

Newsletter



Engage with Legislators

Looking to engage with your local legislators during this Legislative Session? Check out these opportunities being held across the state in different counties.

Washington County:

Chamber Breakfast Club with Washington County Senator Anne Watson

- Tuesday February 28 at 8 am
- This event is free for Chamber members, for nonmembers the cost to attend is \$11 to cover the cost of breakfast, which is being provided by Le Petit Gourmet from Waterbury.
- [Register here](#)

Orange County:

Office Hours with Rep. Monique Priestly (Ora-2)

- Monthly on 3rd Sunday, January 15 - May 23, 2023
- [More information](#)

Windham County:

Legislators at the Library

- 3rd Saturdays at 10:30 am, Rockingham Library
- March 24, April 21, May 19
- Windham-3 Representatives and Windham Senators

Windsor County:

Bethel Area Legislative Breakfast

- Bethel Town Library 106 Main St. Bethel, VT
- 7:30am-9:00am
- March 13, April 10, May 8

Lamoille County:

2023 Breakfasts with Legislators

- 8:00am-9:30am
- March 13, April 3
- [Learn more about locations and register here.](#)

Addison County Legislative Breakfasts

The Bridport Grange #303 and the Addison County Farm Bureau are once again hosting a series of Addison County Legislative Breakfasts. All are welcome to

attend - come ask a question or make a comment about a bill.

- Breakfasts start at 7am; the program will be from 7:30am-8:45am.
- Purchase of breakfast is not required to attend, but it helps the hosts defray the cost of opening their venues for the event.

Dates and locations:

- February 27: Bristol American Legion, 56 Airport Drive, Bristol
- March 13: Salisbury Congregational Church, 853 Maple Street, Salisbury
- March 27: Shoreham Congregational Church, 28 School Street, Shoreham
- April 10: Orwell Fire House, 604 Main Street, Orwell

Supported by:

Addison County Chamber of Commerce, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Addison County Economic Development Corporation

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Legislative

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The Legislative session is in full swing and we're already nearing the halfway point. We're two weeks out from Town Meeting Week where legislators will return to their districts, participate in Town Meeting Day and meet with constituents. It's a great opportunity to share with them what you've been seeing and hearing about the various bills.

For as much as legislators tagged **addressing the housing shortage as a top priority**, very little progress has been made in the eight weeks of the 2023 legislative session. Various committees have reviewed language including H.111 in the House General Committee this week and the Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Committee will continue their work on their Omnibus Housing bill. However, the potential of changing environmental regulations continues to cause concern that progress will be limited again this year.

The House General Committee has passed H.66 the country's most generous **paid family and medical leave** proposal, offering employees 12 weeks of paid leave at 100% of their wages (\$1,135 per week max). The bill includes a 55 cent payroll tax split evenly between the employer and employee. The Treasurer's Office, tasked with administering the program, has reported that they would require \$100 million to establish the program which would also double the number of employees within the office. The bill needs to be considered by the House Ways and Means Committee prior to a vote by the full house and then make its way through the Senate.

The **Bottle Bill** discussion continues to highlight resounding frustration from stakeholders of all types, including haulers, beverage manufacturers and retailers, as the House Environment and Energy Committee continues consideration of H.158, the bill that would expand the scope of containers required to be pulled from the recycle bin and redeemed. Witnesses, including VRGA expressed concern about labor shortages, which would further impair the already broken system if expansion were to happen now. Two retailers reported that their redemption businesses were unprofitable. Committee members appeared receptive to these concerns, but VRGA does not expect much change to the bill prior to the committee voting it out. The bill has a long road and battle before the end of the legislative session.

The Senate Health and Welfare Committee is poised, for the fifth year in a row, to pass out the bill that would ban the sale of all flavored tobacco products, and expand the seizure and destruction of contraband. As typical with this bill, we do expect that the Senate Health and Welfare Committee will pass the bill out of committee and it will be considered by the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees near the end of session.

As reported by VPA lobbyist Matt Cota, the "**Affordable Heat Act**" is moving quickly through the Vermont Senate. Also known as S.5, the legislation would require fuel dealers to get their customers to buy less of what they sell - or else pay someone else to do it for them. It is expected to add at least 70-cents to a gallon of heating fuel. Businesses and residents will see even higher heating fuel prices if this legislation is enacted. Cota, who recently spoke at VRGA's Legislative Day, reported that he anticipates that 70-cent increase will most likely be closer to \$2 per gallon. This is similar to the Clean Heat Standard that passed the Legislature last year, was vetoed by the Governor and it was sustained by one vote. Finally, this bill, if enacted, will also set the precedent for motor fuels.

The House Government Operations Committee has passed H.127, the bill that would **legalize sports betting in Vermont**. The bill needs to be considered by the House Ways and Means Committee and then will be sent to the House floor prior to moving to the Senate for review.

H.121 A bill that would expand on the requirements of **data collectors** is expected to move swiftly out of the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee. Companies that collect **personal information or biometric data** will see stricter requirements surrounding notification to authorities and consumers in the event of a data breach and requiring an opt-out option for consumers. If you maintain a database with customer information, whether it's a website, loyalty program, gift card database, etc., we strongly suggest that information is securely stored and you keep as little information as possible.

[This spreadsheet](#) will show you VRGA's 2023-2024 bills to watch list. If you have any questions, comments, or are interested in testifying please email erin@vtrga.org.

Association News

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2023 Legislative Day and Specialty Food & Beverage Tasting



On Thursday, February 9th VRGA and VSFA members convened with state legislators and government officials and network with fellow retailers, grocers, distributors, and food producers. Thank you to our attendees, speakers, volunteers, and the Capitol plaza for making this day a success.

Speaker highlights included:

- Attorney General Charity Clark, who grew up in southern Vermont helping in her family's grocery store, talked with members about the rise in retail crime. We look forward to working with AG Clark to address employee and customer safety around the state.
- Treasurer Mike Pieciak spoke with members about the state's finances, housing, and how we can do better at showing Vermont's value over neighboring states. We need to work together to bring more people to Vermont to fill jobs and expand the economy.
- Commissioner of the Department of liquor and lottery Wendy Knight highlighted initiatives within the department and answered questions from members relating to sports betting and liquor regulations.

THANK YOU

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VSFA's Specialty Food and Beverage Tasting was a delicious event featuring 34 unique companies offering an array of flavor from nut butters, to cheese, coffee, cookies and beer!

Did you attend? Please take a moment to complete [this survey](#) about the event.

VRGA Welcomes New Admin Assistant

We are excited to announce that Alyssa Greaney has joined VRGA as our new Administrative Assistant! Alyssa comes to us from an ophthalmologist's office after she decided to get back into the food industry. A graduate of University of Vermont with a degree in Nutrition and Food Science.

Email alyssa@vtrga.org to welcome her to the team. We are excited to have her as an integral part of the VRGA office!



Funding & Education

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Vermont Training Program (VTP)

The Vermont Training Program (VTP) provides performance-based workforce grants for pre-employment training, training for new hires, and training for incumbent workers. VTP grants may cover up to 50% of the training cost. Grants are paid out on a reimbursement basis upon completion of employee training. [Learn more and apply here.](#)

Vermont Business Owners: Participate in the 2023 Annual Business Economic Survey

[Davis & Hodgdon CPAs](#) has once again partnered with the [Vermont Chamber of Commerce](#) in an effort to better understand Vermont small- to medium-sized business owners' perception of the business climate. They are asking for input in the annual survey related to the economy and local businesses.

[Please take 5-10 minutes to complete this brief survey](#) to ensure that Addison County is well represented.

Since launching this survey in 2013 Davis & Hodgdon CPAs have been able to collect some valuable feedback from Vermont's businesses which they share with state media and legislators.

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a previous newsletter?

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Vermont's Infrastructure Rating Above National Average

Vermont's infrastructure gets a 'C', the same as the 2019 report card. Progress is real, but challenges remain. Vermont has some of the oldest infrastructure in the country. Substantial maintenance backlogs have accrued in several areas as recent investment runs into new challenges such as inflation, shortage of a trained workforce, and a deficit of resiliency to withstand climate change.

The infrastructure in the system or network is in fair to good condition; it shows general signs of deterioration and requires attention. Some elements exhibit significant deficiencies in conditions and functionality, with increasing vulnerability to risk.

Vermont is expected to receive \$21 million over five years to support the expansion of an EV charging network in the State, and will have the opportunity to apply for the \$2.5 billion in grant funding dedicated to EV charging under the IIJA.

2023 Scholarship Program

Application Deadline is April 21st, 2023.

Providing financial assistance to eligible students entering their first year at an accredited two or four-year school in the US.



Member Benefits

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Business Insurance Program

MMG Insurance offers a comprehensive and competitive insurance program designed for your business. Exclusive 5% discount for members.



Multi-state 401K Program

Provide great retirement plans to yourself and your staff, without the high cost, liability, and time drain of paperwork oversight. Member Chris Henry, President of The Medical Store, shares, "we ended up saving over \$12,000 annually" [Learn more.](#)



Dental Insurance

Access to a variety of affordable plan options with no minimum enrollments. Plans starting at \$38/mo.



Credit-Debit Card Processing

New programs where you pass the processing fees onto your customers are available. Members report a savings of 10-40%.



HR, Policy, and OSHA Guidance

Looking to reduce your workers comp rate or develop an employee handbook? The Richards Group can help with everything from planning and document preparation to OSHA certification for employees and owners. [Learn more.](#)



Vision Insurance

Low cost vision program with major benefits. Monthly premiums starting at \$5.95/mo.



Get the most out of your membership

The Vermont Retail and Grocers Association has partnered with these organizations after careful consideration and review. VRGA believes these organizations can offer superior customer service along with considerable savings to member businesses. In addition to these benefits, we offer a comprehensive package of services. [Learn more about our services here.](#)

[Discover benefits](#)

Payroll Services

A Vermont company offering easy and economical payroll services. Services include payroll checks, tax filings, reports, new hire reporting and more. Member discount & savings of up to \$150. [Learn more.](#)



For more information about various benefits please email info@vtrga.org.

Valentine's Day indulgences are coming at a higher price this year

"According to Retail Brew, "shoppers looking for Valentine's Day's sweets this year might've felt their hearts sink and wallet pinch due to higher prices on their favorite confections." However, "Rising confectionery prices have yet to stop consumers from indulging. Candy continues to be the top gift shoppers aim to spend \$\$ on this Valentine's Day, per the National Retail Federation. Consumers spend about \$4 billion on confections on the holiday, per IRI, and The National Confectioners Association said it expects sales to be up 5% this year." Read the [full article](#) to see what confectionary companies like Hershey and Mondelez are saying about their continued price increases.

Why Rosa Tequila Is The Next Big Trend In Agave Spirits

Have you heard of Rosa Tequila, the new tequila trend coming from some of the the hottest brands? [In this article](#), Forbes dives into how this pink hued tequila is made and while it's been getting buzz lately, distilleries have in fact been making this rosé colored for over 75 years.

Find out which brands are leading the way in sales and recognition of this unique tequila, "with taste and looks...unlike any other it...deserve(s) to have its own subcategory."

Egg Prices Jump 8.5% as Food Inflation Hits Consumers

Bloomberg reports that, "US egg prices soared 8.5% in January while citrus fruits, cereal and baked goods also climbed." The Labor Department recently released data showing that overall food costs increased by 0.5% last month. "The 70% surge in egg prices from a year ago has been the steepest 12-month rise in four decades." [Read more here.](#)

Volatility in food price inflation continues

January CPI data was [released recently](#), showing that while inflation may be easing somewhat, prices remain elevated.

The U.S. is on track to [add nearly \\$19 trillion to its national debt over the next decade](#), \$3 trillion more than previously forecasted due to rising costs for interest payments, veterans' health care, retiree benefits and the military. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that will result in the total amount of debt held by the public to equal the total annual output of the U.S. economy in 2024.

[A new proposal from the Social Security Administration](#) states the government would no longer cut monthly benefits for people who get regular help with meals or groceries. This would no doubt make it easier for millions of disabled Americans by putting money back in their pockets. The change won't take effect until the Social Security Administration gets feedback from the public.

Shoppers ramp up online grocery purchasing: survey

Supermarket news shares that, "in a December survey of consumers who had bought groceries online in the previous 90 days, 56% indicated that they are buying more frequently than last year, reports Chicory, a New York-based contextual commerce advertising platform operator, in its 2023 Online Grocery Shopping report." [Read what consumers are saying are their top drives for ordering online as well as some of the challenges in doing so.](#)

Industry News | Retail

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AG
New England

**Our customers
stock up on the
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of quality own brands
we have to offer**

Associated Grocers of New England • (603) 223-6710 • AGNE.com
11 Cooperative Way • Pembroke, NH 03275
Contact Paul Greenan, (603) 223-5430 • pgreenan@agne.com
or Nathan Beit, (603) 223-5436 • nbeit@agne.com

Associated Grocers of New England @AGNewEngland @AGNewEngland

Associated Grocers of New England is a full service Cooperative Grocery Wholesaler
supplying Supermarkets and Convenience Stores from Maine to New York.

How The Pandemic Made Contactless Payments The New Normal

Forbes shares that, "a Mastercard survey conducted last year found that contactless transactions grew twice as fast as traditional checkout methods at grocery and drug stores between February and March." The impact of the pandemic was highlighted in the survey.

[Read this article](#) to see why "contactless technologies empower consumers to pay by tapping or hovering their card or device over compatible PoS terminals" and how cash use continues to decline.

What lies ahead for retail in 2023

[Retail Dive reports](#) that, "value-conscious consumers, rising layoffs and new leadership at some of retail's major players are just a few forces shaping the industry so far."

Consumers spending will be a big factor. Retail Dive notes:

- "Inflation and the threat of a recession have caused consumers to pull back on discretionary purchases and take a more cautious approach to spending, and some retailers are feeling that pain more than others."
- "As consumers navigate a difficult financial landscape, they are turning to private labels and seeking out cheaper alternatives for their go-to products. That could also mean a boost to resale."

Welcome New VRGA Members

We'd like to give a warm welcome to our newest members who have joined in 2023:

- [Farmhouse Market](#)
- [Vermont's Own Gifts & Goods](#)
- [Quaigh Design](#)
- [ZuZu's](#)
- [Maple City Candy](#)
- [Granite Financial Group](#)

Retail sales jump 3% in January, smashing expectations despite inflation increase

[Retail sales rose far more than expected in January](#) as consumers persevered despite rising inflation pressures. Advanced retail sales for the month increased 3%, compared with expectations for a rise of 1.9%, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday. Excluding autos, sales rose 2.3%, according to the report, which is not adjusted for inflation. The ex-autos estimate was for a gain of 0.9%.

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State & Regulatory Guidance

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Chart Reuse™, the industry's first foodware reuse analytics platform

Created by Upstream, a non-profit focused on waste reduction, Chart Reuse is "the first reuse analytics platform to help food service companies shift from single-use to reuse." This mapping tool creates actionable insights that pinpoint food packaging waste opportunities and empowers teams to chart a path to operational improvements and cost savings.

Chart Reuse is currently free for anyone interested in participating. It will be offered for a subscription fee in the second half of 2023. Learn more and request a demo [here](#).

FDA Food Code Update

To help reduce barriers to food donations and prevent food waste the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) recently released 2022 Food Code clarifies for the first time that food donations from retail food establishments are acceptable with proper food safety practices.

The new guidance encourages donation of food that is stored, prepared, packaged, displayed, and labeled according to applicable provisions contained in the Food Code or local, state and federal statutes, regulations, and ordinances.

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To learn more about
specific options visit
our [website here](#) or
email info@vtrga.org.

A photograph of a hand-drawn sign on a piece of paper. The sign says "Sponsors Welcome" in a cursive, handwritten font. Next to the sign is a white pen and a small potted plant with green leaves.

While the Food Code never prohibited such donations, this update will make it more explicitly clear that such practices are acceptable.

This addition in the Food Code is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition and Health.

Association Staff is here to help!

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