



2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Vermont Agriculture + Vermont Culinary = Thriving Communities

For the past 27 years, VFN has built integrity and vibrancy into our local food system in support of Vermont's working landscape and the rural economy by developing relationships among businesses in the food and farm sector. In 2023, **22 new Partner Members joined the Network**. Our 200 Partner Member farms, restaurants, specialty food, beverage producers, and so many others in the local food sector span the state.



Cheers to VFN's 25th Annual Forum Dinner!

The Annual Forum Dinner came back strong again in 2023! This year, **55 restaurants, chefs, and specialty food & beverage producers showed off the best of Vermont food and beverage** at VFN Annual Forum Dinner at Shelburne Farms. 20 participants were new to the event this year. Visit our website for the winners of the evening's friendly competition, Best Bite & Best Sip. Our popular silent auction included generous gift packages with products and culinary experiences from 25 local businesses and VFN members. This event helps the public connect with Vermont's food system, by providing opportunities for them to interact directly with the people and businesses who raise and prepare the food we eat.



Celebrating 9 years of Vermont Open Farm Week

Vermont Open Farm Week (Aug. 6th - Aug 13th) **brought curious visitors to more than 180 events on 49 farms around the state**. VFN hosts and manages this project through our DigInVT platform. Farmers report this event is a good way to strengthen connections with consumers and explore agritourism as a possible income source. **96% of OFW 2023 survey respondents believe that Open Farm Week is very helpful in attracting new customers and 88% say that it raises awareness about their farm**. Mark your calendar for the 10th anniversary of Open Farm Week in August of 2024!



Annual Meeting, Networking & Statewide Conversations

We kicked off 2023 with our **January Annual Meeting** held at ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain. Over 75 members came together to plan for the new year. We continued the conversation as **150 farmers, food and beverage producers, service providers and chefs came together at VFN networking events in Danville, Brattleboro, and Burlington**. Attendees at each event made an average of 5 new connections and partnerships. **80% of attendees reported that they learned about new opportunities for markets and/or gained access to locally produced agricultural products at these events**, including resources that VFN has developed as well as those offered by statewide partners. These events were funded through a USDA grant awarded to VFN to strengthen Vermont's culinary and agricultural tourism sector by making space for partnership and collaboration.



VFN works with regional organizations, businesses, and public sector agencies to further develop partnerships that benefit our members and support our sector. **This year, VFN testified at the State House in support of a continuing restaurant and food access program, and as part of Vermont Tourism Day** testifying about the importance of agritourism as a viable funding stream for farms. We also have a **seat on the board of the Vermont Tourism Summit and co-chair Farm to Plate's statewide Agritourism Community of Practice**, which meets quarterly and works to make Vermont a world-class destination for authentic agritourism and culinary tourism experiences.

DigInVT.com & Authentic Food & Farm Experiences



DigInVT allows us to provide marketing coupled with professional development opportunities for Vermont agritourism and culinary tourism businesses. DigInVT's monthly **Fresh Feed newsletter** has above average participation and engagement from both in-state travelers and out-of-state visitors. Through DigInVT, **we develop programming and storytelling that supports the farms, restaurants, and producer businesses which help the public access authentic food and farm experiences across the state.** This year, we produced **chef-led farmers market tours in Montpelier and Burlington** and launched the **DigInVT Podcast** to showcase the relationships among chefs, farmers, producers, and their communities. These activities are part of our broader effort to shape consumer behavior by encouraging local buying at every purchase point in the local food system.

Gold Barn Honor & Partnering with Members



During May of 2023, we celebrated VFN Gold Barn Members. **Gold Barn VFN members spend at least 35% of their annual food purchasing budget with local partners.** This year, twelve Gold Barn member restaurants offered a dish featuring local ingredients and partnerships and donated a portion of sales to VFN. We also provided additional recognition to all Gold Barn members through web, email, and social media content. **Out of our 100 culinary members, 57 are Gold Barn!**

In partnership with **Farrell Distributing**, VFN also worked with members AquaViTea and Shacksbury Cider to promote local beverages from each brand. A portion of sales benefits VFN, as part of Farrell's Give Back Program.

For the 3rd year, **The Lodge at Spruce Peak's "A Taste of New England"** weekend benefited VFN by providing a platform to share the best of Vermont with the public. Sunday's Vermont Specialty Food Showcase featured over 40 Vermont food and beverage producers. We continue to look for ways to work with VFN members and partners on projects that support our mission. Reach out with ideas and opportunities!



Professional Development & Peer to Peer Learning

The most important resources Vermont Fresh Network has are the amazing people who are members of the network. In November and December, we worked with UVM Extension to conduct a **three-part professional development webinar series** that was well attended averaging 25 - 35 engaged participants. Topics included **Local Partnerships for Restaurants, Business Planning for Agritourism Enterprises, and Managing Diversified Food and Farm Businesses.** These peer-to-peer learning sessions featured VFN members sharing their experiences and making valuable recommendations on the topic at hand.



Member Resources and Support

Our member benefits focus on marketing, networking, and professional development resources. In 2023, VFN members were able to access a wide range of benefits, including the opportunity to work with photographer Winter Caplanson of New England Food and Farm for a series of complimentary photo shoots.

Staff and Board actively look to collaborate with regional organizations, businesses, and public sector agencies to further develop partnerships that will benefit our members and support our mission.



Thank you to our 2023 Affiliate Partners!
Community National Bank | Farrell Distributing
Foley Services | Sodexo, Vermont First
vermontfresh.net

