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Milk Producers Struggle as Demand Drops

by Emmett Avery

EAST HARDWICK — The dairy industry in Vermont has long struggled and, for some farmers, the current crisis has intensified that struggle to an alarming degree.

With orders of dairy from restaurants and schools falling off significantly, and weakened supply chains at home and overseas, dairy farms are struggling and adapting, trying and make it out the other side.

Creamery, in East Hardwick, says that the creamery's orders declined by 60% as soon as Vermont's schools and restaurants were closed by the governor's "stay home, stay safe" order. It's not just a lack of orders causing problems for farmers; either, the price of liquid milk has fallen significantly, as well. And, Michael said in an interview last Friday, milk prices are likely to fall even further, perhaps to around \$11 per hundredweight. This would be a tremendous loss

See DEMAND, 6



The REACH! essential childcare program's kids made hand-painted signs which are being put up at Welcome to Hardwick Signs. Left to right: Jennifer Ward (Wolcott Elementary), Romin Butterick, Raylynn Shatney, Kayla Curn (Hazen Union)

OSSU Quickly Organizes Childcare Program for Essential Workers

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Just two months ago, it would have been strange to hear someone say "nobody likes bleaching Legos." In this new COVID-19 reality, it's just a normal sentence describing what childcare looks like these days. Ceilidh Galloway-Kane is program director of the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union's (OSSU) REACH! program. REACH! swung into action when Governor Phil Scott issued a directive requiring childcare services for essential workers on March 17, right after he ordered schools to close. In just four days, REACH! built a childcare system from scratch to meet that directive.

Galloway-Kane said "We started planning the (childcare) program the Thursday after schools closed and opened it that Monday. It's a totally new program and it's basically organized in the same way that our summer camps are organized for REACH!"

The free program's relies on the state's definition of essential workers, which is ever-evolving, said Kane. Childcare runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., "and families can

choose whatever time they want (their children) to be there, but we ask that they're there from 8 to 3, at least." Children from kindergarten through eighth grade can join the program. "Right now, we have kindergarten through fourth grade," said Kane. "The majority of our families have been with us for at least the past three weeks."

Galloway-Kane and four additional staff, all paid by the OSSU, run the daily program, which averages four children a day, she said. Students are fed breakfast, lunch, and a snack. She said the wide range of ages poses some challenges, though most of the children in the program usually are younger, so older students are separated into another classroom during academic blocks.

See WORKERS, 5



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Helen Beattie (right) of the newly-formed Hardwick Area Neighborhood-to-Neighbor Group donated 60 cloth masks April 23 to Lauralee Sweeney (left), director of the Hardwick Area Food Pantry (HAFP). Twenty-four of the volunteers in the Neighborhood-to-Neighbor Group have a goal of sewing 1,500 cloth masks to be given away to anyone in the community that needs one. The two distribution places in Hardwick are the Village Restaurant and HAFP.

Group Coordinates Community Efforts

by Helen Beattie

EAST HARDWICK — On March 30, Hardwick Area Neighbor to Neighbor was formed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a local grassroots organization committed to coordinating community efforts to collectively address the community challenges.

True to the Hardwick community's spirit and history of resilience when confronting crises, many community members are rallying to help family and neighbors. The group understands that,

in this time of mounting unemployment and stress, increased access to resources and support is helpful.

The group's first priority was to create a means for community members to request assistance and/or offer services. Within the week, Neighbor to Neighbor had established a phone line (call

See GROUP, 5



courtesy photo

A late spring snow on Sunday night dumped up to seven inches of heavy wet snow in higher elevations in Walden and Cabot.

Craftsbury Farmers Market Setting Up Virtual Market

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — The Craftsbury Farmers Market is slated to open May 23, and the steering committee has been working on guidelines to meet the Agency of Agriculture's regulations. Kris Coville, chair of the steering committee, said they will have been meeting to work through scenarios for the market.

The look and feel of the "physical" CFM will be very different this summer sans music, sans picnic benches, sans neighborhood chats and sans meeting with old friends. No on-premise consumption of food or drink is allowed; no congregating or lingering.

Coville said that a virtual

farmers' market is in progress on the Craftsbury Farmers Market website, craftsburyfarmersmarket.com. Individual vendors are showcased. People are encouraged to visit the site as vendors' come on board. Processing orders with vendors can be done by phone, e-mail, or through individual websites.

The steering committee has to determine which vendors are allowed to be physically on the Common when the market opens May 23. As of Monday, despite the Agency of Agriculture's edict of Friday, it is unclear which vendors are allowed to participate physically. The Agency of Agriculture guidelines state: "Only food vendors with raw or value-added agricultural products or edible plant starts are permitted (no crafts, jewelry, etc.). Value-added products must be prepackaged and consumed off-site."

What constitutes value-added products is still not clearly defined.

See VIRTUAL, 2

A Farmer's Market Like We've Never Seen

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Just a few weeks ago, with COVID-19 spreading, state executive orders shuttered what few winter farmers' markets were open as the pandemic took hold. Governor Phil Scott (R) announced a new directive at last Friday's briefing that would allow farmers' markets to open after May 1.

See SEEN, 6

State Issues Guidelines for Farmers Markets

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets has issued its Farmers Market Daytime protocols last Friday. The agency formulated

See GUIDELINES, 5

\$3 Million Grant Awarded to Yellow Barn

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — On April 23, Hardwick Town Manager Shaun Fielder signed documents finalizing a three-million dollar Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant for the Yellow Barn Accelerator (YBA).

The EDA grant is the Yellow Barn's final initial major program, which averages \$3m grant for the Yellow Barn Accelerator (YBA). He added that to his knowledge the \$3m grant was one of the larger grants ever awarded in Vermont by the EDA, perhaps the largest. Grants are still being sought for the YBA going forward and "all options are being kept open that keep more funding opportunities in front of us for 2020," Fielder said. Select board chair Eric Renick said

the grant was "really exciting news."

Renick said "For [the] EDA to commit such a high level of support to the project is encouraging, both for the major funding it provides and for the indication that this federal agency shares our vision for the project."

With this last major piece on place, the work to move from planning to construction can begin. COVID-19 has delayed the timelines for the project. Just two weeks ago the definition of "essential workers" did not include construction workers. That led Fielder to say at an earlier select board meeting it would likely be Spring 2021 before construction could begin. Now, with what Governor Phil Scott characterized as two more "surges of the spigot" putting Vermonters back to work, those restrictions have loosened. Fielder

See GRANT, 2



photo by Vanessa Fournier

Wayne Tallman, owner of Tallman Excavating of Hardwick, grades the landscape around the home of Kathy and Leo Renaud on Dewey Street in Hardwick. The Renauds moved into their new home on March 20. Their former home was destroyed by fire June 14, 2019.

Governor Loosens More Restrictions, Local Businesses Adapt

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — As the projections for deaths from COVID-19 continue to be low compared to initial estimates, Gov. Scott in his Friday press conference announced initial loosening of business restrictions. The state faces economic hardship, as at least 86,000 Vermonters have applied for unemployment benefits since the restrictions went into effect.

The changes allow manufacturing and distribution

centers to reopen with up to five workers. Outdoor operations, such as construction crews, have to follow similar guidelines, including the five-person limit.

Some stores which had been forced to provide curbside-only service can reopen to allow no more than ten people inside. Also starting May 1, farmers' markets can reopen, but under an orderlink up OSUED board, reorganization ideas presented so far, as well as a brief discussion of COVID-

See ADAPT, 4

OSUED Continues Campus Discussion

by Emmett Avery

HARDWICK — The Orleans Southwest Union Elementary District (OSUED) meeting on April 29 was originally planned as a public brainstorming session to discuss possible new configurations of the district's campuses. However, there were not many members of the public attending, so the discussion turned toward methods for evaluating the campus reorganization ideas presented so far, as well as a brief discussion of COVID-

19's likely impact on next year's budget.

At this point, revenue projections for FY2021, taking COVID-19 into account, have not yet been created. However, a significant revenue shortfall in the state education fund is expected, and this shortfall will likely to affect the OSUED's budget.

In the past few weeks, well over thirty campus configuration ideas have been suggested by the OSUED board, reorganization ideas presented so far, as well as a brief discussion of COVID-

See CAMPUS, 4

State Officials Warn Against Complacency

by Doug McClure

MONTEPELLIER — Vermont health officials warned on Monday that the reason COVID-19 statistics are trending in a positive direction is not because of an over-reaction, but because Vermont reacted quickly. Most residents have followed guidance on physical distancing and wearing masks when shopping in public. Store employees are now

See COMPLACENCY, 6