



Vermont Grass Farmers Association

P.O. Box 142 Randolph Center, VT 05061

2009-2010 Board Members

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Fair Winds Farm, Brattleboro

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Cooperative Insurance

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VT Technical College, Randolph
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Andrea Morgan
Ashdown Farm, South Royalton

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Brookfield Agricultural Services

2010 Membership Rate Increase

Dear Loyal and Supportive VGFA Members,

After over five years of considering a membership rate increase, the board of the VT Grass Farmers Association approved the action at its September, 2009 meeting. This brings the annual membership rate to \$40 per calendar year.

Multiple factors have contributed to this decision:

1. For over 13 years, the VGFA annual member rate has stayed the same as the amount its chartering members paid (\$20), largely due to the fact that USDA-NRCS has supported its work through Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) funds paid directly to the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture for staff support. While the **collaboration** and **intentions** behind this relationship are still **very strong**, a changing landscape of federal dollars has shown declining fiscal support for the range of activities provided by the Center staff on behalf of the VGFA.
2. VGFA has entered into a new phase of existence, seeking support in organizational business planning and has worked to develop its vision of the future of grass-based livestock agriculture in Vermont. While this process is not yet finished, the discussion has elevated the importance of VGFA's ability to maintain diverse income streams in order to be a strong, stable organization. We need your help, as members, to do that.
3. The 2010 VT Grazing & Livestock Conference signifies a new collaborative future for the VGFA and partnering organizations the VT Beef Producers Association and the VT Sheep & Goat Association. The three organizations will co-host the conference, with a registration discount for members of any organization. At the lower rate, VGFA has had a significant advantage in building membership through the conference as compared to the other organizations. In order to be fair, VGFA's member rate should come into alignment with other comparable organizations. *Please note:* through this special conference arrangement, there will be discounts for renewing multiple memberships at once.
4. At the onset of membership rate discussions, a goal was made very clear that the *value* of the membership needed to be built up prior to any request for additional fees. VGFA has worked to add value in multiple ways:

"A group of farmers and neighbors growing the vitality of grass-based farming in Vermont"

- a. Conference discounts, quarterly *Solar Dollar* newsletters and pasture walks more than pay for the membership fee.
- b. VGFA members now enjoy a free listing in paper and electronic versions of the annual *Directory of Grass-Fed Products*.
- c. A mini-grant program was piloted in 2008 and established in 2009, funding three farm projects this year.
- d. VGFA board and subcommittee members attend the Northeast [regional] Pasture Consortium meetings and VT State Technical Committee meetings to share the experience, perspective, interests and vision of grass-based livestock with national, state and regional entities. VGFA has developed positive relationships with Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Representative Welch's staff.
- e. VGFA has taken a leadership role to support diverse grazing livestock education, through the Everything Equine exposition, the Northeast Animal-Powered Field Days, Rural Vermont annual meeting and more.

We, the VGFA Board, are proud to be Directors of this organization. We recognize the important role the VGFA plays within the agricultural landscape of Vermont, and seek to strengthen that role in the years to come. Our goal is to represent and support you, the grass-based farms of this state, and provide valuable services for your generous support.