

Newsletter



**SAVE
THE DATE**

2024 Legislative Session Planning

As we near the end of 2023, we're preparing for the 2024 legislative session and the issues pertaining to retailers, grocers, food producers, and distributors. Bills that did not make it through the legislative process during the 2023 session still have a chance for passage in 2024.

Minimum Wage Will Increase to \$13.18

Starting from January 1, 2024, Vermont's minimum wage will increase to \$13.66 per hour, starting January 1, 2024. This is an increase of \$0.48 from the current rate of \$13.18. Tipped wage will increase from \$6.28 to \$6.84 per hour. The annual wage adjustments are made in accordance with Vermont law.

Updated labor law posters will be sent prior to January 2024. Please update your member profile to ensure we have the correct number of locations and mailing address.

Join Us for Our Upcoming Calls!

VRGA Hosts Webinar on Governor's Voluntary Paid Family Leave

As the Vermont Legislature continues its debate on a mandatory paid family and medical leave program, the first phase of Governor Scott's voluntary program has been launched for State employees. Phase 2, open enrollment for businesses, will begin on July 1, 2024.

Join VRGA members on Tuesday, October 24th at 1pm via Zoom to learn more about the voluntary program.

Register in advance for this meeting

Pre-Session General Legislative Update Call

Tuesday, December 12 @ 11am

Register in advance for this meeting

2024 Session General Legislative Update Call

Beginning January 9, 2024 @ 11: every other Tuesday during the Legislative Session

Register in advance for this meeting

THANK YOU ANNUAL SPONSORS

CHAMPION



SUPPORTING



SUSTAINING



Association News

Newsletter–October 2023



Sponsor VRGA!

We look forward to working with our Champions in the coming year to support our work in representing retail and the food industry in Vermont in 2024. Sponsors are essential to our work in supporting our members. Click [here](#) for more information on our available levels of sponsorship or reach out to karin@vtrga.org.

2024 Scholarship Announced

Each year, Vermont Retail and Grocers Association awards 10 students with a \$1500 scholarship to a two or four year college or university. VRGA members should encourage their employees to apply! Click [here](#) for a poster to hang in stores. Please see all requirements and the application [here](#). Applications are due April 26, 2024. Reach out to info@vtrga.org for more information.



SAVE THE DATE! 2024 VRGA Events



Legislative Day
Capitol Plaza Montpelier



Annual Meeting
Location TBD



Scholarship Golf
Location TBD



PayData is offering members free W-2's for 2023 and 20% off their current invoice!

Members must sign up and process payroll by 12/1/23 to receive a free W-2.

Contact PayData [here!](#)

Support Flood Recovery Efforts

The State of Vermont is currently selling “Vermont Strong” license plates to the public to raise funds for flood recovery. If you would like to help raise funds for the [Vermont Community Foundation flood recovery fund](#) and the [ACCD Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program](#) by selling this plates in your retail space, you can now place a bulk order of the plates through the [Vermont DMV website](#). All proceeds from the plates will go to support those impacted by the flooding including retail businesses in the most impacted areas. Bringing these plates into your storefront to sell them is a great way to raise awareness about the impact of the flood and give Vermonters and visitors alike a way to support the recovery efforts quickly and directly.



Funding & Education

Newsletter-October 2023



Food Safety Trainings Through VMEC

VMEC has partnered with esteemed food safety experts to offer Vermont manufacturers specialized food safety certifications and training programs. These programs, provided by organizations like Cornell Dairy Foods Extension, the University of Idaho, and Registrar Corp., cover a range of topics such as HACCP accreditation, Food Safety Planning, Business Planning, and Good Manufacturing Practices for Food.

Both virtual and in-person options, spanning from short sessions to multi-day courses, are available, offering flexibility for participants. Discounts are offered, and interested individuals can register through the provided links. To secure discounts, Vermont-based attendees should follow specific instructions, such as adding "/VMEC" to their company name or using designated coupon codes during registration. Seats are limited and fill up quickly, so early registration is encouraged. See more information [here](#).

Flood Recovery Grant Application Deadline is Monday, OCTOBER 23rd

The [Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program \(BEGAP\) application portal](#) will close on Monday, October 23rd. Businesses who have yet to apply or are still completing their application will need to do so by October 23rd. In September, the BEGAP [award calculation changed](#), removing the \$20,000 award cap for applicants with eligible net damage amounts between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 to provide additional funding to businesses in need, up to 30% of their total unmet damages. Supplemental checks will begin going out next week to businesses that already received a BEGAP award. It is expected that all program funds will be expended when the application portal closes and the application approval queue is cleared.

FEMA Centers Closing

FEMA closed its Disaster Resource Center (DRC) in Barre on Wednesday, October 11, and the Waterbury Amory location Saturday, October 14. The one remaining DRCs will close at 2pm on the date below:

- Ludlow Community Center – Saturday, October 21

Department of Taxes Fact Sheets and Guides

Check out the VT Department of Taxes' website to learn more about a variety of topics such as scams, getting your refund faster, and many more.

Start browsing [here](#).

LOOK WHAT'S IN STORE

The **Total Solar Eclipse** is coming to Vermont on April 8, 2024 and Moon Over VT has the made-to-order merchandise your customers want!

FIND OUT MORE

MOONOVERVT.COM

Business Resources

Newsletter–October 2023



Free Onsite Energy Visits

Efficiency Vermont is offering free on-site energy visits to all Vermont businesses. These consultations give businesses access to rebate offers, financing solutions, and technical advice. The result: lower energy costs and a more resilient business. Sign up for your business energy walkthrough to get:

- A clear understanding of what systems are wasting energy and money.
- Financial incentives on products including lighting, HVAC, weatherization, renovation, and more.
- Customized incentives and flexible financing options are available to suit your business needs.
- Objective recommendations and direct access to your energy consultant for future project needs or questions.

[Schedule a walkthrough](#) today, even if you plan to make energy updates further down the road. Your consultant may be able to provide low and no-cost ways to start lowering your energy bills now.

Become a SNAP Authorized Retailer

Interested in becoming an authorized SNAP retailer? Check out this retailer [guide](#) to SNAP authorization and the [retailers](#) page on Vermont Food Help to answer any questions. For additional information please contact Ivy Enoch ienoch@hungerfreevt.org.



FEMA Deadline Extended for Vermont Residents Affected by Severe Storms

Vermont residents affected by severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides in July have until October 31 to apply for FEMA assistance. Residents in specific counties can receive grants and loans for temporary housing, home repairs, and other disaster-related needs. Applying sooner expedites the process. To apply, visit DisasterAssistance.gov, use the FEMA App, or call 800-621-3362. In-person assistance is available at designated Disaster Recovery Centers. FEMA ensures equitable assistance without discrimination; concerns can be reported to the FEMA Civil Rights Office at 833-285-7448.

Some Vermonters who applied for assistance received a letter stating that they were ineligible, this does not mean you are denied!

Click [here](#) to read about writing your appeal letter.

Read [here](#) for FEMA's October Recovery Update.

THE SUCCESS OF VRGA MEMBERS IS OUR TOP PRIORITY.

VRGA MEMBERS CAN RELY ON THE RICHARDS GROUP TO ENSURE THEIR RISKS
ARE MANAGED EFFECTIVELY AT THE MOST COMPETITIVE COST.

- COVID-19 Safety Resources
- Insurance Cost Containment Strategies
- Coverage Gap Analysis
- OSHA Compliance Assistance
- Client Compliance Portal
- Workers Comp Mod Evaluation
- Safety Program Development Services
- Return to Work Program Development
- Industry Specific Safety Resources

TALK TO OUR TEAM

Contact one of our Risk Management Consultants
to learn more.



SHANNON PRESCOTT
sprescott@therichardsgrp.com



EDDIE LEWICKI
elewicki@therichardsgrp.com

**The
Richards Group**
FINANCIAL, INSURANCE & HR SOLUTIONS

(800) 222-6016
therichardsgrp.com

Member Benefits

Newsletter–October 2023



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](#).

Payment Solutions

Wix, a premiere website platform and POS solution, allows you to sell online and in store. Create a beautiful website with easy templates. [Contact us](#) to schedule a demo and receive special VRGA member rates.



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](#).



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.



Business Insurance Program

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



Vision Insurance

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



Dental Insurance

Access to a variety of affordable plan options with no minimum enrollments. Plans starting at \$41.75/mo.



For more information, please email info@vtrga.org.

Online Grocery Sales in September Experience Decline Compared to Previous Year

Online Grocery Sales in September Experience Decline Compared to Previous Year

In September, the online grocery market in the U.S. saw a 3.1 percent decline compared to the previous year, totaling \$7.5 billion in sales, as reported by the Brick Meets Click/Mercatus Grocery Shopping Survey. This decline was attributed to decreased order frequency and spending per order, with an 8 percent drop in the average number of orders per monthly active user. Despite the decrease, an expanded user base helped mitigate the overall sales dip, indicating continued interest in online grocery shopping. Pickup, delivery, and ship-to-home methods all experienced growth in user bases, with pickup accounting for 48.4 percent of sales in September. The average order value fell by nearly 5 percent, and cross-shopping rates between grocery and mass retailers increased to 28 percent. Online sales represented 12.6 percent of total weekly grocery spending in the last week of September.

The FDA Conducts Public Gathering to Discuss Recall Modernization

The FDA is recognizing the need to modernize its recall communication methods, which currently rely heavily on press releases issued by the industry. Recent foodborne illness outbreaks have underscored the urgency for this change. A public meeting was held where various stakeholders discussed ways to enhance the existing recall framework, focusing on identifying contaminated foods, increasing the speed of recall notifications, and managing the efficiency of the FDA recall network. Challenges arise in tracing fresh items like chicken, deli meats, and produce back to their sources, often taking months,

even with the implementation of the Traceability Rule. Stakeholders emphasized the need for urgency, consumer-friendly language, and technology use in recall notifications. Industry experts advocated leveraging modern communication channels such as group texts and social media for faster consumer awareness. There's also a call for the FDA to consolidate recall responsibilities and publish distribution lists of retailers involved in Class 1 Recalls to enhance efficiency and transparency in the recall process.

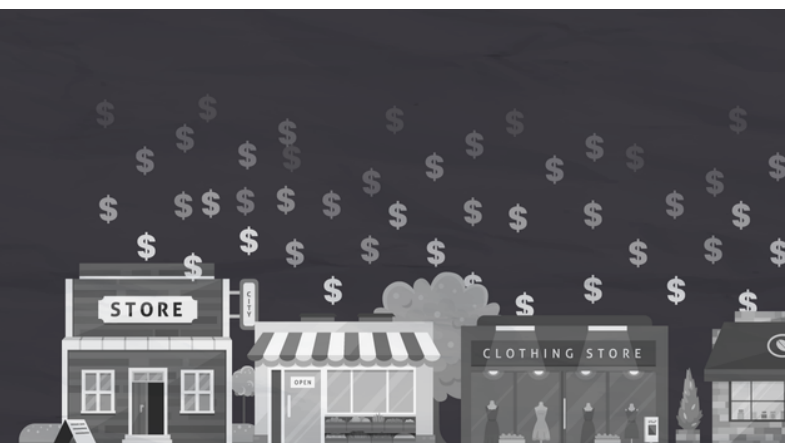


Retailers Reconsider the Use of Self-Checkout Systems

Food retailers are reevaluating their use of self-checkout technology, with some making changes in response to challenges. Costco now requires shoppers to show membership cards and photo IDs at self-checkout registers to prevent improper card sharing. ShopRite is reintroducing full-service checkout lanes in Delaware stores due to customer dissatisfaction with self-checkout. Walmart is removing self-checkout from select stores in Albuquerque, replacing them with staffed registers, although the company hasn't specified the reasons. While some retailers, like Kroger and Dollar General, continue to invest in self-checkout, concerns about theft and technical difficulties are prompting reevaluation within the industry. Retailers face decisions about the level of investment they are willing to make in self-checkout technology.

Prioritize Main Street over Wall Street

Currently, two companies control 80% of the credit card market, setting fees and terms that businesses must adhere to. This situation forces small businesses to pay non-negotiable fees, impacting their ability to expand, hire, and maintain competitive prices. On average, American families pay an extra \$1,000 annually due to rising swipe fees, even if they don't use credit cards. U.S. retailers face the highest swipe fees globally, totaling \$126.4 billion in 2022, hindering their investments in staff, inventory, and pricing competition. A bipartisan solution, the Credit Card Competition Act, proposes introducing competition by requiring at least two processing networks on each credit card, potentially saving businesses and consumers \$15 billion yearly. Public support for this change is strong, emphasizing the need for Congress to take action. Small retailers can express their frustration with swipe fees and endorse the Credit Card Competition Act by displaying provided [educational signage](#), including window clings, easel signs, and flyers, to promote awareness and support for swipe fee reform.



Record Halloween Sales Expected as Consumers Embrace Decorations and Costumes

Retailers are gearing up for a booming Halloween season with a record 73% of consumers planning to celebrate, up from 69% last year, according to the National Retail Federation's annual survey. The average spending per person is expected to reach \$108.24, surpassing the previous record of \$102.74 in 2021. Shoppers are not only buying candy and costumes but also investing in decorations, with 77% of celebrants planning to make decorative purchases, totaling an anticipated \$3.9 billion in spending. Retailers like Dollar General and Lowe's are offering trendy and affordable Halloween items, while consumers increasingly turn to social media for inspiration, making Halloween a significant and expanding retail event.

National Retail Security Survey 2023

Retail crime, violence, and theft are significantly impacting the retail industry, according to NRF's National Retail Security Survey. The study reveals a rise in the average shrink rate to 1.6% in FY 2022, up from 1.4% in FY 2021, translating to \$112.1 billion in losses based on total retail sales in 2022. The report explores factors behind shrink, the escalating threat of violence related to retail crime, and upcoming initiatives.

Member News | Classifieds

Newsletter-October 2023



New Members this Month

Shaftsbury Country Store

Hannaford Supermarkets Leads the Charge in Supporting Local Organic Dairy Farms

Hannaford Supermarkets has become the first supermarket to join the Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership, an initiative supporting organic dairy farms facing challenges in New England and New York. The partnership, formed in response to supply contract cancellations, pandemic impacts, and economic factors, aims to promote local organic dairy products. Hannaford's "Local Matters" campaign will highlight and offer products from four organic dairy partners: Organic Valley, Stonyfield Organic, The Milkhouse, and Butterworks. The collaboration emphasizes consumer support for local farms and their role in preserving rural agriculture. The partnership also engages in initiatives such as supplying bulk organic milk to Vermont schools.

Botanica Florals to Reopen on October 23



Looking for something from a previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)

Casella Waste Systems Acquires Full Ownership of Former CSJ Campus, Plans Training Hub Transformation

Casella Waste Systems has purchased the western portion of the former College of St. Joseph (CSJ) campus, becoming the sole owner of the property in Rutland. The waste management company, which had previously acquired the eastern portion, bought the rest of the campus from Heritage Family Credit Union for \$750,000. Casella plans to transform the site into a training hub for employees, offering orientations and commercial driver's license training. The company aims to train approximately 100 people a month on the campus. Renovation will occur in phases, starting with relocating the human resources team to the former administration building and demolishing non-usable dormitories. Casella aims to enhance economic growth in Rutland, considering options like providing temporary housing in collaboration with other employers.

Association Staff is here to help!

Erin Sigrist
President
erin@vtrga.org

Karin Cioffi
Director of Membership & Development
karin@vtrga.org

Alyssa Greaney
Administrative Assistant
alyssa@vtrga.org

(802) 839-1928 | info@vtrga.org | www.vtrga.org

