



### VFN Business Portion - 30 minutes

- Cara - Welcome & Highlights in 2023
- Jake- Treasurer's Report
- Tara - Building on 2023 work and plans for 2024
- Tara - Thank you and on to the day!

### Cara Tobin VFN Board President - 2024 Annual Meeting

- Welcome on behalf of the Board of Directors - (have Board members in the room stand) Some of our board members will be stepping down after completing their two terms, -Thank you to our exiting board members, Jake Claro, John Mandeville and Susan Reid.
- I want to start off by thanking our sponsors -
  - Affiliate Partners: **Community National Bank, Farrell Distributing, Foley Services, and Vermont First. We also want to welcome a new 2024 sponsor - Image Tek!**
  - Thank you to our host this year - Zen Barn. Every year we try to bring the Annual Meeting to a different part of the state.
  - **Thank you also to the local businesses that generously provided our food and drink today:**  
AquaViTea • Blake Hill Preserves • Bitter Bubble • Cabot Creamery Cooperative • Champlain Orchards • Honey Road • Jericho Settlers Farm • Joe's Kitchen at Screamin' Ridge Farm • King Arthur Baking Co. • Mad River Taste Place • Maple Wind Farm • Pitchfork Pickle • Prohibition Pig • Small Oven Pastries • Snow Farm Vineyard & Winery • Snug Valley Farm • Spruce Peak • Stowe Street Cafe • Susanna's Catering • The Tipsy Pickle • TÖST • Upstate Elevator Company • Vermont Cranberry Company
- VFN continues to be a busy organization. We've done a lot. There's a 2023 highlights sheet in your packet that covers our projects this year.
  - **Events like today are directly connected to our mission of strengthening partnerships and connecting the food and farm sector.** This year, VFN hosted three networking events bringing together over 150 farmers, chefs and producers, in Danville, Brattleboro, and Burlington. We received a lot of great survey feedback saying that these events are valuable to members in generating new business partnerships, learning about new market opportunities, as well as the positive social impact of reconnecting and meeting new people in our food and farm community.
  - **In 2023, we continued support to our mission in outreach efforts and collaborated with VFN members on projects.** For example, professional development and peer-to-peer learning with our fall webinar series and our DigInVermont podcast series. These projects featured 12 VFN members sharing their experiences and showcasing how



mission-driven food and farm businesses can have a positive impact on their local communities and the greater rural economy.

- **We celebrated the 25th Anniversary of our Annual Forum Dinner at Shelburne Farms.** Our Annual Forum Dinner had the highest member participation in recent years, with 55 total participating restaurants and specialty food & beverage businesses compared to 48 in 2022. This year, the dinner will be a little earlier in the summer. We are looking forward to our 26th Dinner at Shelburne Farms coming up this year on July 21st. Save the Date.

If you are interested in joining the VFN Board or participating in a member committee, please let us know. If you are a VFN Partner Member, please remember to fill out your ballot for our new 2024 Board Member nominee - Breanna Kileen of Kileen Crossroads Farm.

Next Jake Claro will give an update on VFN financials and Tara will review a few things to look for in the upcoming year.

## Treasurer's Report 2024

### Jake Claro

A goal at the start of 2023 was to stabilize our yearly financials, successfully complete grant projects that we had taken on to offset pandemic loss and work towards balanced and sustainable funding for our programs. We are slowly moving in that direction.

- You'll see that we have a net deficit for 2023.
  - While the **Annual Forum** remains a key fundraiser for us, it did not reach the financial goals set this year. This year for the first time, the Forum did not sell out. A sold-out event would have grossed an additional 13-15 thousand dollars. July's flooding hurt ticket sales. And in an unfortunate coincidence, another annual food system fundraiser was scheduled on the same night pulling from our ticket base. We can't control the weather but we're working to make sure 2024's Forum meets financial expectations.
- **On a more positive note**, in 2023 we surpassed our goals for individual donations and we saw an increase in VFN member-partnered fundraising. Thank you to the **23** VFN members who worked with us. You can see the list of partners on the back of the financial report. The money raised by Member Menu Fundraisers goes back to our membership. It funds staff work in member services, provides the capital needed to fund programs and helps us raise consumer awareness around the importance of supporting our farmers and the chefs and food producers who prioritize local purchasing.
- **Thank you to our key sponsors:** Sponsors are vital to our ability to increase our mission impact, refine our programming, and increase opportunities for members. In particular, our Affiliate Partners have



invested in VFN as an organization: Community National Bank, Farrell Distributing, Foley Services, and Vermont First.

- We are continuing to stabilize our member network after a difficult few years. In 2023, we had 224 members with 22 of them being new to VFN. Dues came to 13% of our revenue which was moderately below the budgeted amount. Membership growth and retention have an impact on the financial well-being of our organization. It also is vital to VFN's mission to connect more farmers, food producers, chefs and other culinary professionals - It allows us to celebrate their work and their partnerships. Supporting Vermont Fresh Network is an investment in the people and businesses who grow, raise and prepare Vermont's food and drink. It is important that you renew your membership and recommend membership to others so that VFN can continue our important work at the intersection of the culinary and agriculture sectors and extend our 28 year legacy.

Our current operating reserves are within bounds for the recommended levels of cash on hand. The Vermont Fresh Network is ending the year with 3 months of operating expenses in reserves. In 2024, we plan to continue to stabilize VFN and work towards a balanced budget that supports healthy staff levels and valued programming and services to members, while also supporting new projects with strategic partnerships.

### **Executive Dir. Tara Pereira**

Thank you Jake and Cara - Thank you all for coming today. It is great to see you all.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our board of directors. I wouldn't have been able to do my job without their support. And thank you to all our sponsors. A big thank you to our members. Our organization could not be as effective without the support of all of our sponsors, our partners, and our members. I would also thank Jessie Hoyng our Membership and Events Manager who joined us a year ago this month. Jessie quickly got up to speed and has played an important role in our work this past year.

Before we go on to the rest of the day, I want to talk a little about our major themes in 2024

The Vermont Fresh Network's legacy includes an extended network of individuals and businesses who have been both inspired by VFN's work in local food and positively impacted by its mission. That includes members of the public who value and prioritize restaurants and other businesses that invest in their communities by purchasing fresh ingredients from local farms.

To grow our network and extend VFN's legacy, it is important that we retain current members, but also we must support the next generation - farmers who don't yet have partnerships, chefs who have not yet opened their restaurants, new specialty and beverage food producers looking for local ingredients, and of course individuals working towards a profession in local food.

**Connecting local partners is vital to VFN's mission.** To that end, we have another networking event coming up in April at Pearl St.Pizza in Barre.

Also, this coming year, we'll be working with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets on a project to help producers and restaurants reduce barriers to local sales and local purchasing. The goal is to help



stakeholders across the market sector connect and communicate their business needs and product information. We want to know what we can do to support your business. To learn more about the project and to share the resources or activities that would best help you connect with local partners, stop by the agency of agriculture.

**Our work in food and farm tourism is part of VFN's mission to educate** consumers about the economic and environmental impact of supporting local food, from making a dinner reservation to pouring a glass of wine or cider to buying directly from the farm.

This year, we will continue in our commitment to **Building a Larger Narrative Around** local food and farm experiences and increasing the touch points the public has with local food as it relates to VFN members. To that end, we have two more chef-led farmers market tours planned for the spring, our Annual Forum dinner, and the 10th anniversary of Vermont Open Farm Week.

The Annual Meeting *is* a networking event so make it a point to meet someone new and learn about them and what they do. Thank you all.

We are going to have a short 10 min break for you to grab more coffee and chat with folks and then we'll be starting our morning panel.