



# **CHAMPLAIN VALLEY FARMER COALITION**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

## Dear Friends,

As we reflect back on 2023, we see it was a year of exciting achievements and formidable challenges for our community.

Here at the Farmer Coalition, we strengthened our conservation efforts to promote water quality, healthy soils, and climate smart farming; introduced a workforce development program with schools in Addison County; supported our young farmers through our Farmers Connect program; and deepened our engagement with Vermont's other farmer watershed groups. All the while, we expanded our funding base, added new staff members to our team, enhanced our outreach to community partners, and diversified our board by adding three new next generation farmers.

At the same time, the year presented its fair share of obstacles that demanded resilience, perseverance, and reliance on one another. A late season frost followed by excessive rains and flooding throughout the summer disrupted on-farm practices such as chopping hay, spreading manure, and harvesting quality crops safe for human and livestock consumption. We were heartened to see farmers share their support and expertise with one another to weather these storms. We are grateful for the timely support state and federal agencies provided, as well as guidance from UVM Extension on adaptation strategies. If what we saw this year is the "new normal," farmers will be in a much better position to deal with future weather events.

As we look to 2024 and beyond, it will be important to collaborate to solve some of the biggest challenges in agriculture and dairy, in particular, in Vermont. Improving access to markets, using technology for better on-farm decision-making, adapting to unpredictable and extreme weather conditions, promoting environmentally friendly practices, and creating a strong labor force are essential if agriculture is to thrive in the Champlain Valley for years to come.

The Farmer Coalition remains committed to our mission of supporting a vibrant and sustainable agricultural community. We thank our donors, sponsors, and partners for helping us fulfill this mission.

**Vijay Nazareth**  
Executive Director

**Brian Kemp**  
Board President

# Membership Snapshot

Since our early days in 2012, the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition has grown from a fledgling group of 12 members to more than 160 members today!



**103**

Vermont farmers



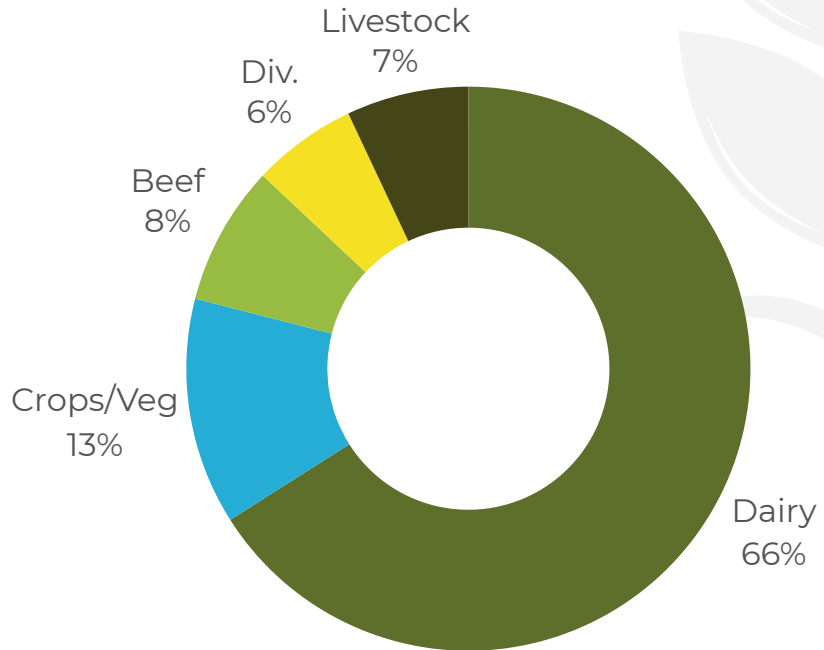
**94,898**

acres of farmland  
managed



**64**

local businesses & individuals  
who believe in our mission



# Farmers Connect

As part of our mission to provide farmers with opportunities to learn more about innovative agricultural practices and to share their own experiences with their peers, we launched Farmers Connect. These educational events are a space for farmers to share ideas, ask questions, and learn through roundtable discussions, presentations, and field demos.



*Drew Bentley, Kristina Howlett, and Logan Balestra from Champlainside Farm in Bridport at our March 2023 Farmers Connect*

Many of these events are targeted toward our Young Farmers Group, a community of farmers who are from a younger generation on their family farm, new to farming, or otherwise identify as a young farmer. The Young Farmers Working Group is the group's advisory committee, which meets throughout the year to plan and host educational events based on input and feedback from the wider CVFC membership.

The big focus was on manure injection at our July Farmers Connect, where we were joined by Ferrisburgh dairy farmer Allan Brisson of Allandra Farm. Allan is a bit of a manure injection evangelist and he'll share the good word about this practice with anyone who will listen.

"I basically preach it—I don't know why. I guess it's because I'm passionate about it," explains Allan. "It works so well and we all should be working in that direction."

Allan is right to be so enthusiastic. After he shared his manure injection successes and challenges, the group heard from Abby Augarten, UVM Extension Agronomy Outreach Specialist, about research-backed benefits of the practice. "Phosphorus doesn't move into the soil profile readily when surface applied. It will hang out on the surface, and when you have runoff, it will dissolve the phosphorus and carry dissolved phosphorus with it," she explained. "That is one mode we see phosphorus leaving the field even if there isn't any soil moving off that field."

For farmers considering how to modify their cropping systems to reap the benefits of manure injection, Sonia Howlett, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator for the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, was on hand to discuss several funding programs to support the purchase of equipment. Grants such as the Capital Equipment Assistance (CEAP) Program and the Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP) Program make accessing new technologies easier for farmers.



*Allan Brisson shares what he's learned about manure injection at our June 2023 Farmers Connect*

**Curious to hear more  
about our robust  
discussion of manure  
injection? Just use  
your smart device to  
scan the QR code.**





# UVM Ext. Collaboration



*Abby Augarten from UVM Extension speaks to a group of Farmer Coalition members about manure injection*

We've had the privilege of collaborating with the University of Vermont Extension since our inception in 2012. UVM Extension staff have continually served on our Board of Directors, providing valuable guidance and expertise. This partnership has been essential to CVFC's organizational development and impact. CVFC and UVM Extension staff meet weekly to discuss on-farm technical assistance, current and upcoming educational events, and new initiatives that provide support and services to farmers across the state.

This year, Abby Augarten, Agronomy Outreach Specialist at UVM Extension, helped facilitate a new collaboration between the Farmer Coalition and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM). Thanks to this connection, CVFC now assists farmers in submitting their Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP) claim forms, and conducts conservation practice field checks, which support VAAFM's conservation program.

As part of our grant agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM), our Water Quality Program Manager Kate Longfield conducts seasonal Conservation Practice Surveys with Vermont farms. She not only records and field verifies priority conservation practices, she also enters them into the Vermont Partner Database.

The Partner Database is a conservation tracking and planning tool administered by VAAFM. Priority conservation practices have assigned or pending phosphorus reduction efficiency values. These Conservation Practice Surveys specifically focus on practices that are implemented by farmers without any state or federal cost share assistance. The practices are then aggregated and sent to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to report nutrient reductions toward meeting Lake Champlain's Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL), which is required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). CVFC's effort to record self-funded conservation practices provides the State of Vermont and the EPA with a more accurate picture of the conservation work (and nutrient reductions) that farmers in Vermont's Lake Champlain basin have done to improve soil health and water quality.

# Farmer-Funded Conservation



*Rye cover crop reduces soil erosion and runoff from fields through the winter and spring*

# Stronger Together

Heading into 2023, working closely with the other farmer watershed groups was a top priority. We kicked things off in the spring by meeting with the Farmer's Watershed Alliance (FWA) and the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance (CRWFA) to brainstorm how we could better address the needs of our members through collaboration. Working together on advocacy, education, membership structure, and sponsorship were some of the topics we covered.



Our second collaborative meeting took place in the fall with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) and the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to discuss concerns related to manure management. Because of the excessive rainfall Vermont received over the summer, manure pits were reaching capacity and custom applicators were not able to spread. Concerns were mounting that farmers would still have full pits by the time the December 15 manure spreading ban would take effect. As a result of our collective input and advocacy, the State of Vermont implemented a system allowing farmers to request extensions on the spreading ban.

In January 2024, the three watershed groups were invited by VAAFM for a meet-and-greet with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in Montpelier. Once again, we think being at the Capitol together will help amplify the voices of our members with the state legislature. Although the needs of our members may be different, based on geography and the type of farms we work with, we share a strong commitment to working together in the future.



Several weeks after the disastrous July flooding and in the midst of ongoing excessive rainfall, we had the opportunity to meet with state and federal officials to discuss impacts on Vermont's farms. We were joined by Under Secretary for Farm Production & Conservation at USDA Robert Bonnie, as well as Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Peter Welch, and Vermont Secretary of Agriculture Anson Tebbetts. Nearly a dozen of our members were in attendance and many of them shared their first-hand accounts. Not surprisingly, several common themes emerged:

- There's a significant need for short-term assistance—emergency funding where it's needed the most—to aid farmers in recovering from both catastrophic flooding *and* the effects of excessive rainfall this summer.
- There's also a significant need for long-term solutions to ensure agriculture's resilience in the face of a changing climate and other economic pressures.
- Excessive rainfall has had a negative impact on farms, as well, including crop yield and quality, livestock health, general operations, and finances.

Overall, we hope we gave our state and federal officials a comprehensive picture showing how farmers have been negatively impacted by both catastrophic flooding and excessive rainfall. We look forward to the dialogue in the weeks and months ahead, influencing the development of short- and long-term solutions.

# Federal Advocacy



*Farmer Coalition Board Member David Conant speaks with Sen. Bernie Sanders*

# Lake Champlain Sustainable Ag Program



*A student in our program shares what she learned at Boundbrook Farm*

While we pride ourselves on the learning and networking opportunities we provide to farmers in the Champlain Valley, it's also a critical part of our work to ensure our community understands what farmers are doing to be good stewards of the environment.

To that end, this year we launched the Lake Champlain Sustainable Agriculture Program, funded by the Farm to School Vision Grant through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM).

It's an exciting new opportunity for high school students in Addison County to engage in hands-on learning at local farms. Students in our internship program meet and interact with local farmers; develop a broad understanding of farm operations; learn about agricultural practices to support water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin; and, share what they learn with younger students in their district.

We piloted the program in Fall 2023 with five students working at Cutting Hill Beef Company and Boundbrook Farm. Thanks to the grant, students were eligible to earn a \$400 stipend. Evaluations from our participating students show they all have increased their knowledge of conservation practices that improve water quality and would recommend our program to their classmates. One student shares, "This internship has expanded my horizons of what farming in Vermont can look like!" We look forward to further enriching the program based on what we learned this fall and offering it again in Spring 2024.

In 2023, we continued to reach radio audiences in the Champlain Valley through a public education campaign aired on WVTK 92.1.

With the turning of each season, we sat down with radio host Bruce Zeman for an on-air interview about what's happening on Vermont farms throughout the year. We recorded some fun, informative ads highlighting seasonal practices Vermonters might be seeing on their neighboring farms.

In our interviews, we covered a broad range of topics, including no-till planting, climate smart farming, nutrient management plans, cover crops, manure injection, weed and pest management, workforce development, and more.

**Listen to our on-air  
interviews with WVTK  
92.1! Just use your  
smart device to scan  
the QR code.**



# In the Field & On the Air



# Words to Farm By



## **Ramsay Mellish**

*Cutting Hill Beef Co., Cornwall*

Farmers are essentially responsible for managing hundreds of thousands of acres in Vermont, and we need to be mindful of that.



## **Pauline Stevens**

*Golden Russet Farm, Shoreham*

I want to make sure that when I'm done farming, there's still something here that can be enjoyed and used.



## **LeAnna Compagna**

*Scholten Family Farm, Whiting*

At the end of the day, a good farmer has good management practices. It's not that they're big, small, organic, or conventional.

*LeAnna with two of her children,  
Colin & Coralie*



## **David Conant**

*Conant's Riverside, Richmond*

One of the things you can do to have a better life is to leave the earth better than you found it, whether you grow a single rose or a thousand acres.

*David with his wife Deb*



## **Dan Wulfkuhle**

*Wood's Market Garden, Brandon*

Hopefully, our little farm can be one of many examples of what you can do to push the envelope at this scale.

*Dan with his wife Elyse*



## **Nick DeGraaf**

*DeGraaf Dairy, Richmond*

If you don't care for your land, it's not going to take care of you. If you keep your land healthy and productive, it will provide you with the feed you need.

*Nick with his sister Renae*





## **Cameron Clark**

*Riverhill Farms, Richmond*

[My land] is just beautiful. I want it to stay that way. I want it to be productive and provide for my animals because I love my cows.

*Cameron with employee Wendy*



## **Jon Lucas**

*Lucas Dairy, Orwell*

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.



## **Lorenzo Whitcomb**

*North Williston Cattle Co.*

We're doing it for ourselves. We're doing it for the future.

**Read our *Featured Farmer* series  
to learn more about what our  
members are doing to be good  
stewards of the environment.  
Just use your smart device to  
scan the QR code.**



## **Ben Dykema**

*Wilcon Farm, N. Ferrisburgh*

Supporting water quality is our responsibility. You have to change. To change the right way, you have to ask questions, talk to your neighbors, and talk to your peers.



## **Erin Farr**

*Farr Farms, Richmond*

I think it's important to demonstrate to the next generation that we're trying something new, trying to stay up-to-date with current practices, and encouraging progressive thinking.



## **Tim Kayhart**

*Kayhart Bros. Dairy, Addison*

I feel a duty to both my family and other farmers to be an advocate for what we're doing.

*Tim (R) with his brother Steve*

# Bringing Grant Dollars to the Farming Community

We've been the recipient of local and state grants that allow us to better serve farmers. Our annual grant funding budget increased from \$177,706 at the end of 2022 to \$221,866 at the end of 2023.

## Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program

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- Funding Agency: Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- Purpose: Advance water quality initiatives in the Champlain Valley
- Amount: \$85,000 (Total AgCWIP Grant: \$440,413)

## Education & Outreach Grant

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- Funding Agency: Lake Champlain Basin Program
- Purpose: Advance sustainable agriculture education in Addison County schools
- Amount: \$45,644

## Farm to School Vision Grant

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- Funding Agency: Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- Purpose: Promote workforce development with Addison County high school and middle school students
- Amount: \$27,714

## Dairy Farmers Cohort Technical Assistance Grant

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- Funding Agency: Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center
- Purpose: Support young farmers with Innovative Staffing & Business Management and Marketing & Education of Dairy Production Practices
- Amount: \$150,000 (2024-2025)

## Revenue

Dues for Membership	3,750.00
Gifts/Sponsorship	9,612.24
Grants and Contracts	221,866.00
Interest Income	19.55
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$235,247.79</b>


## Expenses

Advertising	2,327.40
Annual Meeting	3,030.20
Bank Service Charges	16.88
Business Meals	793.12
Car and Truck Expenses	14.07
Chemicals Purchase	674.81
Computer and Internet Expenses	1,624.19
Contract Services	33,759.41
Dues and Subscriptions	500.00
Insurance Exoense	1,337.00
Legal Fees	20
Miscellaneous Expense	456.32
Office Supplies	3,407.57
Payroll	154,509.93
Photocopy	742.35
Postage	85.64
Professional Fees	7,247.82
Rent	9,895.87
Repairs and Maintenance	42.67
Supplies	393.48
Telephone	889.53
Travel	699.19
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$222,467.45</b>

**NET REVENUE \$12,780.34**

# Financials

Total Assets as of December 31, 2023 were \$128,547, of which \$116,261 were in bank accounts. The remainder were fixed assets relating to office furniture and equipment. Because the Farmer Coalition does not have any liabilities, its net worth was \$128,547 at the end of the year.



# What's Ahead for 2024?


Our vision for 2024 and beyond is to keep agriculture in the Champlain Valley profitable and sustainable in the face of mounting challenges, such as higher input costs, labor shortages, and extreme weather events. No organization, CVFC included, has a monopoly on good ideas to address these challenges, but collectively we can work toward creating a stronger and more vibrant agricultural community in the Champlain Valley and across Vermont.

We believe solutions need to be driven by innovative, cutting-edge research and the ability to deliver it in a timely and effective manner to farmers. We also believe research needs to drive good policymaking and policymakers need to stay connected with the farming community. CVFC will continue to play an instrumental role in helping bring this about.

Our commitment to water quality and climate smart agriculture remains as strong as ever. Our water quality program has been the mainstay of the organization since its founding in 2012. In 2023, we introduced a workforce development program and a young farmer initiative, recognizing the challenges posed by labor shortages in agriculture and the needs of our younger farmers. To further demonstrate our commitment to young farmers, we added three young farmers to our Board of Directors in January 2023. Our Board will continue to reflect the diverse makeup and needs of our membership base.

As we look to the future and find ways to deliver value to our members, it's important we recognize our donors for their support. VAAFM continues to support our water quality efforts through a generous grant and extended a Farm to School grant to CVFC in 2023. We also received a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin to support water quality education with schools in Addison County.

At CVFC, we believe the best is yet to come! Thank you for joining us on this journey to create a strong and vibrant agricultural community in the Champlain Valley.





# Our Supporters

Our mission to assist all farmers in implementing innovative agricultural practices that enhance water quality, soil health, climate smart farming, and their economic resiliency in the Champlain Valley is generously supported by



We are also grateful for support from our business members.

## Platinum



## Gold



## Silver

Bourdeau Brothers of Middlebury  
Champlain Valley Equipment  
Farm Credit East

Phoenix Feeds & Nutrition  
Poulin Grain  
Seedway

## Bronze

Brian's Farm Supply  
Chr Hansen  
Gaines Insurance  
Independent Dairy Consultants  
J. P. Carrara & Sons

Lawes Agricultural Service  
Matthew's Trucking  
Philo Ridge Farm  
United Ag & Turf  
Valleywide Veterinary Services

# Our Team

## Staff

**Vijay Nazareth**, Executive Director

**Kate Longfield**, Water Quality Program Manager

**Brooke Small**, Workforce Development Program Manager

## Board of Directors

**Brian Kemp, President** - Mt. Meadows Farm, Sudbury

**George Foster, Vice President** - Foster Brothers Farm, Middlebury

**Ben Dykema, Treasurer** - Wilcon Farm, N. Ferrisburgh

**Abigail Augarten, Secretary** - UVM Extension, Middlebury

**Marie Audet** - Blue Spruce Farm, Bridport

**Ray Brands** - Deer Valley Farm, Ferrisburgh

**Eric Clifford** - Clifford Farm, Starksboro

**LeAnna Compagna** - Scholten Family Farm, Whiting

**David Conant** - Conant's Riverside Farm, Richmond

**Peter James** - Monument Farms, Weybridge

**Tim Kayhart** - Kayhart Bros. Dairy, Addison

**Jon Lucas** - Lucas Dairy, Orwell

**Ramsay Mellish** - Cutting Hill Beef Co., Cornwall

**Rachel Reed** - East Creek Stock Farm, Orwell

**Lorenzo Whitcomb** - No. Williston Cattle Co., Williston

**Loren Wood** - Woodnotch Farm, Shoreham