

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Vermont farms must meet high standards for environmental stewardship while balancing shifting markets, tough environmental conditions, and long days of hard work. The Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) was established in 2012 to support the evolving challenge of achieving Vermont's agricultural water quality goals. In particular, the Partnership focuses on improving water quality by reducing nutrient pollution from farms.

Mission

Improve agricultural water quality in Vermont by coordinating partner efforts to provide education, and technical and financial assistance to the farming community.

The VAWQP Aims to:

1. Improve water quality and wildlife habitat on all farms;
2. Deliver technical and financial assistance in the most efficient and effective manner; and
3. Provide the best service experience possible for the farmer.



Partners

Patrick Leahy Lake Champlain
Basin Program

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

University of Vermont Extension

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

USDA Farm Service Agency

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts
& Natural Resources Conservation Districts

Vermont Agency of Agriculture,
Food & Markets

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources,
Department of Environmental Conservation

Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Featured Story

Spotlight on Innovation & Stewardship at Laroche Dairy & Son

MATT AND RYAN LAROCHE: CHAMPIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DAIRY FARMING

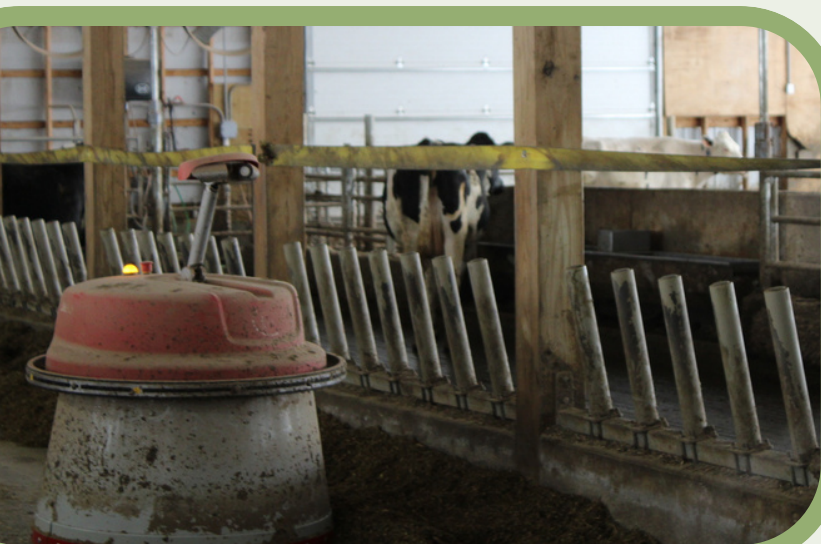
Matt and Ryan Laroche, third and fourth generation family farmers at Laroche Dairy & Son in Highgate, are setting a remarkable standard for sustainability and innovation in dairy farming. They've worked with VAWQP organizations including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the University of Vermont Extension to discuss conservation options for their farm and implement Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The Laroche's have also been active participants in the Ben & Jerry's Low Carbon Dairy Program and the Caring Dairy initiative since its inception, they've worked tirelessly to transform their farm into a model of environmental stewardship and agricultural ingenuity. Their efforts are not only elevating their own dairy but are helping to inform best practices and further research across the northeast. Over the years, Laroche Dairy & Son has added acres, cows, and barns to the farm while also transitioning Ryan into more of a management role with increased responsibilities. Most recently, Ryan's wife Olivia has also joined the team.



Matt's parents, Real and Marie Claire, conserved 218 acres through the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board in 1999. By 2024, ownership had transitioned to Matt and his son Ryan, and as the farm grew, more land was added to the farm to support the growing business. In recent years, the father/son duo added conservation protections to the acres originally conserved in 1999 and an additional 131 acres.

A testament to their forward-thinking approach is the addition of a new barn in 2025, designed with a priority on animal welfare. This state-of-the-art facility embraces current standards for animal care, ensuring comfort, health, and productivity for the herd. Barn integrations include cutting-edge technologies such as a robotic feed pusher and a manure vacuum system, which streamline daily operations, promote a healthier environment for farm workers, and more efficient resource management. In 2025, with support from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the farm also added a wastewater collection system including two collection basins and a clean water transfer system to reduce runoff from their barns and feed bunks.



The Laroche's have also prioritized rejuvenating their perennial grass fields, recognizing both the ecological and agronomic value of a vibrant, resilient landscape. Matt captures their commitment simply: "Cover cropping does work. I'd encourage other people to give it a try. It is something we have done annually for years. We see less gully wash-outs since we've been cover cropping." This commitment to soil health and regenerative ag practices not only supports better yields, but it also enhances carbon sequestration, water retention, and overall farm resilience in the face of climate change.

Investing in a manure digester, Matt and Ryan have further underscored their dedication to renewable energy and closed-loop nutrient cycles. This technology converts manure into usable energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing a sustainable power source for farm operations.

Throughout their journey, Matt and Ryan have exemplified proactive engagement with the Low Carbon Dairy Program, consistently asking thoughtful questions and making impactful changes not just for their own business, but for the broader farming community in the Northeast. They say that calculating fuel, manure, fertilizer, and electric usage and breaking that down has allowed them to make changes where there are opportunities. The Laroche's say they "have a greater understanding of on-farm emissions and potential solutions after participating in the Low Carbon Dairy program." Their spirit of collaboration, curiosity, and continuous improvement positions Laroche Dairy & Son at the leading edge of climate-smart dairy, paving the way for a more sustainable future for farming families everywhere.



Ben & Jerry's Low Carbon Dairy Program

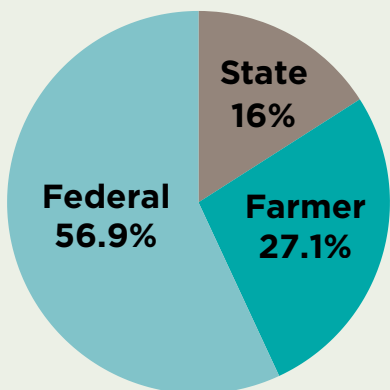
An intensive 3-year pilot in coordination with the Caring Dairy Program

Ben & Jerry's is a global ice cream company that grew out of a single scoop shop in Burlington, Vermont, where the company has been headquartered since its founding in 1978. Today, the company purchases roughly 20% of Vermont's milk volume through local dairy cooperatives. As a part of its commitment to the wellbeing of farms, farm owners, farm workers, the environment, and cows, Ben & Jerry's pioneered the Caring Dairy program in the U.S. in 2011. The program is centered on four pillars: regenerative agriculture, excellent life for cows, dignified livelihoods for farm workers, and low carbon farming.

In 2022, Ben & Jerry's launched the Low Carbon Dairy pilot program, a carbon reduction initiative linked with the Caring Dairy program. The Low Carbon Dairy program works collaboratively with farmer partners to reach their goals of increasing farm resilience and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by the end of 2025, while optimizing farm productivity and financial performance. Through innovation and implementation of best practices, Ben & Jerry's seeks to curtail greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact while documenting key insights and sharing learnings. As a business, Ben & Jerry's is concerned about climate change and is committed to building both the environmental and economic resiliency of Caring Dairy farms to support a long-term regionalized supply of dairy.

INVESTMENTS & IMPACTS

State & Federal Commitment to Water Quality



\$51.7 million* invested for implementation of agricultural water quality and conservation projects on Vermont Farms.

\$14 million estimated farmer investment in water quality and environmental stewardship.

35% of Lake Champlain Basin & **25%** of Lake Memphremagog Basin TMDLs required phosphorus reductions met through clean water programs.

Clean water restoration plans, known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), identify pollutant reductions required for an impaired waterbody to meet the State of Vermont's water quality standards. Tactical Basin Plans identify and prioritize clean water projects across land use sectors (stormwater, agriculture, rivers, roads, and wastewater treatment) based on scientific monitoring data and assessment results.

Wetlands

Crucial habitat for wildlife and aquatic species, they control erosion and reduce flooding, and improve water quality.

39 acres of wetlands habitat restored or enhanced.



On-Farm Implementation

96,643 Acres
of Annual Cropland in Vermont



Farmers planted **43,558 acres of cover crops** and **5,837 acres of cropland was managed with conservation tillage** to reduce erosion and build soil resulting in a positive impact for water quality.



30 farm barnyards and **22 manure storage systems** constructed to properly store agricultural waste and prevent runoff of nutrients.



17 farms conserved through conservation easements ensuring that our cherished farmland will remain that way forever.

*Figures are based on the total federal program investments and corresponding results during the Federal Fiscal Year 2025 (10/1/24 - 10/30/25) and the total state program investments and results from the State Fiscal Year (7/1/24 - 6/30/25). All other results included in this report are based on the State Fiscal Year 2025. Farmer contributions are estimated. This report was published in May 2026.