

Newsletter



Welcoming New Leadership

We're excited to announce that Ed Fox has officially stepped into his role as VRGA's new President. With extensive experience in both the food retail and food manufacturing industries, Ed brings a proven track record of success that will be invaluable as VRGA continues to grow and evolve.

The VRGA board is confident that Ed's leadership will guide us into the future, and we're all looking forward to achieving our shared goals together.

We also want to extend our sincere thanks to Erin Sigrist for her dedicated contributions and leadership during some challenging times. Her efforts have laid a strong foundation for Ed to build upon, and we're excited to see where we go from here.

*In this edition of our newsletter, we've gathered important updates and resources to keep you informed. Learn how you can support the **Credit Card Competition Act**, stay up-to-date on the **2025 Unemployment Insurance Taxable Wage Base**, and ensure compliance with **Vermont's Clean Heat Standard by the October 31st deadline**. You'll also find useful insights on merchandising strategies, managing food waste, and succession planning for family businesses.*

We want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to everyone who attended our Annual Meeting. It was a great opportunity to say goodbye to Erin Sigrist, who has been an integral part of our organization, and to hear from Vermont State Treasurer Mike Pieciak about the state of Vermont's economy. His insights provided valuable context on the financial landscape we're navigating and the opportunities that lie ahead. The meeting also allowed for networking and coming together as a community, strengthening the connections that make our organization thrive.

Looking ahead, we're excited to announce our next event: *Legislative Day at the Capitol!* This will be an excellent opportunity for members to engage with lawmakers and discuss important issues affecting our industry. Stay tuned for more details, and we hope to see you there!

Association News

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VRGA Announces Board Officers

On October 8th 2024 at the first board meeting following our annual meeting. The board unanimously elected:

- Mark Bouchett (Homeport): President
- Tricia Brown (Stewart's Shops): VP/Secretary
- Pat Iannotti (Price Chopper): VP/Membership and Events
- Heather Tremblay (University Mall): VP/Treasurer

At the VRGA Annual Meeting in September, we welcomed the following **NEW** board members:

- Doren Hall (Jake's Markets)
- Mike Evans (Associated Grocers of Vermont)

Thank you all for your acceptance, responsibilities and dedication to your roles and the ongoing success of VRGA. Congratulations!



Support the Credit Card Competition Act (CCCA)

The Food Industry Association and the Merchants Payments Coalition need your help in supporting the Credit Card Competition Act. They are asking businesses to sign a short letter urging U.S. Senators to back this crucial legislation aimed at **reducing burdensome credit card fees** and introducing competition into the market.

To participate, simply fill out a Google Form to sign the letter of support. The coalition will compile these responses by state and send a letter to each U.S. Senator representing those businesses.

Action Needed:

- Sign the letter by completing the Google Form linked [here](#)

If unable to access the form, email your business details to Christine Pollack at cpollack@fmi.org.

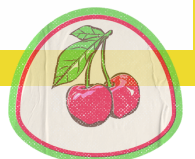
It's important to remove produce stickers before putting peels and whole produce in food scrap collection bins. Most produce stickers don't decompose and pollute the compost.

To have fewer produce stickers to remove:

- 1) Mark down produce as it approaches end-of-life. Advertise it in a designated area, so customers purchase more of it, leaving staff with fewer stickers to remove.
- 2) Donate more produce while it has enough shelf life to be distributed and eaten locally.
- 3) Track excess produce so you can adjust purchasing, storage, and processing as needed (for example, making prepared foods in-store).
- 4) Ask suppliers to use fewer stickers or to [use alternatives to plastic produce stickers](#).

[Learn more from the Sustainable Packaging Coalition](#) or contact VT DEC at 802-828-1138 for help figuring out how to improve your food scrap management system.

Tip provided by VT Dept of Env and Conservation



Enhance Your Store's Success with Modern Merchandising Strategies

As the retail landscape continues to evolve, it's important to stay ahead of trends in merchandising to engage customers and drive sales. Here are a few insights from the latest industry strategies that could be valuable for your business:

1. **Brand-Forward Merchandising:** Retailers like Ace Hardware and Kohl's are creating immersive in-store experiences by giving specific brands more space on the sales floor. You might consider dedicating sections of your store to highlight Vermont-made products or popular brands, encouraging customers to bundle purchases.
2. **Keeping Your Merchandising Fresh:** Best Buy is refreshing its stores by updating layouts and reducing physical inventory to align with digital shopping trends. By regularly rotating displays or adjusting stock to match customer needs, you can keep your store exciting and relevant.

Embracing Technology: Walmart and Hershey are using technologies like digital shelf labels and augmented reality to manage pricing and product placement efficiently. These tools can help streamline your operations, making it easier to update pricing in real-time and optimize product locations based on sales performance. Read more [here](#).

Retailers Selling oil, propane, natural gas, coal, and kerosene *Must Register By October 31st*

Under Vermont's Clean Heat Standard, the Vermont Public Utility Commission is requiring all retailers that sell "heating fuels" to register by October 31, 2024. Non-compliance could lead to fines of up to \$10,000.

The definition of "heating fuel" has expanded to include fossil-based fuels like oil, propane, natural gas, coal, and kerosene, meaning that even small businesses selling propane canisters must register and report their sales from 2023. This regulation now applies to all retailers handling these fuels.

"Heating fuel" includes fossil-based fuels such as oil, propane, natural gas, coal, and kerosene, regardless of end-use. This broad interpretation implies that even entities selling heating fuel not used for heat, such as propane for cooking or standby power generation, must register. This new and expanded definition of "heating fuel" means that every store that sells propane canisters must register with the PUC and report how many gallons were sold in 2023 and where they were purchased. This means every hardware, convenience, or corner store that exchanges BBQ tanks is now considered a "fuel dealer" and regulated just like the largest fossil fuel company in Vermont. It's the same with anyone who sells kerosene from a stationary pump or coal in a bag.

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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.

Early Halloween Shopping: Trends, Spending Projections, and Cultural Significance

Consumers began shopping for Halloween decor and costumes earlier this year, with 56% of shoppers aged 25 to 34 starting their purchases before October, according to the National Retail Federation (NRF). Despite a decrease in overall spending from last year's record high, total Halloween spending is projected to reach \$11.6 billion, down from \$12.2 billion in 2023.

Candy remains the most popular category, with spending expected to hit \$3.5 billion, despite rising cocoa prices. Retailers have proactively brought in holiday shipments early to avoid disruptions from potential strikes and shipping delays.

Consumer sentiment is anticipated to improve with an expected 50 basis point interest rate cut, while retail sales stay steady due to strong online shopping. As Halloween gains cultural significance, 47% of surveyed shoppers started buying items before October, up from 37% five years ago. Read more [here](#).

Succession Planning

For VRGA members, succession in family businesses is a key challenge, especially in maintaining continuity beyond the second generation. A significant concern is how nonfamily employees perceive a successor, as nepotism fears can undermine their commitment. However, research shows that nonfamily employees often prefer family successors, given the family-oriented culture, provided they are reassured of the successor's qualifications.

To address these concerns, family firms can:

1. Foster familiarity: Introduce potential successors early, allowing nonfamily employees to build trust and adjust to the transition.
2. Raise the bar: Aspiring successors should demonstrate competence and accountability, showing their leadership potential through credentials, hard work, and dedication.
3. Involve nonfamily employees: Including nonfamily employees in the training process signals their value and helps build a participative culture, fostering loyalty and trust.

These strategies help family businesses secure nonfamily employee support, ensuring a smooth transition and a more engaged, loyal workforce. Read more [here](#).

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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.

Disaster Unemployment Assistance Available for Flood-Affected Vermonters

- **Eligibility:** Federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits are available to Vermonters affected by flooding on July 29–31, 2024.
- **Approved Counties:** Individuals in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties may qualify. This includes independent contractors, self-employed individuals, and agricultural workers.
- **Application Process:**
 - Individuals must first file for regular unemployment benefits.
 - Indicate on the application if employment was lost due to the disaster.
- **Deadline:** The deadline to file a claim for DUA benefits is **December 2, 2024**.
- **First Payable Benefit Week:** Benefits will start for the week of August 4–10, 2024.
- **Examples of Eligible Claims:**
 - Injury from the disaster preventing work.
 - Workplace damage or closure due to the flooding.
 - Loss of transportation to work.
 - Job unavailability due to the disaster.
 - Significant income loss for those whose business was adversely impacted.

For further assistance, please contact the [Vermont Department of Labor](#).

Minimum Wage Increase Announcement

The Vermont Department of Labor has announced an increase to the state's minimum wage, effective January 1, 2025.

The minimum wage will rise from \$13.67 to \$14.01 per hour, reflecting an increase of \$0.34.

This adjustment also affects tipped employees, as the “Basic Tipped Wage Rate” will increase from \$6.84 to \$7.01 per hour, representing 50% of the full minimum wage. Employers can pay this lower hourly rate, provided that employees receive tips equal to or exceeding the standard minimum wage during their shifts. If an employee's tips do not meet this threshold, the employer is required to pay the difference to ensure that the employee receives at least the standard minimum wage for the week.

These wage adjustments are made annually in accordance with Vermont law and take effect at the beginning of each year, as specified in 21 V.S.A. § 384.

Vermont Department of Labor Announces Unemployment Insurance Taxable Wage Base for 2025

- **Increase:** The Taxable Wage Base will rise from \$14,300 to \$14,800 effective January 1, 2025.
- **Employer Contributions:** Employers will pay unemployment contributions on the first \$14,800 an employee earns in 2025.
- **Quarterly Reports:** Vermont employers must file quarterly wage and contribution reports.

For further assistance, please contact the [Vermont Department of Labor](#).



It's High Time for Hemp Beverages

Hemp-derived THC beverages are booming, with sales skyrocketing 143% over the past year to \$98.1 million nationwide. We're excited to announce that we're the first Vermont company to enter this market with our fully compliant, low-dose hemp-derived THC beverages, ideal for any social occasion.

Understanding Legalities in Vermont

Navigating hemp and cannabis regulations can be confusing. Here's a quick comparison:

Category	Hemp Derived THC Product	Cannabis Product
THC Content	Less than 0.3% THC on a dry weight basis	More than 0.3% THC on a dry weight basis
Potency	1.5mg THC per serving, 10mg THC per container	5mg THC per serving, 100mg THC per container
Sales Channel	Can be sold in all channels	Adult-use retail only
Age Requirements	No age restrictions; 21+ recommended	21+ only

WE'RE GIVING AWAY A COMPLETE WIX POS PACKAGE! (VALUED AT \$1,295.00!)

How to enter:

[SCHEDULE A WIX DEMO](#)

& complete your demo by **October 31, 2024** to be entered into our giveaway

(Yes, it's that easy)



[LEARN MORE ABOUT WIX](#)

[View giveaway terms and conditions](#)



Help Preserve Buxton's Store!

Buxton's Store, a beloved staple in Orwell, Vermont, is closing after over 50 years of service. To preserve this community hub, Andy and Mary Buxton are leading efforts to secure funding to purchase the building and transform it into a new community space.

A group of dedicated residents has formed a nonprofit organization to raise \$103,000, which will cover essential expenses during the transition and support the Buxtons.

Although the store will close on October 31, the goal is to reopen the space as a community center.

Get Involved: Your donations can help make this vision a reality! Thank you for your support!

Association Staff is here to help!

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