



VERMONT

AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS



2015 Annual Report

www.Agriculture.Vermont.Gov

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A Message From Our Secretary

Dear Reader,

It has been another successful year for agriculture in Vermont. The Ag sector continues to be a bright spot in Vermont's economy – creating jobs, enhancing the Vermont brand and our reputation for quality, and preserving our Working Landscape.

The local food movement continues to thrive – providing our communities with access to healthy, fresh food. Our specialty foods – including cheese and maple – continue to receive national acclaim.

The following pages highlight the many ways in which the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets is supporting local agriculture. From providing technical assistance, to regulation and promotion, the efforts of the Agency help to ensure Vermont agriculture continues to flourish.

Here are just a few of the food and farming highlights we celebrated in 2015

Our cheese is tops!

- Vermont Cheese dominated the 2015 American Cheese Society Awards
- 46 of the 355 ribbons awarded at the 2015 American Cheese Society Competition went to Vermont cheesemakers, including 13 for first place
 - First place awards for Jasper Hill, Cabot, Consider Bardwell, Franklin Foods, Parish Hill Creamery, Spring Brook Farm, Sweet Rower Farmstead, Vermont Creamery, Vermont Shephard
 - Best in Show for: Jasper Hill

VT Specialty Food Producers reign supreme!

- Vermont specialty food companies take home 5 gold SOFIs (Specialty Outstanding Food Innovation) awards
 - Big Picture Farm (2 golds for Raspberry Rhubarb goat's milk caramel and Chai goat's milk caramel)
 - Fat Toad Farm (Outstanding product line for their goat's milk caramel)
 - Vermont Creamery (Cultured Butter Sea Salt)
 - Wozz! Creative Kitchens (Kiwi Lime Salsa)

Best Beer in the World

- According to Beer Advocate, we make some of the best beers in the world...11 of their top 250 beers in the world are produced right here in Vermont by the Alchemist and Hill Farmstead Brewery.

Dairy & Meat Processing Boom...

- Tremendous growth in meat and dairy processing sectors
 - 23 new meat facilities (including packing plants, slaughterhouses, and pre-packaged retailers) have come online in the past 12 months, creating skilled jobs, expanded capacity, and economic opportunity for Vermont's farmers. State total: 1922 facilities

- 20 new dairy processing facilities have come online since January 2015, with 10 additional plants under construction. We also have 4 plants undergoing multimillion dollar upgrades with new equipment and products. State total: 135 processing facilities

We lead NE in Dairy!

- 63% of all the milk in New England is produced right here in VT
- Dairy brings \$2.2 Billion in economic activity to our state each year
- Sales of VT dairy products exceed \$1.3 billion annually

Syrup is as Sweet as Ever!

- We continue to be the national leader in maple syrup, producing more than 41% of the nation's maple crop.
- We have 4.5 million taps in the state!

Creating Jobs, Preserving our Landscape...

- Working Lands grants supported the creation of 65 new jobs this year

Domestic Export Expands our Vermont Brand...

- "Harlow's Vermont Farm Stand" at Boston Public Market, a partnership between Harlow Farm in Westminster, Agency of Ag, and the Department of Tourism, now features 35+ Vermont products.
 - More than 1 million shoppers are expected at the market annually!
 - Exposure for our best-in-class-products, right in the heart of Boston
- The Vermont Building at the Big E = huge economic opportunity
 - In 2015, 29 companies exhibited their products at the building grossing \$1.68 million in sales
 - More than 1 million visitors experienced the Vermont brand in the Vermont Building!

Thank you for your continued support of Vermont agriculture! I am looking forward to all we will accomplish together in 2016!

Sincerely,



Chuck Ross, Secretary
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

Our Mission: VAAFMM facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment

Leadership Team

The Agency currently has more than 100 employees across all four divisions. The leadership team is listed below.

Administration

Chuck Ross, Secretary
Jolinda LaClair, Deputy Secretary
Diane Bothfeld, Deputy Secretary
Thea Schwartz, Assistant Attorney General for Agriculture, Food, and Markets
Marcey Hodgdon, Director of Administrative Services
Hunter Thompson, IT Manager
Alison Kosakowski, Marketing & Communications
Sam Werbel, Executive Assistant

Agricultural Development

Chelsea Bardot Lewis, Business Development Section Chief
Abbey Willard, Food Systems Section Chief
Stephanie Smith, Land Use Section Chief

Agricultural Resources Management

Jim Leland, Director
Laura DiPietro, Deputy Director
Guy Roberts, Lab Director
Cary Giguere, Pesticides Regulation Section Chief
Tim Schmalz, Plant Industry Section Chief

Food Safety & Consumer Protection

Dr. Kristin Haas, State Veterinarian & Division Director
Dr. Kathy McNamara, Assistant State Veterinarian & Deputy Division Director
Dr. Shelley Mehlenbacher, Assistant State Veterinarian & Animal Health Section Chief
Henry Marckres, Consumer Protection Section Chief
Randy Quenneville, Meat Industry Section Chief
Dairy Industry Section Chief (currently vacant – hiring in 2016)

Administrative Division

For the Administrative Division, 2015 has been a year of streamlining systems, maximizing efficiency, and enhancing customer service. The team has accomplished a robust scope of work and maintained continuity, despite down-sizing in the Business Office by one-third, due to staff retirements.

Licensing and Registration

The Licensing and Registration Section of the Administrative Division took over administrative responsibilities for dairy licensing this year, thus completing the process of consolidating all licensing activities in one office. All renewals, collections, and licenses are now processed by this team. This has enabled the Agency to manage licensing more efficiently, and to serve customers better.

The Licensing and Registration team also set up the new apiary fee program, which requires all beekeepers to pay an annual fee. The team also re-implemented the field inspection program, which entails seeking out unregistered products at stores across the state. This initiative, which had been suspended since 2009, holds manufacturers accountable to the state's product registration laws, and drives revenue for the Agency.

Information Technology

The Administrative Division hired a new IT Manager, Hunter Thompson, to replace the Systems Developer position vacated previously this year. The position was upgraded to reflect the need for a more strategic approach to IT at the Agency. Since joining in September, our new IT Manager has advanced several important initiatives.

The Agency has successfully migrated to Office 365, putting VAAFM in the top 30% of all state agencies in implementing the new platform.

To support the merger of the Agency of Natural Resources and Agency of Agriculture labs, the IT team has completed the task of cataloging all lab systems and equipment, and has developed a back end integration plan which maps out the steps necessary to connect the technological infrastructure of these two previously disparate entities. The anticipated completion date for the integration is Spring 2016.

Major strides have also been made towards populating FarmViewer, a program that enables VAAFM to map farm locations and other notable data points. FarmViewer now receives a live data feed from our USA Plants and Herds databases, which has enabled greater efficiency, consistency, and accuracy.

In keeping with the theme of efficiency, accuracy, and customer service, the Agency has also implemented a new grants management software system, which eliminates paper applications and provides applicants with a simple, online interface. A new e-signature offering has also been implemented, eliminating the need for paper routing.

In response to security concerns, the Administrative team has worked to secure the 116 State Street location, which had previously been unlocked during business hours. All staff are now required to use their ID badge to enter the building, and guests are buzzed-in using newly installed a camera system. Implementing this system required close coordination among the administrative staff, but has resulted in a more secure and safe work environment for our employees.

Finally, in preparation for a potential crisis situation, the Agency has outfitted the Berlin lab location with the technological infrastructure needed to host an Ag emergency command center. We are now wired and ready to execute our emergency response plan.

Communication

Over the past year, the Communications team has significantly improved the Agency website to improve user experience. New resources have been added, and information has been reorganized to be more clear, concise, and useful. The team also launched a new, monthly e-newsletter and has expanded the Agency's social media presence.

Ag Development

Food Systems

Over the past year, the Food Systems team has focused on developing benchmarks, formalizing networks, and readying Vermont producers for the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Farm to School

The Farm to School team led a rigorous systems mapping and strategic planning process in 2015. Although Vermont has long had a robust Farm to School network, until now, it has been somewhat amorphous and decentralized. As an outcome of this effort, the statewide Farm to School Network now has a dedicated, formalized leadership team, a steering committee – called the Common Circle, and clearly articulated goals – including the ambitious target of ensuring 75% of Vermont school participate in Farm to School programming by 2025, and procure 50% of their food from local or regional sources.

The team has also proposed legislative language to formalize what constitutes “Farm to School.” Just as the term “local food” can potentially have many meanings, and thus needed to be formalized in order to ensure goals and metrics could be established, the effort to formally define “Farm to School” programming is expected to result in greater consistency and impact, statewide.

Farmers' Market Data Tracking

The Food Systems team launched a new initiative in 2015 to track pricing at farmers' markets, in an effort to understand the cost differences between local food available at farmers' markets and similar items sold at retail. Using grant money from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, a part-time temp was hired to survey local markets, collect data, and compile weekly pricing reports. The key take-aways from this effort were that commonly purchased produce items are affordably priced at farmer's markets compared to retail locations and organic produce pricing at farmers' markets is very competitive when compared to organic products sold at retail grocery stores. In 2016, the team will begin outreach to build awareness of these findings, with the goal of dispelling the misconception that farmers' markets are prohibitively expensive.

Farm to Institution

VAAFM has worked closely with Sodexo, an international food service management company, to help facilitate the adoption of their “Vermont First” Commitment to support the production and purchase of local food. The Agency played a critical role in helping to develop the program, identify qualified

producers, and providing guidance and technical support to farmers interested in approaching institutional markets.

Under the “Vermont First” program, Sodexo will work with farmers, distributors, processors, state government, non-profits and supply chain players within the farm to table economy to increase the amount of local food grown and sold in the state and beyond.

Over the past year, VAAFM also undertook the task of tracking local product procurement in state government. Data tracking reveals that approximately 6.9% of food purchases in state government are procured from local producers. In 2016, the team will continue to work with state partners to identify opportunities to expand the percentage of local food procurement in state government.

Produce Safety

The newly formed Produce Safety team has been hard at work preparing Vermont’s growers for the arrival of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Signed into law in 2011, FSMA gives the Federal Food & Drug Administration (FDA) broad new authority over many types of food production, processing, and distribution, in an effort to prevent foodborne illness and protect public health. FSMA represents the largest overhaul of federal food safety laws since 1938.

The team has been deeply engaged in industry and stakeholder outreach – from hosting public listening sessions with the FDA, to gathering farmer input, to submitting formal comment on the federal rules. Throughout this process, it has become clear that the Vermont producer community supports VAAFM to play an intermediary role with the FDA. In response, during the upcoming legislative session, VAAFM will seek expanded statutory authority to assess fees, inspect produce farms, and promulgate produce safety rules, in an effort to maintain local oversight. However, the FDA has not yet allocated state-level budget resources – until Federal funding has been dedicated, we will not stand up a produce safety program.

Business Development

The Business Development team continues to support Vermont’s food and farming businesses by creating new market opportunities, providing technical and grant support, consulting and advising, and promoting the Vermont brand.

Domestic Export

The Agency formed a partnership with Harlow Farms in Westminster to operate the booth at the Boston Public Market, providing Vermont producers direct access to a premier consumer market, and an opportunity to build awareness for Vermont agriculture and the Vermont brand in Boston. The booth now features more than 35 Vermont products, and more than one million shoppers are expected at the market annually.

The Vermont Building at the Big E continues to be a huge economic opportunity for a number of Vermont companies. In 2015, a total of 29 companies exhibited their products at the building grossing \$1.68 million while fair attendance came in at nearly 1.4 million.

Working Lands

www.WorkingLands.Vermont.Gov

In 2015, the Legislature merged the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Board into the Working Lands Enterprise Board, expanding the number of members from 15 to 20, and adding a policy development role to the WLEB's statutory charge. The Working Lands Enterprise Board has implemented a Policy Committee, and continues the valuable work of the Finance Committee, Forestry Committee, and Goals and Evaluations Committee. Notable work in 2015 includes:

- The Forestry Committee undertook a Forest Sector Systems Analysis for the State of Vermont, working with Yellow Wood Associates. The analysis recommended strategies, highlighted in a final report, which WLEB will be acting upon in the coming year. To more broadly share the results on this process and WLEB's roadmap for action, the WLEB Forestry Committee will host an event and press conference in February, as well as briefings for legislators.
- WLEB's Enterprise Financing Options Committee explored the capital needs and gaps within the agricultural and forestry sectors, as well as opportunities and tools that have the potential to multiply and accelerate the impact of WLEB funding. The Committee engaged Roberta Harold and then Nancy Wasserman to identify gaps and suggest potential tools. Key findings include: WLEB is already providing the most needed type of capital by awarding grants; there is currently no need for WLEB to create an additional revolving loan fund; There are additional financing options worthy of consideration that meet WLEB's goals and mandate.

To date, the program has granted over \$3 million dollars, leveraging \$4.9 million dollars of matching funds. By the end of 2015, we were just starting to see the substantial impacts of our first two years of grant-making. The 44 businesses that have completed their projects (representing \$897,987, or approximately 30% of total grants to date) reported: 82 jobs created thus far, a total increase of \$8.8 million in gross income, and a 75% average increase in product output.

Demand from applicants for the Working Lands Program remains strong. This Fiscal Year 2016, the Board has approximately \$550,000 to invest into agriculture and forestry projects. We have received 114 applications from every county of the state, requesting a total of \$3.3 million in requests. We are currently mid-grant cycle and will announce project recipients May 2016.

Land Use

The Land Use team has a new member who filled a vacancy in the Act 250 Coordinator position created earlier in the 2015. Prior to this transition, the Agency upgraded the position to reflect the programmatic demands to independently manage the Agency's participation in the Act 250 process including reviews of development impacts on significant farmland, and tracking onsite and offsite mitigation in a systematic way. To meet these demands, development of an Access database is underway. In this past year, research, interviews and a draft report documented the use of onsite mitigation land since 2006. The Agency has only completed this work in Chittenden County, but will continue this research throughout the state. One of the preliminary outcomes of this initial work is a desire by the Agency to improve outreach strategies for designing development projects with Criterion 9 (B) in mind and marketing onsite mitigation land to farmers.

Act 250 Criteria 9(B) FY 2015 Statistics

- Projects reviewed: 103 in total; 25 had de minimis impacts to "primary agricultural soils"

- Onsite Mitigation acres: 182.67
- Offsite mitigation acres: 289.31
- Offsite Mitigation dollars: \$202,399

The Agency has long been partners with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) on the important issue of farmland access and farm viability, which includes funding the VHCB Trust via the Act 250 offsite mitigation dollars. These funds supported the conservation and perpetual affordability of 3,889 acres of farmland in FY2015. The state mitigation funds leverage additional federal dollars from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), supporting Vermont's conservation efforts. The ACEP, and additionally, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program funding, require development of an agricultural land easement plan (ALE plan), which outlines farm management practices for the operator that will contribute to positive water quality outcomes. This plan, developed by NRCS, is tied to compliance with the Require Agricultural Practice Regulations (RAPs) administered by the VAAF. Prior to the Governor's acceptance of gifts of real property (6 V.S.A. § 14), the Agency reviews ALE plans to gather knowledge about small farm operations, and the recommended implementation of agricultural practices to protect water quality in accordance with RAPs. This is an example of how the Agency works with its conservation partners to achieve better water quality outcomes for farms participating in the farmland conservation program.

On conserved farms and others across the state, operators are diversifying their enterprises to support the farm operation. This commonly includes business that are not typically part of a farm, but can be agricultural product marketing, processing and agricultural experiential education opportunities. Often, these unique and dynamic businesses can land in a regulatory purgatory where it is unclear who regulates the farm and/or the non-farm business. The Agency will seek an opportunity for clarification and consistency to address this issue, and get on the road to provide guidance on how to participate in the local regulatory process.

Dairy Promotion

The Dairy Promotion team launched "Milk Matters," an economic assessment of the impact of the Vermont Dairy Industry. The report was based on research the Agency commissioned from Castleton Polling and Ken Jones, an economist at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

Key Findings...

Economy

- Dairy brings \$2.2 billion in economic activity to Vermont each year
- Dairy brings \$3 million in circulating cash to the state, each day
- Dairy accounts for more than 70% of Vermont's agricultural sales
- Annual sales of Vermont dairy products and by-products = \$1.3 billion
- 63% of the milk produced in New England comes from Vermont
- The dairy industry provides 6000-7000 Vermont jobs
- Every cow brings \$12,500 in economic activity to Vermont annually

Landscape

- 15% of the state is covered by dairy farms, and the fields that provide their feed
- More than 80% of Vermont's farmland is dedicated to dairy
- 66% of Vermonters report using farmland for recreation

Way of life

- 97% of Vermonters say dairy farms are important to the state
- 92% of Vermonters say dairy farms add to the beauty of Vermont
- 91% of Vermonters say dairy is important to Vermont's way of life

To share these findings, the Agency produced a full-color, 16 page report, of which more than 2500 copies have been distributed. Presentations have been given across the state, with more than 1000 Vermonters in attendance. VermontDairy.com was also relaunched, to publicize the findings, and a sharable video, highlighting key data, was created to be shared over social media.

The Agency also led Vermont's first annual "Breakfast on the Farm" event. This free breakfast, hosted by Nocht-Tea Farm in Ferrisburgh, was attended by more than 550 guests. The goal of the event was to build Ag Literacy and create an opportunity for the community to see a working dairy farm, up-close. The event was such a success that, not only will this be an annual event, but team has decided to host two Breakfasts on the Farm in 2016, at two separate locations.

Agricultural Resources Management (ARM)

The past year has been defined by an expanding scope of responsibility for the ARM division, as they work to implement new laws and grow in order to fulfill the associated obligations.

Vermont Clean Water Act

Act 64, the Vermont Clean Water Act, was signed into law in June. The requirement to implement this law set into motion a vast scope of work for the ARM division, including rule-writing, reorganizing the division and its financial structure, providing enhanced technical assistance to farmers, connecting more deeply with partners, and launching a comprehensive public outreach and education effort. Eight new staff roles were created to implement the Clean Water Act. In early 2016, a new office in Williston will open to accommodate the expanded team and be closer to their customers – the farmers in the Lake Champlain watershed.

The ARM division also played a critical role in establishing the Vermont Clean Water Fund, including board and budget development.

In the coming year, the team has a vast scope of work to accomplish related to Act 64, including the creation of several training and certification programs, including the Custom Manure Applicator Program, the Farm Education Program, and developing the framework for the Small Farm Certification Program, which will take effect July 1, 2017

Although the Agency and legislature accomplished a great deal towards the goal of improving water quality in 2015, the hard work is far from over. Meeting our statewide goals will be an iterative process, which will undoubtedly require additional resources and an evolving strategy, over time.

North Lake Farm Survey

The Agency began redirecting staff in May of 2015 to work in the Northern Lake Champlain watersheds (Missisquoi and St. Albans Bay watersheds) to perform a survey on all the known livestock operations to develop a baseline understanding of the on-farm challenges impacting water quality in the region. An

Interim Report was developed for the information collected when we surveyed half of the known farms. This is available at: <http://agriculture.vermont.gov/water-quality/research/nlfs>

The results of this survey have shown that there are still significant challenges on farms of all sizes on nutrient management and waste storage.

Pesticide Regulation

Over the past year, the pesticide management section has completed multiple outreach sessions and solicited stakeholders to help develop a plan for pesticide use that will aid in protection of pollinators. The proposed plan is currently being developed and reviewed by interested parties, who will help develop the critical elements of the plan. This state effort is part of a larger pollinator protection initiative proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency and President Obama. The Agency has also been studying how certain types of pesticides move in the environment. The Agency has broadened its field research efforts to determine what exposure patterns may exist for pollinators.

The pesticide management section also completed a report regarding utility poles treated with pentachlorophenol and the potential impacts of it in the environment, specifically shallow drinking water supplies, in partnership with DEC, multiple utilities, NGOs and other stakeholders. The report, which addressed the many variables and provided best management practices for potential mitigation efforts that play a role in determining the impact of treated utility poles on wells, is being prepared for delivery to the Public Service Board for consideration. Additionally, staff is working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on potential additional use restrictions in the reregistration of pentachlorophenol.

As a result of increased national awareness about the use of glyphosate Montpelier residents have asked their local government of intercede on their behalf and enter into an agreement between the municipality and railroads to facilitate the use of alternate methods of vegetation management in Railroad rights of way that encroach on densely populated areas. The pesticide management section is currently working with the Vermont Pesticide Advisory Council to develop policies related to the use of herbicides in densely populated areas. The council has been tasked with making recommendations to the Secretary before the next permitting cycle.

Plant Industry

The Plant Industry section, which oversees the mosquito surveillance program, vastly expanded the scope of this effort in 2015. The program seeks to identify mosquito pools which harbor West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. What was previously a regional effort, centered in Addison and Rutland Counties, is now a statewide initiative, increasing both geographically, and in terms of the number of samples collected. We are now able to provide the Department of Health with data about mosquito pools across the entire state, enabling them to monitor the health risk Vermonters in all regions – yet another example of our strong cross-Agency partnership.

Laboratory

In 2015, the Ag and DEC labs merged, and all lab functions were consolidated, enabling greater efficiency. A strategic plan for the combined lab was written, IT systems are being integrated, a new lab director was hired, and a formal governance board was created to coordinate the management

structure. We are on track to occupy the new lab space in Randolph in 2018 – groundbreaking is projected for fall of 2016.

Finally, the entire ARM Division implemented career ladders in 2015, a year-long process that more clearly defined the skills and responsibilities associated with individual job roles. As a result, staff have a more clearly defined career trajectory and greater opportunity to grow within the Agency.

Food Safety and Consumer Protection

In 2015, the Food Safety and Consumer Protection Division continued to provide an increasing level of technical assistance and support to meat and dairy processors, enabling robust industry growth. The team also dedicated considerable resources to preparing the state for the potentially devastating impact of a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza outbreak.

Key themes for the year in this Division include streamlining processes, emergency preparedness, development of career ladders, and an increased level of customer service.

Animal Health

During 2015, the Animal Health Section continued to meet its statutory obligations by engaging in regulatory and enforcement activities, technical outreach and assistance activities, and initiatives that demonstrate ongoing collaboration with Vermont livestock producers and licensees, state and federal sister agencies and departments, and NGOs.

Due to the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in the West and the Mid-West, the Section worked diligently to prepare the Agency, the State, and poultry producers for a potential outbreak in Vermont. Avian Influenza preparations presented both a challenge and an opportunity - while work around this issue was time consuming and completed with limited resources, many positive and tangible outcomes were produced. The Agency is now more equipped than ever to respond to an outbreak, and has honed many of its emergency response protocols, which will serve us well in any future crisis scenario.

The Agency has continued its management of the state's captive cervid herds in accordance with the federal law that was passed two years ago. When this project was initiated, many herds were not in compliance with the state and federal regulations. Since initiation, herd inventories, animal identification, and site inspections have helped bring herds into compliance.

The Section continued its outreach to veterinarians, encouraging the use of electronic forms of Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (CVI), including online applications and a pdf version of the Vermont CVI. The Section piloted the release of an iPad application for the Vermont version of the electronic CVI. The Animal Health Section continued its collaboration with DMV Enforcement regarding interstate movement requirements for livestock. This year, field staff worked with Enforcement Officers at new check points designed to monitor livestock transports related to sales auctions in other New England States.

The Animal Health Section worked diligently during 2015 to maintain Vermont's disease-free status with USDA for Brucellosis, Tuberculosis, Scrapie, and Pseudorabies.

Meat Inspection

During 2015, the Meat Inspection Section continued to provide mandatory daily inspection for the meat and poultry slaughter and processing industry through a cooperative meat and poultry inspection program with USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS). Additionally, the section has continued to provide inspection to federal plants under a cross-utilization cooperative agreement. This cooperative program is responsible for inspection of commercial, custom, wholesale and retail meat and poultry production and distribution of these products within the State of Vermont.

Like the rest of the Division, the Section worked through the implementation of a career ladder to more accurately define duties, knowledge, skills, and accountability amongst the inspection staff. It was a culmination of a year's worth of work, and gives Food Safety Specialists the ability to work towards a career goal.

Vermont's meat industry continues to grow, which has broadened the scope of work for the meat industry inspection team. Twenty-three new meat facilities (including packing plants, slaughterhouses, and pre-packaged retailers) have come online in the past 12 months, creating skilled jobs, expanded capacity, and economic opportunity for Vermont's farmers. Today, the state has 1922 meat processing facilities.

In-commerce surveillance of meat and poultry products continues through Compliance and Enforcement reviews. Due to a staff increase last year, inspection numbers and retail samples at retail stores, wholesale distributors, warehouses increased 4-fold. To ensure consumers are not being defrauded by beef fat/lean claims and other mislabeling or adulteration, samples taken of ground beef this past year led to 3 non-compliances by retail meat processors. The increased surveillance also led to 4 cases of violations of the Federal Meat Inspection Act being referred to the USDA FSIS, since the findings by state staff were of violations that extended beyond state borders to regional and national levels.

Dairy

The dairy section continues to provide support to the growing dairy processing sector. In 2015, industry growth necessitated the hire of a fifth dairy inspector, to meet the statutory requirement to inspect and regulate plants. Today, there are more than 135 dairy processing facilities in Vermont. In the past year alone, thirty new plants came on-line.

Despite the retirement of the long-time section chief, Dan Scruton, the section has maintained business continuity and increased its industry outreach efforts over the past year, including hosting two pasteurizer training courses, attended by representatives from 11 different facilities across the state.

In 2015, two staff were recertified as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) listing auditors for another three years (of note: there are only a dozen total state level inspector/auditors certified for this purpose nation-wide). A third staff member is scheduled to achieve this certification in 2016.

Consumer Protection

In 2015, Vermont implemented the new maple grading system. The Consumer Protection section supported this transition by providing technical assistance to industry members as they adapted to the

new grading standards. Despite hesitation from some producers, the overall response to the new grading system has been positive, both from the industry and consumers.

This year, the Apiary program increased its support to beekeepers by hiring a temporary employee to provide technical assistance. The response from the apiculture community was overwhelmingly positive. New beekeepers, in particular, saw significant benefit from this offering.

Consumer Protection continues to inspect price scanning systems in stores to protect consumers from over paying. A distinct group of repeat violators has emerged, which the team is continuously monitoring and working to bring into compliance.

The Food Safety and Consumer Protection Division provides an important service to Vermonters. As industry continues to expand and grow, the Division will need additional resources to maintain the high level of regulatory oversight Vermont consumers expect and deserve – particularly in the program areas of weights and measures, USDA GAP audits, and apiary-related services.