes lunch. Certified Crop Adviser CEU credits and VAAFM Water Quality Education credits will be available. Scan the QR code with your smart device to register online!



Welcome New Members

Thank you to these farmers and individuals for joining the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition to support our mission!

LeAnna Compagna, Scholten Farm
Ramsay Mellish, Cutting Hill Beef Company
Karen Callicott

Have you renewed your membership for 2023?

If not, just scan the QR code with your smart device to get started.



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.

Thank You!



Addison County Dairy Consulting