



# Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association

P.O. Box 854, Richford VT 05476

Phone: 802-777-2667

[www.VermontMaple.org](http://www.VermontMaple.org)

## VMSMA Board Meeting Minutes - DRAFT May 22, 2023

**Board Members present:** Emma Marvin; Reid Richardson; Dave Mance; Arnie Piper; Ted Young; James Buck; Mike Christian; Shawn Messier; Andy Aldrich; Cody Armstrong; James Buck; David Lane; Ed Smith; Sam Cutting; Mark Isselhardt, Kate Whelley McCabe; Ellie Palmer; Jim Judd; Steve Hagenbuch; Erik Waring; Meg Emmons; Jeff Disorda

**Guests:** Dr. Abby van den Berg (via Zoom), Abbey Willard (VAAF), Tucker Diego (VAAF), Mark Cannella (UVM Ext), Madison Berry (VAAF)

**Staff present:** Allison Hope; Heather Winner

### Motions

1. Ed Smith moved to accept the Nomination Committee's slate of Board officers. Jeff Disorda seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
2. Ted Young moved to approve November 4, 2022, and December 13, 2022, Board meeting minutes. Dave Mance seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
3. Emma Marvin moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Ed Smith seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
4. Ted Young moved to approve the Annual Meeting Agenda. Arnie Piper seconded. Motion approved unanimously.
5. Dave Mance moved to appoint both Steve Hagenbuch and Kate Whelley McCabe as new Board members and re-appoint David Lane. Mike Christian seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Emma Marvin at 9:02am. Emma gave an overview of the day and gave kudos for so many members on hand. She sees a diversity of voices, experiences, perspectives and sizes of production around the table!

### Season Updates

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**Bennington County:** Almost everyone had a great year, unless sitting at a higher elevation. No big runs, but temperatures were just right (freeze at night, warm the next day). Sap kept coming. Not as good as 2022, but everyone is pleased with their production. Many noted best production year or close to it. Weather worked for us this year!

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**Lamoille County:** Northern half of the county at 50-60% of crop. Cambridge area (diff climate) saw up to 6lbs per tap. Most people in the county, especially if they had higher elevation, had a poor season. Arnie felt like this was his second worst season per tap since they started about ten years ago. Temperatures weren't great, but even when they were, snow on the ground through April kept flows from going as hoped.

**Windsor County:** Low elevations were great, high elevations not as good. High sugar content early, with Feb runs. Not big runs, and not "old time sap" runs. Weak sap at end of season, and some early season metabolism, that then went away. Only an average year. Reid reported wearing show shoes for the entire season - even pulling taps.

**Washington County:** Elevation mattered. Colder areas had a poor year. 50-70% of crop this year, unless at a higher elevation. Similar to other counties. Exceptional quality sap, 2.7% for James Buck, but only 5 boils. "Couldn't seem to buy a good day".

**Grand Isle County:** Flat elevation and a great year. Started 10 days earlier than before. Had a record year, as did other producers. Around the lake was good production.

**Addison County:** Lowlands started early, got some good sap with high sugar content and above average year. Some at 8lbs per tap. Higher elevations started later and had an average year.

**Windham County:** Same with elevation issues. Snowstorm in March had an impact. No sap flowed, even in the good weather. Lot of time was used up for folks to fix lines. Not a great run late spring. Most producers had an ok year.

**Rutland County:** Elevation mattered. Some felt it was an average year. Warmer pockets had their best year ever (near lake). Good sugar content early, but dropped off after the snowstorm.

**Caledonia County:** Below average at about 50-75%. Good sugar content most of the season, but the sap was late in coming. Temps were borderline and sap didn't want to run.

**Orange County:** Gravity producers or those not able to have good vacuum didn't have good runs. The marginal temps made it hard to get a good flow. Sugar was above average, but runs were only ok. Only a few reported an above average crop.

**Chittenden County:** All over the board; Andy had one of his best years ever but his neighbor 1/2 mile down the road had a 50% year.

**Orleans County:** About 60% of expected crop. Sugar content about 30-50% higher than usual. Not much RO this year.



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**Proctor Center:** Hit their minimum long term average. Just under 0.6 gallons per tap. Mark is hearing how a couple of degrees made a difference and makes modeling and understanding the impacts of climate change challenging.

**Emma Marvin:** Saw overall 80% of average. Crop was based on microclimates is what they heard from Butternut's producers. (Elevation, aspect, bodies of water, cold or warm sugarbush mattered a lot). Huge variety of output for yield. Other regions not as lucky as Vermont on quality indicators. Maine and Quebec saw more off flavor production, and yield was poor (particularly further north). Grateful for the good crop in 2022, it evens out the inventory position better.

### Officer Elections

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Ted presented the slate of Board officer candidates and asked if anyone else wanted to be nominated or nominate themselves:

Chair, James Buck

Vice Chair, Arnie Piper

Secretary, Reid Richardson

Treasurer, Jason Gagne

At Large Member, Emma Marvin

Ed Smith moved to accept the Nomination Committee's slate of Board officers. Jeff Disorda seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

James thanked the group for their support. Emma shared her gratitude for her 3+ years in her role. The group feels more vibrant, with new faces and, despite the challenges of the pandemic, is stronger. Everyone was engaged and committed to the work and she is extremely grateful. Our ability to transition leadership is key to keeping momentum, Emma is excited for James' work, and is confident about what's next. Special thanks to Dave for his time on the board, he'll be missed. Welcome, Reid!

### Minutes of November 4, 2022 and December 13, 2022

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Ted Young moved to approve November 4, 2022, and December 13, 2022, Board meeting minutes. Dave Mance seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

### Treasurer's Report

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Allison Hope reported in Jason Gagne's absence. Allison will place on a future agenda a presentation, for Board members new and long-standing, about how we budget and track our fiscal progress. Allison shared some FY2022 and FY2023 ytd highlights (also included in the Board packet). Arnie asked about placing the federal earmark funding in an interest-bearing account. Allison confirmed that federal rules do not allow us to earn interest on these funds,

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even if we rolled that interest back into the projects being funded. Sam Cutting asked about margin on FY2022 container sales. Allison will share a report with the Board in the future with these specifics.

James asked about any risks for FY2023; is there anything the Board should be aware of? Allison pointed the board toward The Big E, helping with strong board development and leadership development, a need for a better understanding of what would drive increased membership and how we all communicate value, and improved partnership and support from county associations.

Emma asked about an Audit Committee in advance of the annual meeting. Asked for a small committee to form to support this. A paid audit was completed in 2019 and the updated by-laws require a full audit every five years (next one in 2025). We may want to save for it over the next 2 years, so we have money set aside and then continue to set aside money each year for future audits. James and Meg volunteered for this committee.

Emma Marvin moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Ed Smith seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Annual Meeting Agenda**

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VMSMA's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, June 24th at VTC in Randolph. New this year, we'll be hosting a syrup and cream contest with Henry at the helm. Paul Renaud will offer a session (with time for Q&A) on climate change, via Zoom as he's from Ottawa. This session is in response to the Board's strategic planning session from November 2022 and will kick off a year of broader discussions.

Ted Young moved to approve the Annual Meeting Agenda. Arnie Piper seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Ted Young reminded the board that he didn't think we had a quorum to approve last year's minutes. If that's the case, we will need to approve two sets of minutes at this year's Annual Meeting.

### **Additional Board Members**

Information on two potential new Board members was included in the Board packet: Kate Whelley McCabe and Steve Hagenbuch. James introduced Kate Whelley McCabe to the group (Steve will be joining the meeting later in the morning) and asked for approval for her to join us. Kate shared her background and history as a sugar maker. Kate practiced law for 10 years and helped draft Ag regulations and worked in consumer protection. She started with her 10 acres and created a barrel evaporator with her husband. They made 9 more that sold quickly, and

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eventually decided to make that a new business (Vermont Evaporator Company). This business now offers more than 75 products with customers in 40 states and Canada.

Dave Mance moved to appoint both Steve Hagenbuch and Kate Whelley McCabe as new Board members and re-appoint David Lane. Mike Christian seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

### **Strategic Partner Presentations**

*UVM Extension, Maple Program: Mark Isselhardt*

Mark encouraged folks to visit the resources on the [Extension website](#). The UVM forestry community and program is growing. Mark made two presentations to the program's groups recently. He then reviewed current funding streams, updated Maple Quality Training, the CDE program, and the Maple Minute.

*UVM Extension, Maple Business Program: Mark Cannella*

Mark is currently participating on VMSMA's Industry Committee and appreciates the VMSMA collaboration. He shared highlights of the current program, introduced some folks on his team and encouraged members to give more feedback on the programming.

*VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Maple Retail Inspections: Tucker Diego*

Tucker reviewed the most recent season of retail inspections (Dec 22-May 23). He completed inspections at 19 locations with 46 products sampled and a 65% pass rate (better than last year!). He shares summaries of each inspection season on the VAAFAM website: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/food-safety/maple-products>

Tucker saw more bulk syrup displays in retail food co-ops with a wide range of quality in those displays. Many retail stores lack knowledge to keep syrup fresh, either in bulk (should be refrigerated) or knowing to rotate displays in retail containers. Most common inspection issue is with color, based on data from last few years of inspections. Allison asked about the potential for year-round inspections, potentially including farmer's markets.

*VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Maple Policy & Ag Development: Madison Berry & Abbey Willard*

Madison shared updates on VAAFAM projects: Acer funding and their final year expanding consumer engagement - projects included the Maple 100, media asset development, and domestic marketing campaigns. In 2024, VAAFAM will focus on marketing maple in Dallas TX in conjunction with barbeque season (and to line up with one of the more recent direct flight offerings out of Burlington airport). Upcoming funding that includes options for sugar makers:

- \$3M in available grant funding through Working Lands;

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- new funding of \$2.3M in grants (based on recommendations from the Governor's Commission on the Future of Vermont Agriculture) for meat processing, maple, and produce;
- USDA resilient food systems infrastructure with \$4.5M in grants for the middle of Vermont's supply chain for crops, dairy and grains. May require a match of 25-50%. Funding support for expanding capacity for aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing. Four year program.

Abbey Willard shared updates on VAAFMT priorities and engagement with maple moving forward:

- Spending more time prior to the legislative session to understand needs
- Starting in July, start broader conversations on unmet needs
- Work to improve support of maple at the state level, including understanding why more funding through existing grant structures is not being awarded to maple (who's applying, who's not applying, etc). There's an opportunity here to partner with VMSMA on outreach.

### Strategic Topic Table Report Out

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The Board decided to forego Committee meetings on the agenda as the meeting was behind schedule. Instead, time was preserved for strategic topic tables and the group

#### Quality:

What about online inspections?

Keep pressure on Ag

Container issues

Every county gets a quality school

Counties sponsor education

Can we sell something to support more accurate grading? Spectrophotometers?

Infusion - updates to maple law?

Partner with retail (creemee stands!)

"We serve pure VT Maple" as a designator at retail establishments, along with storage best practices

#### Producer Education:

- Certification program was key. Many questions continue to come up: how do you calibrate your tools? Potable water pvc. Incentives are clear (money, regulations, benefits). Increase promotion to find information you need. More deeply engage equipment manufacturers.
- Summer education/Winter conferences - getting next generation involved, grading work.
- Big question: How do we break our addiction to plastic?

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### **Climate and the Environment:**

- Solar and whether it makes sense (maybe that's information dissemination)
- Carbon credits - steering folks to information
- Can we focus more on the maple resource (our woods are a critical resource we rely on). We can promote environmental practices. Suggestion: look at what's out there and help narrow via committee, to what is a priority for VMSMA.
- Closer relationship with forest/parks and recreation would be helpful. Forest vs Ag product discussions are important.
- S5 with fuel taxes
- When the next bug comes through, how do we respond as an association
- Water quality, are we ready for future testing? Do we have a spokesperson for these things? One voice for advocacy.
- Energy efficiency grants, can funding sources help our sugar makers upgrade? Electrification of sugar making - what are those grants to convert wood evaporators? (There is an opportunity to connect with Mike Christian about this. He recommends information via the PUC. Jacob did this for his RO as well.
- In general, the group would like to talk more about how we keep our carbon credits within the industry.

### **Membership & Marketing:**

- Getting more clear and communicative about the financial benefits of membership may help increase renewals and new members.
- Can we talk more about our grants, free educational opportunities, and local discount programs?
- What hand shake discounts exist in our counties that might be extended to all VMSMA folks?
- There was a request for VMSMA to help strengthen county groups and reignite their work.
- The group brainstormed why folks join:
  - Industry involvement and knowledge of the maple ecosystem
  - Education for experienced sugar makers
  - Tradition and connection to community
  - Getting shared experiences and knowledge about the work
  - Community is very important, and a historical reason folks joined
  - Impact on sales and retail projects
- The group brainstormed ways sugar markers identify themselves:
  - Multi-generational sugar makers and their families
  - Backyard
  - Bucket vs Tubing
  - Aspiring side-gig folks
  - Just sap production
  - Organic vs Non organic

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- Haul vs not haul
- Lifestyle group
- Pure maple vs value added products
- Retail - wholesale - Bulk
- E-commerce or not
- Additional farm activities
- Sole source of income
- School sugar operations