

7056 US-7, Unit C
Ferrisburgh, VT 05473



(802) 989-6712
info@cvfc-vt.com



Featured Farmers: Ashley and Erin Farr

FARR FARMS, RICHMOND

If you were to look at Farr Farms' social media posts, you might assume they're all fun and games. You'd see ducks getting pedicures in the farmhouse sink, pigs playing hide-and-seek, Jersey cows mugging for the camera, and all kinds of big, beautiful sunflowers stretching toward the sky. And while it is true the Farrs have a robust sense of humor about their profession and family life on the farm, it's serious business behind-the-scenes.

Especially when it comes to taking care of the environment.

When we visited co-owners Ashley and Erin Farr in early November 2022, they were wrapping up their soybean harvest, planting their cover crops to prevent erosion and nutrient run-off over the winter, washing and putting away equipment for the season, and planning for next year's cropping.

They raise beef cows, pigs, and ducks, selling their meat and eggs at an on-site farmstand. The barn also boasts a small but mighty contingent of Ayrshires for showing in 4H. Until recently, the Farrs milked a herd of 60 cows, a nod to the farm's original purpose at its 1951 founding by Ashley's grandparents.

On the agritourism side of the operation, the Farrs welcome visitors each summer to their sunflower patch to take a meandering stroll through the gigantic blooms. **(cont.)**

Farr (cont.)

As fall creeps in, the sunflowers give way to pick-your-own pumpkins in all shapes, colors, and sizes.

And then there are the crops. Known as Johnny Brooke Farm and owned by Ashley's father Chuck, they grow corn, soy beans, winter rye, triticale, and hay, which they sell to other farmers in the area.

Whether the Farrs are growing sunflowers, decorative gourds, or livestock feed, they give considerable attention to how they plant and nourish their crops in the spirit of preserving soil health.

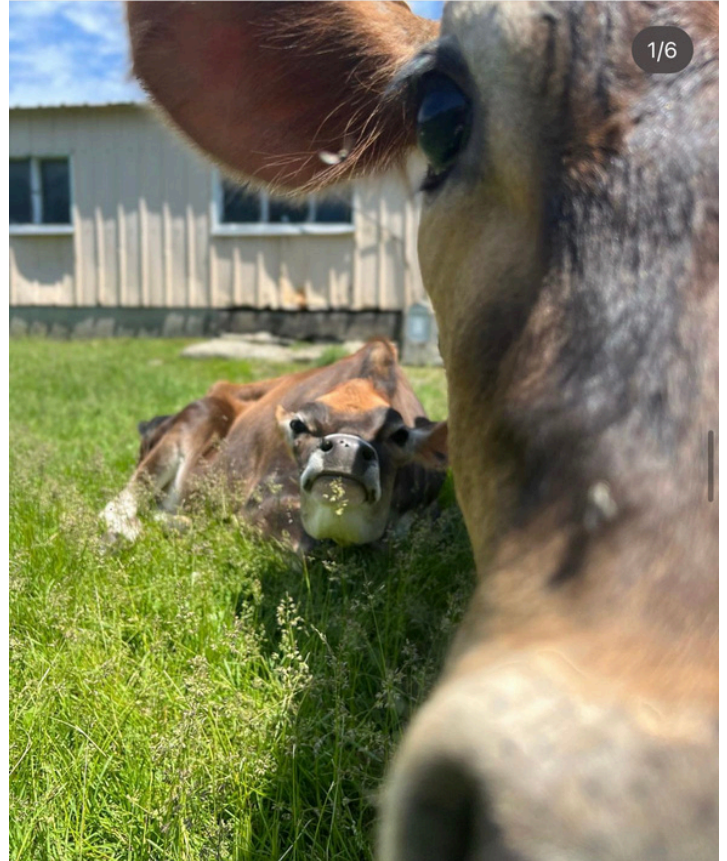
Each fall they use a no-till drill to plant a cover crop mix of two varieties of clover, winter peas, tillage radish, and triticale on all of their acreage, including the corn land. These cover crops help the Farrs to build more organic matter and capture nutrients in the soil.

Admittedly, the multi-species mix is a bit tricky to plant because each variety of seed is a different size. The seed distribution requires frequent monitoring to ensure all the little seeds do not come out first and leave the larger seeds behind.

“I also 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.”

ERIN FARR, FARR FARMS

The Farrs use their no-till corn planter for the sunflower patch, a mix of Black Oil and Autumn Beauty. Most recently, they have experimented with no-till planting their pumpkins into winter rye, though with mixed results. They're eager to keep trying and work out the kinks.



The agritourism crops also present an opportunity for Erin to educate the general public about agriculture. This year, for example, visitors immediately noticed that the sunflowers and pumpkins were not in the same spot they were last year. This prompted interesting discussions about why it's important for farmers to engage in crop rotation: improved soil health, optimized nutrients, and pest and weed control.

Ashley and Erin have big aspirations for the future of their farm and the environment.

For one, they would like to try rotational grazing with their beef herd to capitalize on some of the hilly land they cannot crop. Rotational grazing is the practice of containing and moving animals through a pasture to improve soil, plant, and animal health. This practice increases soil fertility, reduces soil compaction, prevents erosion and nutrient runoff, and allows plants to build stronger root structures. From an **(cont.)**

Farr (cont.)

economic perspective, rotational grazing allows farmers to reduce costs associated with machinery, fuel, and supplemental feeding.

The Farrs would also like to try roller crimping to terminate their cover crops in the spring instead of using herbicides. Though they have heard mixed reviews about this practice from other farmers, they're planning to conduct a trial next year. If their experiments prove successful, it is a practice they could then use on their soybeans, sunflowers, and pumpkins.

Of course, trying new agriculture practices and dreaming about the future is easier said than done.

“The biggest hurdle we have is mental, of wrapping our heads around something newer.”

ERIN FARR, FARR FARMS

Ashley concurs.

“This year we no-tilled cover crops into picking corn stubble and it worked out fine,” he said. “Still, there’s always that fear: you think you’re set up, you think you’re ready, you’ve done your research. But you’re skeptical: ‘Is it going to work on my farm?’”

On the other side of the equation, the Farrs are very grateful for the soil they have (much like their fellow Richmond farmer, Dave Conant).

“We have extremely forgiving ground,” notes Ashley. “That has enabled us to do some of the things we’ve done. Our soil quality allows us to take risks.”

For Ashley and Erin, the hesitation, skepticism, researching, nail-biting, and risk-taking is all worth it to be good stewards of the environment.

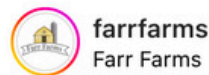
“It’s our asset. There’s no sense in wasting it,” says Ashley. “Why not improve it?”

Erin adds, “I also 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.”

“There’s the opportunity to save on input costs, having better soil quality. It’s not something that’s going to happen overnight,” Ashley notes. “Last year, we cut back on our inputs by 20%, not from a cost standpoint, but from nutrients put out. We still had good yields this year thanks to improved soil health.”

The Farrs have solid advice for other farmers who are trying to figure out how best to support water quality, soil health, and climate-smart farming.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Most farms are willing to share what they know,” says Ashley. “You can take it home and adjust it how you see fit for your particular operation and ground.” “No two farms are alike.”



...



Farm to School Internships for High School Students

Sow the seeds for a rewarding future in agriculture! High school students in Addison County and northern Rutland County can apply today to join our Lake Champlain Sustainable Agriculture Education Program. It's an excellent opportunity to get hands-on farm learning!

Students in our program will:

- 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
- Share what they learn with young students in their district

It's a 16-hour program on a flexible schedule and students receive a \$400 stipend.

Have we piqued your interest? Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device and head to our website to learn more.



And please be sure to share this opportunity with the high school students in your life!

Save the Date! Dairy Sustainability Workshop with Cornell PRO-DAIRY

We're teaming up with Kirsten Workman from Cornell PRO-DAIRY and our friends at UVM Extension to bring you a dairy sustainability workshop! Hear about the latest, cutting-edge water, soil, and climate research from Cornell. It's happening on Wednesday, April 10, at a time and location TBD in Addison County. Lunch will be provided. Stay tuned for an invitation with full details!

Annual Meeting Recap

Oh, what a night! Nearly 100 community members joined us for our Annual Meeting on January 25. Thanks to them, our gathering represented the best of Vermont agriculture. It was a multi-generational mix of farmers, researchers, service providers, policymakers, and, of course, future farmers. We welcomed young kids, teens, people in the thick of their agricultural careers, and folks who've retired, but still like to keep their fingers on the sector's pulse.

Attendees asked thoughtful questions and engaged in a lively discussion of agricultural policy and research. It's ok that we don't always see eye-to-eye on how things should work. It is this diversity of thought and opinion that will fuel a brighter future for Vermont agriculture.

We're grateful to our many panelists who shared their expertise and perspectives:

- Anson Tebbetts, Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets
- Julie Moore, Vermont Secretary of Natural Resources
- Ellen Kahler, Executive Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
- Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS
- Roy Beckford, Associate Dean & Director, UVM Extension
- Joshua Faulkner, Research Assistant Professor, UVM
- Heather Darby, Extension Professor: Agronomy Specialist, UVM Extension
- Brian Kemp, Mt. Meadows Farm, CVFC Board President
- Ramsay Mellish, Cutting Hill Beef Co., CVFC Board Member

We'd also like to congratulate three of our long-serving board members on their re-election for another three-year term: Tim Kayhart, Lorenzo Whitcomb, and Loren Wood. Thank you for your service!

Stories of Impact: Our 2023 Annual Report

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.

We invite you scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to read our 2023 Annual Report to understand how our collective work has made a difference in the agricultural community.



Farmers Connect Recap

Again and again, we hear from our members that their favorite part about being involved in the Farmer Coalition is the opportunity to engage with their fellow farmers by asking questions, offering support, and sharing knowledge. Farming isn't simple, but it can ease your mind to know you have a community surrounding you.

We saw this spirit on full display at our recent Farmers Connect, which we co-hosted with our friends at UVM Extension in Middlebury. We welcomed more than 20 farmers and service providers to discuss the upcoming 2024 cropping season. It comes on the. **(cont.)**

Farmers Connect (cont.)

heels of an exceedingly wet and disaster-filled 2023, which left many farmers facing field ruts, soil compaction, standing water, erosion, increased weed pressure, dormant cover crop seedings, and less nutrient dense manure—just to name a few! These are issues farmers will need to be mindful of as they make their plans for the year to come.

For nearly two hours, farmers and service providers engaged in a robust and lively conversation. They covered a wide range of topics including:

- The pros and cons of subsoiling
- Timing, techniques, and technology for manure injection
- Options for tillage, including no-till, vertical till, chisel plow, and rip tilling

- Approaches to weed and grass management
- Cow illness due to mycotoxins introduced by flood waters

We're grateful to all of the farmers and service providers who joined us, shared their concerns, and generously offered their expertise to the group.

If you were unable to join us or still have questions, the Farmer Coalition and UVM Extension are ready to support you! We invite you to reach out to CVFC Water Quality Program Manager Kate Longfield at kate@cvfc-vt.com and UVM Extension Agronomy Specialist Abby Augarten at abigail.augarten@uvm.edu. They're happy to answer your questions, or help you find someone who can!



SALEM
FARM SUPPLY



1-800-999-FARM ♦ SALEM FARMSUPPLY.COM



OUR SERVICE SELLS SINCE 1953!

SALEM, NY & CLAVERACK, NY

Grain Growers Workshop

Thursday, March 21
9:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

UVM Extension

23 Pond Ln., Suite 300, Middlebury

Join us for a workshop designed to provide practical information on growing, harvesting, and storing grains, as well as the impact on water quality and soil health. This is the second workshop in an ongoing series related to grain production for dairy farms.

This meeting is a collaboration among three UVM Extension teams – Ag Business, Northwest Crops and Soils, and Champlaine Valley Crop, Soil and Pasture Team. It is co-hosted by the Champlaine Valley Farmer Coalition. The day's agenda includes:

- Heather Darby and Northwest Crops and Soils team will discuss considerations on varieties of corn and soy optimal for the Northeast.
- Abby Augarten and Joshua Faulkner from the Champlaine Valley Crop, Soil and Pasture team will present preliminary data on nutrient balances and the water quality impacts of growing soybeans.
- A farmer panel comprised of producers who have integrated grain production into their operations will share the knowledge they have gained.

This is a free event and lunch will be provided. Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to register by March 19.



Welcome New Members

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

Vermont Bees, LLC

Tup's Crossing Farm, LLC

Michael Snow

2024 Grain Growers Conference

March 20

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

The Essex Resort & Spa
Essex, VT



Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to register today.

2024 VAAFM Listening Sessions

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets invite you to participate in their 2024 listening sessions! The sessions are a mix of in person or virtual opportunities for producers, processors, distributors, and service-providers to give feedback on topics such as the impacts of severe weather, grants and programming, industry needs, and more.

Registration is required unless noted in the schedule below. Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to register today.



- Statewide (virtual) | March 18 | 12:30-2:30pm
- Rutland County (no registration required) | March 20 | 4-5:30pm | Rutland, VT
- Franklin & Grand Isle Counties (no registration required) | March 25 | 4-6pm, St. Albans, VT



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.

Scan the QR code with your smart device or view and bookmark the calendar by visiting:



<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/calendar>

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.

Northeast Dairy Innovation Summit

Registration is open for the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Summit. On April 2-3, the summit will bring together dairy farmers, processors, service providers, and industry stakeholders from across the northeast in Albany, NY.

From farm innovation to processing expansion and more, you'll leave with new ideas to put into action, peer-to-peer connections, and strategies to build a more resilient dairy sector.

Scan the QR code with your smartphone or device to register! Discounted rates are available for dairy farmers, processors, and students.



Learning Opportunities with UVM Extension

Our friends at UVM Extension's Northwest Crops & Soils Program are hosting several upcoming events and webinars related to soil health, water quality, and climate change!

- Winter Farm Meeting | March 6
- Organic Dairy Days | March 13 & 14
- From Hooves to Harvest Webinar Series | Starts March 18
- Grass Fed Dairy Workshop | April 3

To learn more and register for these events, scan the QR code with your smart device or visit

<https://tinyurl.com/mtkxmtpd>.



Thank You!

