

Newsletter



Senate to Vote on Bottle Bill Veto Jan. 23rd – Call Your Senators

The Senate will vote Tuesday, January 23rd on the Governor's veto of [H.158, the bill that would expand the scope of the bottle bill](#) and create a Producer Responsibility Organization that would be responsible for managing the redemption system and increasing the rate of redemption in Vermont.

The Senate President Pro Tem is working hard to flip votes in order to override the veto. Please [contact your Senators](#) and ask them to vote to sustain the Governor's veto. Legislators should be listening to the businesses that administer the program.

If your senator is one of the following, please contact them and thank them for voting no on H.158 and please sustain the Governor's veto.

- [Brock, Franklin County](#)
- [Chittenden, Chittenden County](#)
- [Collamore, Rutland County](#)
- [Ingalls, Essex County](#)
- [Kitchel, Caledonia County](#)
- [Mazza, Grand Isle County](#)
- [Sears, Bennington County](#)
- [Starr, Orleans County](#)
- [Weeks, Rutland County](#)
- [Williams, Rutland County](#)

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Legislative and Regulatory

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[H.534](#), the retail crime bill that aggregates the total retail value of stolen merchandise within a 14-day period has lost traction in the House Judiciary Committee. Despite compelling testimony from various retailers, including Outdoor Gear Exchange, Burlington Business Association, and Stewart's Shops, committee members are cautious about implementing harsher penalties. Even Republican members are on record saying "...we don't need these bills. We need to get the court system back up and operating the way it was pre-COVID... Maybe once the system was up and running, we could look at bills like this if problems are still lingering."

Representatives Conor Casey and Jonathan Williams introduced [H.723](#), a flood recovery bill allocating \$85 million to municipalities, businesses, and individuals affected by July 2023 flooding. The bill includes provisions for tax reimbursements, exemptions, and waivers. It also proposes \$15 million in grants for municipal tax losses and \$40 million for affected businesses. The bill awaits consideration by the House Environment and Energy Committee, the full House, and the Senate.

Vermont faces over \$600 million in recovery costs from last summer's flooding, and lawmakers hope to make "Big Oil" pay with two bills that were introduced, H.809 and S.259. The bill would direct fossil fuel companies to pay into a superfund that would pay for damages in future climate disasters. Governor Phil Scott's stance is uncertain, and legal challenges from the industry may impede progress.

The House Human Services Committee will be marking up S.18, the bill that would ban flavored tobacco. Several Medical organizations, educators, and advocates support the ban due to the vaping epidemic among students.

The Department of Liquor and Lottery notes a 90% compliance rate among 900 to 1000 retailers across Vermont, but over 200 online retailers illegally sell tobacco in the state each year. VRGA will be urging the committee to compel the Joint Fiscal Office to update their estimated fiscal impact statement. Last year's estimate projected \$5.6 million revenue loss, when data shared with VRGA from four distributors shows upwards of \$26 million in state revenue loss.

Bipartisan Tax Deal Would Provide Boost to Businesses, Families

U.S. lawmakers have introduced a [bipartisan agreement](#) to reverse expired tax breaks for businesses and raise the child tax credit for low-income families. The proposal would reverse several business-tax changes that had been set in motion by Republicans in the 2017 tax law and took effect over the past few years. Companies with interest costs, capital expenses and research spending would all benefit.

2024 Session General Legislative Update Calls

Our next Legislative Update Call will be held January 23 @ 9 am
[Register in advance for this meeting](#)

Association News

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Does trash end up in your recycling? This contamination causes problems and can be dangerous for workers at recycling sorting facilities. These tips can help your business recycle better:

1. Put recycling, trash, and food scrap containers together in a “sort station” so it’s easier for people to sort items quickly. Label the bins clearly.
2. Hang colorful signs with pictures above recycling, trash, and food scrap bins. VT DEC has free signs you can print or request copies by calling 802-828-1138: [The Vermonters Guide for Recycling](#) or [these bin signs](#)
3. Or make your own signs that show the specific items at your business that belong in the recycling. VT DEC is happy to share design files to get you started.
4. Match your recycling containers to the types of recycling your business produces. If you mostly have bottles and cans, consider using a lid with a bottle-sized hole on top of the recycling bin. If you mostly have paper, consider a bin with a paper slot in the lid.
5. Train staff regularly to make sure they know how your recycling system works and what to do to keep it successful.

Need help making signs or want no-cost assistance improving your waste and materials management? Call VT DEC at 802-828-1138 or email Emma.Stuhl@vermont.gov

Save the Dates! 2024 VRGA Events



Legislative Day
Location TBD



Scholarship Golf
Location TBD

Reminder! Share the VRGA 2024 Scholarship Program with Employees

Annually, VRGA grants scholarships of \$1500 to 10 students attending a two or four-year college or university. VRGA members are encouraged to promote this opportunity among their employees. A [poster for display in stores can be accessed by clicking here](#). For detailed application requirements and the application form, please visit the provided link. The deadline for applications is April 26, 2024. For additional information, contact info@vtrga.org.

Call For Board Members

VRGA is accepting nominations for new board members until April 29. If you're passionate about shaping the future of Vermont's retail and grocery industry, submit nominations to info@vtrga.org, including the nominee's name and a brief bio.

Funding & Education

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Free Program for Women-Owned Businesses

DreamBuilder is a program designed to empower women in business, providing them with comprehensive online training and resources to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. This initiative offers a structured curriculum covering various aspects of business planning, management, and financial literacy. [See the programs here](#). **All courses are offered in both English and Spanish and are free!** Aimed at fostering economic independence, DreamBuilder equips women with the knowledge and tools necessary to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Learn how to build a financial plan for your business, start a business, or foster your current business with the available courses!

Webinar on Mastering Retail Shrink Management: Strategies for a Successful 2024

January 25, 2024 / 2:00 pm

Explore effective strategies for identifying and combating shrink in high-risk stores across various retail genres, including big box, specialty, and grocery/pharmacy. **Learn from a panel of experts to enhance your store strategy and make a difference in your 2024 performance.** Even if you can't attend on the specified date, LPM ensures access to the recorded session for your convenience. Additionally, don't forget to contribute to the collective knowledge – VRGA members are encouraged to send data on retail crimes to support industry-wide insights and strategies. Register [here](#).

2024 Forecast: What Can We Expect for Purpose-Driven Businesses? Event

VBSR and UVM's Grossman School of Business will host an event on February 8, 2024, exploring the future of purpose-driven businesses. The panel, featuring Sustainable Innovation MBA students and business leaders, will discuss projections for 2024 in areas like ESG (environmental, social, and governance), Climate Resiliency, and more. The event, open to all Vermont business leaders, offers networking opportunities, a Q&A session, and is moderated by Etienne Morris, CEO of Collective Engagement. The venue at Kalkin Hall includes a cash bar, free non-alcoholic beverages, and appetizers by Sugarsnap Catering. Nonmembers and VBSR members can attend for free, with registration open [here](#).

A new year brings about change, yet our dedication to delivering budget-friendly choices in food, health and essentials remains unwavering. Let us bring you the trusted quality brand your customers rely on.

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Contact Eric Tinker, 603-223-5448 • etinker@agne.com
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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.

USDA Announces Summer Grocery Benefits Program for 21 Million Children in 2024

The USDA has revealed that 35 states, five U.S. territories, and four Tribes will launch the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program in 2024. With an estimated \$2.5 billion in grocery benefits, each eligible child will receive \$120 for the summer to purchase food at authorized retailers. The program, similar to SNAP benefits, aims to combat child hunger, aligning with the Biden-Harris Administration's goals. USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small will celebrate the program's launch in Baltimore, emphasizing its positive impact on nutrition and health. The Summer EBT initiative is part of broader USDA efforts to address child hunger during the summer months. Read the full report [here](#).

Federal Reserve Survey Indicates Softening Inflation, Yet Consumer Spending Caution Persists

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York's latest Survey of Expectations (SCE) reveals a decline in median inflation expectations over the next one, three, and five years, indicating a potential easing of inflation. However, despite the anticipated slowdown in price growth, consumer spending sentiments remain cautious. The survey, conducted in December, highlights a drop in median expected growth in household income and a decline in household spending expectations, reaching the lowest level since September 2021. While consumers foresee lower food prices and improved employment conditions, the overall outlook suggests a reluctance to increase spending in the face of recent inflationary challenges. Read the full article [here](#).

Addressing Challenges: 2024 Outlook for Traditional Supermarkets

Analysts foresee a challenging year for traditional supermarkets in 2024 due to economic uncertainty and heightened competition. Factors such as potential price deflation, increased labor costs, and strong competition from retail giants like Walmart, Aldi, Amazon, and Costco are expected to impact operator margins. While some see opportunities in health and wellness trends, retailer media networks, and personalized e-commerce relationships, the looming challenges include organized retail crime and shrinkage. The market is anticipated to witness mergers and acquisitions as a strategy for growth and cost reduction, with the pending Kroger and Albertsons merger likely to set a precedent. Regional players are urged to differentiate through in-store experiences and niche offerings to combat the pressure from larger competitors. Read the full article [here](#).

We are still looking for a Vice President to join our team!
Please [click here for the job description and requirements](#).
Email erin@vtrga.org with inquiries.

Consumer Spending Faces Headwinds: Challenges and Outlook for 2024

Consumer spending, resilient in 2023 despite inflation and high interest rates, may face challenges ahead, according to Jack Kleinhenz, Chief Economist at the National Retail Federation. Recent reports indicate strain, with credit card debt surpassing \$1.08 trillion and more cardholders carrying debt month-to-month. The labor market's cooling and potential wage growth impacts consumer expectations, making it difficult to maintain current spending growth. The Federal Reserve's interest rate decisions will play a crucial role, but even with potential cuts, high debt costs are expected to persist, shaping the economic landscape for the foreseeable future. Read the full article [here](#).

Vermont Retail Thrives: Post-Holiday Insights and Optimism Amid Economic Challenges

[A WCAX article](#) recently highlighted that local stores are restocking shelves post a busy holiday season, with some shoppers adjusting lists due to rising costs. Despite cautious spending, retailers in Vermont, both large and small, performed well, indicating levels of pre-pandemic shopping. Erin Sigrist from the Vermont Retail and Grocers Association noted a double-digit increase in online sales, yet emphasized the enduring significance of in-person shopping. Anticipating a 14% return rate, Sigrist highlighted a 3-4% increase in year-over-year holiday spending. Jim Vitanos of Jim's Sports at the University Mall affirmed positive sales trends, attributing them to favorable weather and an extended buying season with an earlier Thanksgiving.

Navigating 2024: Retail Industry Predictions from NRF

As the retail industry navigates 2024, a cautious optimism prevails amid economic challenges. Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a pivotal role, but concerns about deepfake technology and privacy persist. Retailers are focused on enhancing customer experiences, embracing circular economy concepts, and adapting to trends like hyper-personalization. Main Points:

- **AI's Crucial Role:** AI contributes to significant sales and profit growth, reshaping decision-making processes and optimizing various retail operations..
- **Customer Experience Focus:** Retailers prioritize tech-driven innovations in physical stores, adapting to the preferences of Generation Alpha, and raising the bar on experiential shopping.
- **Circular Economy Embrace:** Concepts like the circular economy gain traction as shoppers increasingly opt for used or refurbished items, urging retailers to improve in-store experiences and actively market sustainability.
- **Hyper-personalization Challenges:** Balancing hyper-personalization with privacy considerations remains a challenge for retailers seeking to deliver tailored experiences.
- **Other Predictions:** Anticipated trends include the decline of Twitter, shrinking U.S. store sizes, potential legislation against organized retail crime, ongoing workforce challenges, and a focus on health-conscious consumerism.

Read the full article [here](#).

Member News | Classifieds

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Looking for
something from a
previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)

Corner Markets of Burlington: A Closer Look at VRGA Members Dot's Market & Deli and Kerry's Kwik Stop

In a recent Seven Days article highlighting the historic and contemporary corner markets in Burlington and Winooski, two VRGA members, [Dot's Market & Deli](#) and [Kerry's Kwik Stop](#), took center stage. The article shed light on the vital role these family-owned markets play in Burlington's working-class neighborhoods, serving as more than just places to buy goods. Dot's Market & Deli, with its focus on providing after school treats for kids and creating a sense of community, and Kerry's Kwik Stop, a multifaceted hub offering convenience and a beloved kitchen, exemplify the enduring impact and importance of VRGA members within the local community. Read the full article [here](#).

New Members this Month

Logical Machines
LaRae Perez Law

Increase Sales, Help Local Organic Dairy Farms

Farmers throughout the Northeast, especially in Vermont, Maine, and New York, have been under unprecedented stress over the past two years. Contract terminations, lack of affordable feeds, climate change, and extreme weather events have caused many farms to go under. Others are on the verge of closing, and we risk losing the incredibly valuable economic and ecological services they provide our region. The Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership (NOFFP) was formed to increase the demand for local organic dairy and works with retailers to educate consumers about the benefits of supporting local and organic farms. You can help by promoting the brands that are committed to sourcing local organic milk from our neighboring communities. In Vermont, there are over ten brands to support. NOFFP can provide you with complimentary signage and product demos to help boost sales in your stores. Learn more at saveorganicfamilyfarms.org.



Association Staff is here to help!

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