

7056 US-7, Unit C  
Ferrisburgh, VT 05473



(802) 989-6712  
[info@cvfc-vt.com](mailto:info@cvfc-vt.com)



## Our Workforce Development Program

Vijay Nazareth, Executive Director

A competitive workforce will be vital to Vermont's agricultural future. A major constraint to securing that future, however, will be the growth of human talent.

At CVFC, we are committed to working with our education partners such as Middlebury College, the Patricia Hannaford Career Center (PHCC), and middle schools and high schools in Addison County, as well as our other partners, to develop innovative education programs centered on experiential learning, mentoring, and student-to-student learning. These programs help nurture and grow talent while promoting a sustainable agricultural future.

The Farm to School Program is an agricultural apprenticeship program that provides high school students with the opportunity to learn while they earn. It also helps farmers develop the next generation of workers and create a pathway for individuals interested in a career in agriculture. The Lake Champlain Basin Program will help educators at PHCC, as well as middle and high schools in Addison and Chittenden Counties, develop innovative curriculum-based programs that strengthen conservation efforts and preserve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Our mission at CVFC is to help farmers implement innovative agricultural practices that enhance water quality, soil health, climate smart farming, and their economic resiliency in the Champlain Valley. We think workforce development is vital to fulfilling this mission. **(cont.)**

## Vijay Nazareth Letter (cont.)

We invite you to join us as we look to create a vibrant and sustainable agricultural community here in the Champlain Valley. Over the next several weeks, we will invite farmers to participate in the Farm to School program by hosting students at their farm for the 2023/2024 school year. If you are interested, please contact me by phone at 802-989-6712 or by email at [vijay@cvfc-vt.com](mailto:vijay@cvfc-vt.com). We will also be looking to hire a part-time Program Manager. If you are interested, or know of someone who might be interested, please reach out to us.

CVFC would like to acknowledge our funding partners, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFMM), as well as the Lake Champlain Basin, for supporting our workforce development initiative.

## Listen: What's Happening on Farms This Spring?

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.



**SALEM**  
**FARM SUPPLY**



**1-800-999-FARM ♦ SALEM FARMSUPPLY.COM**



**OUR SERVICE SELLS SINCE 1953!**

**SALEM, NY & CLAVERACK, NY**



## Featured Farmer: LeAnna Compagna

Scholten Family Farm, Weybridge

LeAnna Compagna, along with her husband Mike, is an organic dairy farmer at Scholten Family Farm in Whiting and Weybridge. The farm is owned by her parents, Roger and Patty Scholten. In 2022, LeAnna became a member of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition and, in January 2023, was elected to the Board of Directors.

LeAnna Compagna was raised in farming.

And if she has anything to say about it, her children and their children will be, too.

To be certain, she's not trying to coerce her four offspring into leading the agricultural lifestyle she has chosen for herself.

But she is bound and determined to ensure farming in Vermont is environmentally and economically sustainable for generations to come.

LeAnna knows the task before her is monumental.

Growing up, she witnessed her parents, Roger and Patty Scholten, struggle against the economic tides of the dairy industry and then find hard won success after they made the switch from conventional farming practices to organic in 2007.

A year later, Patty launched her artisanal cheese-making operation. She would go on to delight taste buds all over the world with her cave-aged creations.

LeAnna and her husband Mike joined her parents on their Weybridge-based farm in 2010. They quickly expanded the herd from 60 to more than 100 cows.

Knowing they wanted to farm long-term, LeAnna and Mike soon started searching for a



LeAnna Compagna (center, with his sons) (courtesy)

second site. They eventually found their current location in Whiting, leasing the farm for two years from the original owner before her parents purchased it.

Today, LeAnna and Mike have 250 mature cows in Whiting, while her parents have 50 in Weybridge. All of their milk is shipped to Organic Valley, and Patty's cheese operation is a fond memory following her retirement.

In the midst of it all, they're currently working on a farm transfer from Roger and Patty to LeAnna and Mike.

**“We’re trying to figure out the best way to do it financially so Mike and I succeed long-term, but Mom and Dad can retire,” explains LeAnna. “It’s a good relationship in the sense that my parents let Mike and I take full ownership of this place in every other regard than actual written ownership.”**

LEANNA COMPAGNA, SCHOLTEN FAMILY FARM

Emphasis on full. (cont.)

## LeAnna Compagna (cont.)

They own 500 acres and rent 800, all in hay and pasture, and oversee the work of three employees. LeAnna takes care of calf management and feeding, breeds heifers and cows, and fills-in as a milker. Not to mention, she homeschools their four children, ages two, five, six, and ten.

When we visited LeAnna on a bright, blustery day in early March 2023, the children were getting quite the education in animal husbandry, mechanics, quality & compliance, and economics.

The family was busy moving calves, while Mike was hard at work preparing their no-till drill and baler for spring. Calf vaccinations and dehorning were top priorities for the week, as was completing their annual organic certification paperwork.



Although the land was still coated in a hefty blanket of snow, LeAnna was able to point out the many steps she and Mike take to protect water quality, support soil health, and address climate change.

As organic dairy farmers, thirty percent of their cows' dry matter intake must come from

pasture. In turn, they rotationally graze, moving their cows from paddock to paddock to ensure they have continuous access to a diversified base of grass species and nutrients without destroying the soil. Meanwhile, riparian buffers line their pastures and laneways to protect nearby waterways from nutrient leaching.

With the support of Vermont's Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP), LeAnna and Mike recently invested in a no-till drill to plant winter rye and other cover crops, as well as to restore species in their pastures, such as clover and Italian rye.

They're also experimenting with diversifying the species of crops they grow on their farm overall. At the top of the list is sorghum, a high-energy feed for cows that pulls nutrients from the soil they wouldn't normally get with grass.

**“Last year’s drought was an eye-opener for us,” explains LeAnna. “Sorghum helps us make sure we have the volume of feed we need to get through the drier months.”**

LEANNA COMPAGNA, SCHOLTEN FAMILY FARM

Also as organic farmers, they do not spray any herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, or synthetic fertilizers on their land.

Regular readers of our Featured Farmer series might be wondering, “What about their corn?” LeAnna and Mike do not grow any corn for their cows. When they first moved to the farm, they transitioned all corn ground to organic grass over the course of three years.

“There’s pros and cons to it,” LeAnna points out. “We do not miss having that huge push in the spring to get everything planted, but we miss the tonnage and energy that comes with corn. With the heavy clay soils, organic corn is very difficult to grow and manage the weed population. With the amount we were **(cont.)**

## LeAnna Compagna (cont.)

investing for chicken manure for fertilizer and the seed and the fuel and the labor, we felt we were not getting a good return.”

As LeAnna and Mike look to the future, they have many ideas about new practices they would like to implement.

“We would eventually want to put in a new barnyard especially for outdoor access for our cows in the winter so they’re not traipsing through mud,” LeAnna shares. “That will reduce run-off, too, because it would all get scraped and go directly into our manure pit.”

Laneways from the pasture to the barn present another opportunity for improvement. Each year, they cover more and more of them with stone or wood chips.

“We’re looking to reduce the amount of haylage we put up each year, and doing more wrapped round bales,” LeAnna adds, “That reduces run-off and leaching from the bunks.”

One of the downsides, of course, is the amount of plastic they’ll use to wrap those bales. LeAnna and Mike acknowledge the trade-offs farmers must make some times in choosing which practices to try.

“At the end of the day, a good farmer has good management practices,” she says. “It’s not that they’re big, small, organic, or conventional. What you choose to consume is your own choice, and that’s the beauty of America and the diversity of products we have.”

As for all farmers, experimenting with and implementing new practices in order to be better stewards of the environment has presented LeAnna and Mike with some obstacles. Money, time, and people power are common barriers, as well as the clay soils Addison County is (in)famous for.

But as organic farmers, they most of all find there’s a lack of research about new organic methods they’d like to try. It seems as though there’s been more research around improving conventional practices.

“We often times have to trial-and-error things on our own, and consult with other farmers who’ve tried different things,” she explains.

At the same time they’re finding barriers, LeAnna and Mike are also finding sources of support.

“More intelligent people!” Mike chimes in with a laugh, as he comes through the barn office.

Kidding aside, checking in with other farmers for their experience and wisdom has greatly elevated LeAnna and Mike’s farming practices.

And that is a significant reason why LeAnna decided to join the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition in December 2022. It’s an opportunity to network with other farms and be informed about what’s happening in Vermont agriculture at the legislative level.

“We plan on farming for the next 30-plus years of our lives and so we need to be actively involved in how the agricultural community is changing and moving, and we want to be part of that narrative,” LeAnna says. “It’s always better if you can be proactive versus on the defense.”

Why do LeAnna and Mike muster the sheer will, determination, and power to care for the environment through agriculture? For them, it just makes sense—and cents.

**“When you don’t take care of the environment, it’s not going to take care of you,”**

LEANNA COMPAGNA, SCHOLTEN FAMILY FARM

“To be a financially profitable farmer, you have to take care of the soils and the plants because that’s what feeds the rest of the operation.”





Ramsay Mellish (courtesy)

## Featured Farmer: Ramsay Mellish

Cutting Hill Beef Company, West Cornwall

In the not too distant past, Ramsay Mellish was a typical college student desperate for money. What is perhaps less typical is the job he found to help make ends meet: Relief milker at a dairy farm near his university in New Hampshire.

It wasn't long before Ramsay became deeply interested in the science of dairy, and traded in the ivory towers for metal silos. That's right: he dropped out of college, became a farmer, and never looked back.

Fast forward to April 2016, when Ramsay and his wife Caroline purchased a farm in Cornwall. They milked exclusively for five years under a contract with Stonyfield.

"Unfortunately, when they renegotiated in 2021, it was for a lower price. In order to make up for the lost revenue, they expanded their milking herd from 120 to 180, and started growing organic vegetables at a nearby farm.

This opened the Mellishes' eyes to the benefits of direct marketing. As one might imagine, it's a lot of work to build relationships with co-ops and grocery stores. But once you've got a boot in the door, it's much easier to sell them other products.

And that's how it has come to pass that their organic dairy is now known as Cutting Hill Beef Company. They've raised hundreds of cows, selling their meat from Vermont to Rhode Island and everywhere in between.

Ramsay and Caroline have no plans to stop there with diversification. They are now raising a flock of 1,000 hens for eggs, which will grow to 3,000 by fall 2023. They also have a small drift of pigs for personal consumption, but you can count on finding their retail pork in the near future.

What we're doing currently is a big experiment," Ramsay explains of their multi-species venture.

He is not simply referring to their goal of growing and diversifying their revenue, however.

**"As dairymen, we talk about multiple species in our hay, but many don't consider multiple species of animals, or even multiple species of ruminants, within the same system."**

RAMSAY MELLISH, CUTTING HILL BEEF CO.

He adds, "There's really interesting diversification ideas that happen at small scales and it's never implemented at a larger scale."  
**(cont.)**

## Ramsay Mellish (cont.)

And so, the Mellishes are wondering: What are the environmental and economic benefits of raising multiple animal species on the same parcel of land? Can it be done at scale in an effective way?

They believe it can.

**“We know that the pastures benefit from having both ruminants and monogastric animals because of the difference in their manure. We know, too, that grazing even different ruminant species within the same pasture impacts the soil ecosystem differently than just one species,”**

RAMSAY MELLISH, CUTTING HILL BEEF CO.

How? Cattle manure is lower in nitrogen and higher in other nutrients, while monogastric manure is higher in nitrogen and lower in other nutrients. Taken together, this creates a balanced diet for the soil.

“We can get the nitrogen basically paid for by the sale of the product from the monogastric animal, whether it’s pork or eggs,” he points out. “If it can be scaled big enough, then you have an excess of these nutrients you can spread on your hay fields.”

There are research-backed benefits to the animals, as well, when there are multiple species on the same land.

“Small ruminants are susceptible to certain types of parasites that cattle are not. And cattle are susceptible to certain types of parasites that small ruminants are not,” Ramsay says. “When you put them in the same pasture, you confuse the parasites and they leave.”

“This big experiment is all in service to a grander vision: environmental stewardship.

Ramsay observes, “As farmers, we have a huge impact on the environment. Farmers are essentially responsible for managing hundreds of thousands of acres in Vermont, and we need to be mindful of that.”

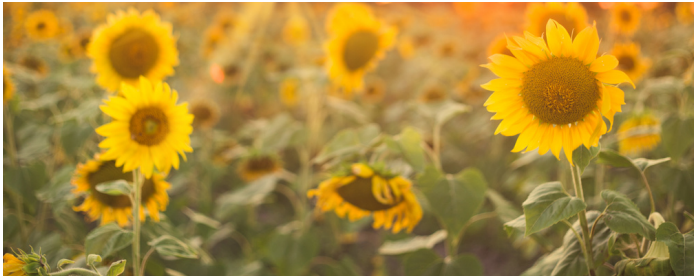


*“To learn more about the innovative practices the Mellishes are implementing to be good farmers and stewards of the environment, you can read their full story by scanning the QR code with your smart device.”*



## 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](mailto:info@cvfc-vt.com) and we'll send you the link.



## Summer Happenings!

This summer is full of agricultural events, workshops, even a pasture walk!

Stay up to date with the most current calendar of events by visiting <https://cvfc-vt.com/events/> or simply scan the QR code with your smart device for event details and registration information.



## Welcome New Members

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

**Bouchard Family Dairy, LLC. | Clifford Farm  
Cloudland Farm | Hamilton Cattle  
Company, LLC. | Liberty Hill Farm | Savage  
View Farm | Molly Anderson | Jeff Carter  
Kim Conant | Whitney Hull | Elizabeth  
Mullikin | Stephanie Walsh**

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](http://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/calendar).

## Thank You!

