

# Newsletter



## A New Chapter

Erin Sigrist will step down as VRGA President effective October 1, 2024. We welcome Ed Fox as our new leader going forward. During Sigrist's tenure, VRGA has experienced remarkable changes, including guiding the retail industry through the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating successfully on various issues within the state house, modernizing office operations, increasing fundraising, and streamlining communications. Her leadership has been instrumental in representing the interests of Vermont's retail and grocery sectors. To ensure a smooth transition, Ed Fox has

joined the association and will begin the leadership transition immediately. Fox brings extensive experience in the food retail and food manufacturing industries, and a proven track record of success. His experience will be invaluable as VRGA continues to grow and evolve. The VRGA board expresses sincere thanks to Erin for her dedicated contributions and leadership during challenging times. They are thrilled to welcome Ed Fox to VRGA, confident that his experience makes him the ideal leader to guide VRGA into the future. Fox looks forward to building on the strong foundation of VRGA and working with the talented team and dedicated members to achieve shared goals.

## VRGA Annual Meeting

Join us in welcoming Ed Fox, VRGA's incoming president, recognize Erin Sigrist, VRGA's outgoing president, and welcome potential new board members.

Hilton Champlain, Burlington, VT  
September 24th  
5pm, registration beginning at 4pm

[REGISTER TODAY!](#)

# Association News

Newsletter – August 2024



## 2024 Scholarship Award Winners Announced

We are proud to announce the winners of the 2024 VRGA Scholarship Program, where eleven outstanding students have each been awarded \$1,500, totaling \$15,000 in scholarships this year. Over the past 30 years, our scholarship program has provided more than \$450,000 to deserving students, made possible by the generous contributions of our members—ranging from small local retailers to large national manufacturers. These scholarships recognize academic excellence, leadership, community service, and extracurricular achievements, with special consideration given to financial need for some recipients. We deeply appreciate the ongoing support from our members, whose contributions allow us to assist these students in pursuing their educational goals. This year's awardees come from all over the state and various employers, large and small. The 2024 VRGA Scholarship Program Awardees are:

- Sunshine Clark (Sisters of Anarchy)
- Ruby Harrington (Beverage Baron)
- Owen Frizzell (Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op)
- Noah Carmona (Lake Champlain Chocolates)
- Kaitlyn Pattison (The Richards Group)
- Gianna Farry (Hannaford)
- Garrett Nelson (Shaws)
- Davian Coy (Main St Market)
- Dakota Harrison (Jolley Associates)
- Cady Robillard (East Burke Market)
- Alanah Walsh (Tenneybrook Market)

## Flood Relief Coming

The Vermont Emergency Board met Thursday, Aug. 9th and approved \$7 million to support communities impacted by floods in July. The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development will be administering allocations. Once applications are available, VRGA will send an alert to members.

## Have You Been Impacted By Flooding?

If you have endured damage as a result of the July 2024 flooding, the Department of Economic Development is requesting that you complete [Flood Damage Survey for Businesses](#) to capture the type and scale of the flood-related damage. Survey data will be used to help advocate for future relief and recovery programs for businesses and nonprofit organizations.

## THANK YOU ANNUAL SPONSORS

### CHAMPION



### SUPPORTING



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# Funding & Education

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## WEBINAR: Employee Recruitment and Retention

[Watch Now](#)

Watch this webinar to explore the complex blend of creativity and analytics in retail recruitment. This session covers strategic planning for peak hiring seasons, balancing AI with human insight, and using data and predictive modeling to make informed recruitment decisions. Whether you're an HR professional or a retail enthusiast, this webinar offers valuable insights into effective retail recruitment strategies.

## WEBINAR: Marketing on a Budget

August 20, 2024 | 1pm

Join small business experts Brian Moran and Jocelyn Ring for a webinar on "Marketing on a Budget," where you'll learn cost-effective strategies to grow your brand without overspending. This session offers practical tips and proven methods for creating compelling marketing messages, leveraging social media, and measuring performance—all while staying within budget. Enhance your marketing efforts with actionable insights you can implement immediately.

Register [here](#).

## Tax on Prewritten Software Now in Effect

Effective July 1, 2024, all sales of prewritten computer software are subject to sales and use tax, including software purchased on storage media, downloaded to a computer system, or accessed remotely via the internet.

Since 2015, prewritten software accessed remotely and not downloaded had been exempt from sales tax. However, Act 183 (H.887) of 2024 specifically applies the sales and use tax to all prewritten computer software, regardless of the method in which the software is delivered or accessed, effective July 1, 2024. [Read more here.](#)

## Tax Guidance Available

Vermont Sales Tax is charged on the retail sales of tangible personal property unless exempted by law. The sales tax rate is 6%. VRGA successfully eliminated a proposal in the 2024 session to impose tax on clothing items over \$110, sugar-sweetened beverages, increased taxes on tobacco products, and more. Have questions about what's taxable and what's not? [Check out the guidance docs from the Dept. of Tax.](#)

## Have you Recovered Your Portion of Swipe Fees from the VISA/Mastercard Settlement

### The deadline to submit your claim August 30, 2024

VRGA has collaborated with DCAP Claims to aid members pressed for time in reclaiming swipe fees from the \$5.54 billion VISA/Mastercard settlement. If you've yet to file and seek assistance, DCAP is available to lend support. VRGA recently conducted a concise 20-minute webinar to furnish members with details regarding the service. Access the webinar here and reach out to DCAP for further assistance. Contact DCAP [here](#).



**Is your message clear?  
Engaging with customers  
on social media,  
can establish a  
meaningful relationship  
with your audience.**



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

### Where Consumers Are Spending for Back-to-School

Early data indicates that online retailers and mass merchants were popular choices for back-to-school shopping, with many consumers making purchases as early as May and June. Despite this early activity, August is expected to be the peak month for school shopping, giving retailers time to refine their strategies.

While online shopping saw an initial surge, a survey by Sensormatic Solutions revealed that 74% of parents still plan to shop in physical stores.

Additionally, sustainability is becoming a significant factor in purchasing decisions, with a growing number of shoppers prioritizing eco-friendly products and practices.

Retailers are encouraged to optimize their operations and staffing to meet consumer expectations during this busy period. [Read the full article here.](#)

The National Conference on Weights & Measures (NCWM) in conjunction with NIST and inspection programs located in 26 states (including Vermont) conducted a national survey on Price Verification (scanning accuracy) in retail stores. The Vermont program checked approximately 18,000 shelf tags during the reporting phase of the survey. Over 419,000 prices were checked nationally. You can find the full survey [here](#).

*Tip provided by the VT Department of Weights and Measures*

### WEBINAR: PFAs in Food Service

August 21, 2024 | 2pm

Join NEKWMD and NEWMOA on Wednesday, August 21st, 2:00–3:30 pm, for a free webinar on PFAS ("forever chemicals") in food service and facility maintenance. Topics include:

- Where PFAS are found (e.g., food packaging, cookware, textiles).
- Health and environmental impacts of PFAS.
- Alternatives to PFAS.

Register [Here](#).

### Summer EBT Benefits Distributed

Summer EBT benefits have been issued to eligible families and will continue through the remainder of the summer. These benefits automatically provide eligible families with funds based on existing information from the Agency of Education and the Department for Children and Families. Approved families will receive \$120 per eligible child on their EBT card, which can be used for groceries at various locations. If you do not take EBT in your store, [learn more here](#) or reach out to VRGA and we will connect you to the proper State contacts to get you started.

Vermont's Single Use Products Law requires food service establishments to only provide a plastic straw if a customer asks for one. Providing straws by request saves businesses money (by using and buying fewer straws) and reduces waste.

Food service establishments may provide non-plastic straws automatically (e.g. reusable, metal, and paper straws). Bioplastic and compostable plastic straws are still considered plastic, so they can only be provided when a customer asks for a straw. Hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities may continue providing plastic straws.



### Early Trends Back-to-School Shopping Reveal High Consumer Spending

As of early July, 55% of back-to-school and college shoppers have started their purchases, but 86% still have more than half of their shopping left. Consumers are holding out for the best deals, while retailers are offering competitive pricing and summer sales. Families with K-12 children plan to spend an average of \$874.68, totaling \$38.8 billion, and college students and their families expect to spend \$1,364.75 on average, totaling \$86.6 billion. Popular shopping destinations include online stores, department stores, and discount retailers. These insights are from the NRF's annual survey of 7,533 consumers. Read the full article [here](#).

### What's Going on with US Consumers?

Recent earnings reports reveal a mixed picture of consumer spending. Fast-food chains like McDonald's and Yum Brands have faced disappointing sales, attributed to price increases and shifting consumer preferences, while Shopify reported strong Q2 performances, reflecting ongoing consumer activity.

Overall, the U.S. economy grew by 2.8% last quarter, fueled by robust consumer spending. While some retailers struggle with slower sales, others thrive by offering perceived value. Despite a weak July jobs report and market volatility, economists suggest we're moving towards economic normalization rather than a recession. Read more [here](#).

### Monthly Cargo Shipments Surge in Peak Shopping Season

Retailers are increasing cargo imports at U.S. ports to avoid potential disruptions from a possible strike at East and Gulf Coast ports this fall. As contract talks stall, many are shifting shipments to the West Coast and importing earlier. June saw a 17.7% increase in cargo volume year-over-year, with even higher numbers expected for July and August. This surge underscores concerns over labor negotiations and global shipping challenges. Retail sales for 2024 are projected to grow between 2.5% and 3.5% from 2023. [Read the full article here.](#)

### How to win over customers in inflationary times.

**Hint: It's not just about price.**

Earnings reports and retail sales figures this year reveal that consumers remain cautious about spending, continuing a two-year trend. Retailers are responding with markdowns, sales events, and private labels, but it's not just about price—consumers are increasingly focused on value and quality. Shoppers, especially younger ones, are looking for well-made products and are willing to pay more for them, particularly in categories like footwear. Retailers that balance price with quality, such as Abercrombie & Fitch, are seeing success. As inflation impacts both shoppers and retailers, the focus is shifting to offering value, with quality becoming a key factor in purchasing decisions. Quality and other considerations are in play as shoppers mull whether or not to spend their money on discretionary items. [Read the full article here.](#)

# Member News | Classifieds

Newsletter- August 2024



Looking for something from a previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)



AUTUMN 2024 • BOXBORO

The New England Made Giftware & Specialty Food Shows feature manufacturers of unique, quality New England made products. These juried wholesale shows include home décor, apparel, jewelry, toys & games, candles, books, cards & prints, glassware, bath & body products, spices, candy, sauces, gourmet mixes, and other specialty food items. Each year the shows attract thousands of national and international buyers who expect the highest quality New England made products. Autumn Show: Boxboro, Massachusetts (September 10-11, 2024) For more information and to register, please visit [www.nemadeshows.com](http://www.nemadeshows.com)

**ARE YOU CRAV'N YOUR OWN BRAND?**  
*We have what you need*

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## Showcase Your Vermont Products at the Council of State Retail Associations Annual Meeting

We invite you to join us on Monday, August 26th, at Spruce Peak Lodge in Stowe for the Council of State Retail Associations Annual Meeting. This event, featuring Governor Scott and other state officials, will welcome about 140 industry leaders and provide an excellent opportunity to showcase Vermont's finest foods and beverages. If you're unable to attend, you can still promote your products by donating to our welcome bags, which will be given to each attendee. Please ensure all products are TSA-approved sizes and delivered to the VRGA office by August 23rd. To participate, contact Alyssa at [alyssa@vtrga.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrga.org).

## Association Staff is here to help!

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