

# Newsletter



**VRGA**  
**Scholarship Golf**  
**Tournament**  
*Williston Golf Club*

**JUNE 5**

With adjournment of the official 2024 legislative session behind us, the Legislature can finally tout some progress on long overdue measures that have been plaguing Vermont’s economy. Forward movement in public safety and housing are two of the top winners this year, but those long overdue measures are easily overshadowed by major tax and cost of living increases. Property owners will face a 13.8% property tax increase next year, DMV fees are increasing nearly 20%. We will see a 16%- 19% increase in healthcare costs, and a \$180 million [Childcare Contribution payroll tax](#) will take effect starting this July 1st. Vermont continues to inch its way closer to the top of the list of most-taxed states.

While a brief update is included in today’s newsletter, a more comprehensive update with all bills VRGA has been working on will be forthcoming after the veto session.

While aggregating thefts failed to garner support in the Senate Judiciary Committee, [H.534](#),

that bill that would have aggregated the thefts committed by one or more persons was gutted and ultimately will impose stricter penalties based on the number of convictions an offender faces. The key issue is a conviction is needed. However, both chambers also passed [S.195](#), a bill that aims to increase supervision of individuals accused of crimes before their court date.

Vermont lawmakers and stakeholders in the final hours of the session made compromises in order to pass major reforms to exempt housing developments in villages, neighborhoods, and downtowns from Act 250 in an effort to reduce the regulatory obstacles to increase the severely needed housing stock across the state. The bill’s tiered approach will require community engagement beyond measures Vermont has ever seen, and creates a professional board to move the Act 250 process to a more predictable, fair, and timely process. It is unclear whether the Governor will sign the bill, veto it, or let it become law without his signature.

## THANK YOU ANNUAL SPONSORS

### CHAMPION



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One major impact on businesses that we have yet to know the fate of is the data privacy bill, [H.121](#). After incredible work by the Senate Economic Development Committee, the bill took a wrong turn in the final hours of the session. What could have been a bill that retailers and businesses of all sizes could have supported to ensure customer privacy, was transformed into the most restrictive data privacy bills in the country. If passed, businesses that use targeted advertising, collect data to provide tailored customer experiences, or offer loyalty programs will face untested regulations and be left with seeking guidance from the Attorney General's Office; the same office allowed to prosecute businesses. If interested in staying up to date on efforts surrounding H.121 prior to the veto session, [please fill in this form](#).

The legislature will return June 17th and 18th for a veto session. Bills that are vetoed by the Governor will have a final chance to survive. To override a veto requires a two-thirds vote in both chambers.

## From DC

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) released the [final portion of the rules](#) to implement the [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#) (PWFA). The PWFA, which went into effect on June 27, 2023, requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified employees. The final portion of the rules released on Monday were published in the Federal Register today and become effective June 17, 2024. The EEOC has posted information and resources on the PWFA on its website [here](#). Additional information about OSHA's recordkeeping and reporting requirement is available [here](#).

## Hiring Softens in April

New data released the first week of May showed a moderation in the pace of hiring. Employers added 175,000 jobs in April, a sharp decrease from the blockbuster increase of 315,000 in March and well below predictions. Even with the April hiring slowdown, last month's job growth amounted to a solid increase, though it was the lowest monthly gain since October.

## New Overtime Rule Increases Threshold, Begins July 1

[Beginning July 1, 2024](#), employers must meet an increased salary threshold to classify employees as exempt from Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) overtime regulations. The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) two-part approach to implementing its [new overtime rule](#) - establishing one raise of the salary-threshold level on July 1 and another on Jan. 1, 2025 - gives employers options for adjusting the pay of their exempt employees.

Effective July 1, 2024 the Fair Labor Standards Act's (FLSA's) annual salary-level threshold for exemptions to overtime requirements will increase from \$35,568 to \$43,888. As of Jan. 1, 2025, the annual salary threshold will rise to \$58,656. The final rule, which will affect millions of workers, is, as of 2025, an increase of nearly 65 percent.

Some HR professionals are considering delaying compliance with the Department of Labor's new overtime rule due to potential legal challenges. However, experts advise against waiting and recommend having a contingency plan in case the rule is blocked by the courts. Legal challenges can be anticipated, but it is important for employers to prepare for the new salary thresholds without delay.

# Association News

Newsletter – May 2024



## 33rd Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament



June 5, 2024  
Williston Golf Club

**Registration for our 33rd Annual  
Scholarship Golf Tournament is Full!**

Email [alyssa@vtrga.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrga.org) to get on the  
waitlist

Click [here](#) to view sponsorship  
opportunities.

### Send a Note to Senator Dick Mazza!

Send a note to Senator Dick Mazza as he retires this year. In the height of VGA conventions, Senator Mazza could be found visiting exhibitors, meeting with members and constituents, and judging the bagging contest. He was always welcoming VRGA staff into his office in the back of his store or answering the call for guidance when needed. Senator Mazza's commitment, integrity, and leadership will be missed in the Senate and the VRGA. We send strength to the Senator and his family during this time. Click [here](#) to send your message!

## Scholarship Deadline This Friday! Share the VRGA 2024 Scholarship Program with Employees



The deadline for students to apply is rapidly approaching in a few short days. 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 May 24, 2024. For additional information, contact [info@vtrga.org](mailto:info@vtrga.org).

## Recover Your Portion of Swipe Fees from the VISA/Mastercard Settlement

The deadline to submit your claim is May 31,  
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.

Watch it [here](#). Contact DCAP [here](#).

# Funding & Education

Newsletter—May 2024



## **Vermont Department of Labor Shares Grant Opportunities Supporting Women in the Workforce**

The U.S. Department of Labor has launched two funding initiatives to bolster women's participation in the workforce: the \$7 million [Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations](#) (WANTO) Grant Program and the \$1 million [Fostering Access, Rights, and Equity](#) (FARE) Grant Program. WANTO aims to increase women's representation in traditionally male-dominated sectors like manufacturing and construction, addressing the disparity where only 14% of Registered Apprenticeships are held by women. FARE targets survivors of workplace violence and women at high risk of harassment, particularly those from marginalized communities. Both programs, managed jointly by the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau and the Employment and Training Administration, seek to foster workplace equity and quality while promoting diversity and inclusivity. Interested parties can apply by May 28, 2024, for FARE and June 10, 2024, for WANTO, and may seek support from the Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Development Division.

## **Free Tools for Efficient Inventory Management and Rapid Recovery Planning**

Management One, an inventory management solution, provides free tools to help you stay focused on the metrics that matter, and plan for a faster recovery. Get them [here](#).

## **Good for Business: Elevating Operations and B2B Purchasing**

Webinar: May 29, 12pm

Explore how business leaders tackle operational and financial hurdles with insights from industry experts Alex Lieberman and Ashley Hubka, as they discuss Walmart Business's role in addressing these challenges and boosting business growth. Register [here](#).

## **SBA Lending Basics and Lender Match**

Webinar: May 23, 1pm

Join this webinar for an overview of Small Business Administration (SBA) lending programs available to small business entrepreneurs.

Register [here](#).

## **Department of Taxes Guidance Docs**

The Department of Taxes [hosts several guidance documents](#) that make it easier for retailers to identify what products are taxable or not, how to determine sales that are tax exempt, guidance on the Use Tax, and more.

## **Starting a Mission Driven Business**

Webinar: May 29, 5:30pm

If you're considering starting a business with a focus on changing the world or impacting your community but are unsure whether to go non-profit or for-profit, this workshop is for you. It will help you develop your business ideas and planning while keeping your mission central. You will learn how to decide on the right legal structure, choose a name, develop a brand, and obtain necessary permits and insurance. Make sure to add [info.regional@cweonline.org](mailto:info.regional@cweonline.org) to your safe senders list to receive registration details.

Register [here](#).

Did you know Vermont has a free battery recycling program? You sign up with Call2Recycle, they send you a postage-paid battery collection box to fill, and you mail it back when it is full. The program is easy and makes sure the batteries do not end up in the garbage or blue bin recycling, where they can start a fire. Get started at [call2recycle.org/vermont](https://call2recycle.org/vermont), email [customerservice@call2recycle.org](mailto:customerservice@call2recycle.org), or call 1-877-723-1297. Don't have enough batteries to host your own collection box? Find a battery recycling drop-off near you at [call2recycle.org/vermont](https://call2recycle.org/vermont).

### Pricing Display Requirements to Know

Here's a breakdown:

- **Consumer Information Required:** Retailers must disclose unit prices for specific consumer goods, such as aluminum foil, bread, fruits, etc., along with the total price.
- **Means of Disclosure:** To comply, retailers can use signage, labels, or tags placed near the product or directly on it to clearly display unit and total prices.
- **Exceptions:** Small retail stores (under 7,000 square feet) and goods sold for on-premises consumption are exempt from these rules.
- **Penalties:** Violations of these regulations may incur fines up to \$500.00.

These regulations aim to empower consumers with clear pricing information, fostering informed purchasing decisions while promoting fairness and transparency in retail practices.

Read the full chapter [here](#).

### Credit Card Surcharges

As Vermont retailers consider implementing credit card surcharges, it's essential to navigate the legal landscape diligently. While many states permit surcharging, laws vary, demanding careful research before implementation. In most states, including Vermont, credit card surcharges are legally permissible, allowing merchants to offset processing fees. However, adherence to specific rules and guidelines is crucial.

Here are some key points to consider:

- **Legal Consideration:** Research state laws thoroughly before implementing credit card surcharges.
- **Minimum Charge Requirement:** Set a minimum charge of up to \$10 for surcharges.
- **Transparency:** Clearly inform clients about surcharges, itemizing them separately on invoices.
- **Cost Limitations:** Surcharges should not exceed the cost of processing fees, typically capped at 3%.
- **Transaction Type:** Surcharges apply exclusively to credit transactions, not debit or prepaid cards.
- **PCI Compliance:** Adhere to Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards for secure handling of credit card information.
- **Legal Payment Processor:** Partner with reputable processors for compliant surcharge implementation and ongoing support.

Read more [here](#).

# Member Benefits

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## 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](mailto:info@vtrga.org).

### Trends and Innovations in the Food Ingredients Market

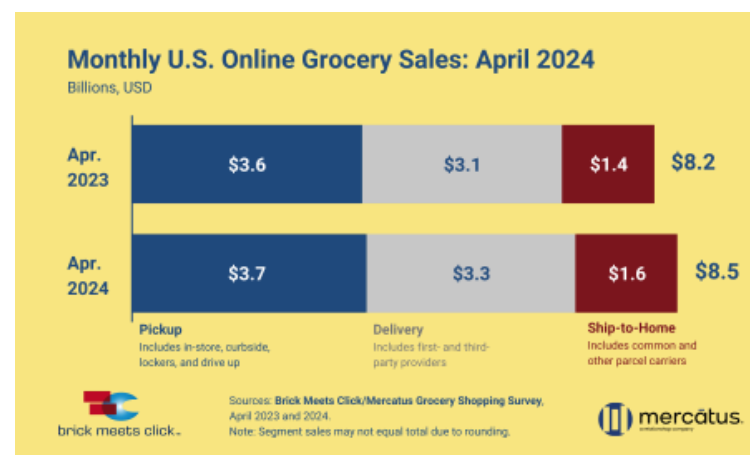
A recent report by the Business Research Company projects significant growth in the food ingredients market from 2024 to 2028, driven by increasing consumer demand for better-for-you options. Health-conscious consumers are favoring bioactive ingredients like omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and probiotics, leading to a surge in their incorporation into meals. Major trends include the rise of natural food colors, facility expansions, innovative product development, sustainability initiatives, and collaborative partnerships. As the market grows to an estimated \$91 billion by 2028, companies are investing in technology-driven solutions to produce next-generation alternative proteins and sweeteners. Examples include MycoTechnology's discovery of a natural sweetener in honey truffles and Kerry's introduction of Tastesense Salt, a sodium-free ingredient with a salty taste. With snacking on the rise, ingredient suppliers are under pressure to reformulate products, while legislation such as California's Assembly Bill 418 is prompting confectionary companies to reconsider their ingredient choices. Read the full article [here](#).

### Premium Meat: Strategies for Grocers

Consumers' evolving perceptions of premium meat, influenced by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, have prompted them to reconsider what constitutes added value worth paying for. Grocers should tailor their marketing and merchandising strategies to meet changing consumer preferences, emphasizing the value proposition of premium meat while also understanding the importance of factors such as health, convenience, and sustainability to shoppers.

### Omnichannel Growth Trends for Grocers

Despite shifting seasonal factors, April showcased positive trends for grocers across various categories and purchase modes. Fresh produce, particularly fruit, saw notable growth in both dollar and volume sales compared to the previous year, despite the early Easter impacting the market. Floral sales remained strong, fueled by everyday purchases and holiday performances. Protein categories, including chicken and ground beef, experienced increased sales despite the Easter schedule changes. Deli cheese, prepared foods, and entertaining items also saw higher unit sales. Looking ahead, elevated food prices are expected to sustain the trend of home-centric meals. In the e-commerce sphere, pickup, delivery, and ship-to-home segments all recorded significant growth, indicating continued consumer interest and investment in online grocery shopping. Read more [here](#).



### Understanding Today's Shopper



Consumer preferences have shifted over the past five years. COVID-19 and [inflation](#) impacted shopping habits and behaviors across the retail space – and while some of the changes were short-lived, others appear to have more staying power. Now, with memories of the lockdowns fading, and as the inflation that plagued much of 2022 and 2023 wanes (hopefully), Placer.ai analyzed location intelligence data to understand what the retail and dining landscape looks like today. Read the [full article here](#), or see the highlights below:

- Discount & Dollar Stores are gaining market share due to customers seeking value, with their emphasis on affordable grocery offerings driving their relative visit share up.
- Membership clubs like Costco are growing in popularity within the Superstore segment, indicating customers' desire for better value.
- Convenience stores (C-Stores) are evolving into dining destinations, experiencing an increase in visit shares as they invest in fresh and convenient food offerings.
- Quick-Service Restaurant (QSR) chains catering to larger households are witnessing visit growth, possibly due to their appeal to families seeking affordable dining options.
- Viral products, like the Starbucks X Stanley "Pink Cup", are driving customer traffic to stores, highlighting the influence of viral marketing and customers' receptiveness to trending products.



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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.

The American Privacy Rights Act (APRA) is sweeping privacy legislation aimed at addressing Americans' concerns over the misuse of personal data by big tech companies and internet service providers. However, it includes provisions that could leave small businesses vulnerable to lawsuits, as it authorizes private rights of action similar to ADA-style "drive-by" lawsuits. This could lead to trial lawyers targeting small businesses for privacy violations related to the services they use for marketing.

#### Action Items for VRGA Members:

Advocate for amendments to the APRA to protect small businesses from frivolous lawsuits. Support the establishment of a national data privacy law that ensures consistent protections for consumer data across all businesses. Raise awareness about the potential impact of the APRA on small businesses among lawmakers, stakeholders, and the public. Engage in advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels to voice concerns and push for changes to the legislation. More info [here](#).



# Member Spotlight

Newsletter—May 2024



## Barnard General Store

Since its establishment in 1832, the Barnard General Store has stood as a symbol of resilience and community spirit in the quaint town of Barnard, Vermont. Through generations, it has been more than just a place to buy goods; it's been a gathering spot, a hub of local commerce, and a keeper of cherished memories.

Enter Jillian and Joseph Minerva, who took the reins of this historic establishment 11 years ago. Their vision, dedication, and passion breathed new life into the Barnard General Store, ushering in an era of revitalization and renewed community engagement.

Through their leadership, the Barnard General Store evolved into more than just a business—it became a cherished community asset, a place where neighbors gather to catch up over a cup of coffee, where visitors are welcomed with genuine warmth, and where the essence of small-town living thrives. Their commitment to preserving the store's historic charm while embracing innovation and modernization has been instrumental in ensuring its continued relevance and success.

As we raise our glasses to Jillian and Joseph Minerva, we celebrate not just their 11 years of stewardship, but also the enduring legacy of the Barnard General Store. Here's to many more years of camaraderie, commerce, and cherished memories at this beloved Vermont gem!



## 70 Years for Dick Mazza's General Store

Nestled in the heart of Colchester, Vermont, this iconic establishment first opened its doors in 1954 and has since become a beloved institution within the community. Known for its mouthwatering homemade pies, delectable sandwiches, and an unparalleled selection of beer, wine, and liquor, Dick Mazza's General Store has been a go-to destination for locals and visitors alike. Beyond its offerings, the store carries with it a rich legacy of community engagement and support, largely thanks to Senator Dick Mazza, who has been both proprietor and champion of small grocers throughout Vermont. His dedication to bolstering local businesses and fostering a strong sense of community has left an indelible mark on Colchester and beyond.

As we celebrate this significant milestone for Dick Mazza's General Store, we also extend our heartfelt gratitude to Senator Mazza and his family for their unwavering commitment to the business community and the people of Vermont. Their contributions have not only shaped the landscape of Colchester but have also left an enduring imprint on the hearts and minds of all who have been touched by their generosity and leadership. Here's to 70 years of excellence and to many more years of continued success and prosperity!

# Member News

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## New Members



Upstate  
Elevator  
Supply Co.

Local  
Maverick LLC



Looking for  
something from a  
previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)

## Congrats to the 2024 Good Food Award Winners!

- The Tippy Pickle
- Trencher's Farmhouse
- Champlain Orchards
- Frog Hollow Farmstead
- Spring Brook Farm Cheese
- Blake Hill Preserves
- Tavernier Chocolates

Thank you to the sponsors of our 2024 Scholarship Golf Tournament! Your support is vital to sustaining our program and future legislative efforts. If you're still interested in becoming a sponsor for the upcoming tournament, please email Alyssa at [alyssa@vtrga.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrga.org).



## Association Staff is here to help!

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