



# Highlights from 2020

## A Resilient Member Network

The Vermont Fresh Network (VFN) is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2021 and our network of members, partners, and community remains stronger than ever. This past year challenged all of us, and reinforced the importance of local food relationships and creativity. We welcomed 14 new members and worked hard to support our 291 members through the pandemic. When the statewide shutdown occurred in March 2020, VFN staff jumped into action gathering lists of restaurants across the state offering takeout & curbside pickup and farms with local offerings. We continued targeted member promotional support throughout the year.



## The Great Vermont Picnic

In August, we invited Vermonters across the state to celebrate the farmer-chef connection with Vermont Fresh Network's "**The Great Vermont Picnic.**" This month-long promotional picnic event was our creative alternative to what would have been our 24th Annual Forum Dinner, showcasing our members. The public planned their picnics with takeout offerings from our chefs & members and searched via DigInVT.com and Seven Days' "Good To-Go" directory of hundreds of additional Vermont restaurants. Seven Days and Front Porch Forum sponsored this campaign.



## DigInVT.com & Vermont Agritourism

DigInVT.com continues to be one of the largest collaborative food and farm tourism marketing platforms in the country and has grown this year to list over **600 food & farm businesses**. The DigInVT partnership enables us to work with 10 statewide producer organizations. In 2020, we added a new virtual events category, as well as the new Vermont Farm Trail project. As part of our work, we continue to co-chair the Farm to Plate agritourism statewide task force. In December 2019, VFN was awarded a three year federal grant to build on our successful efforts with DigInVT and strengthen Vermont's agritourism sector.



## Cultivating the Chef-Farmer Connection

We continued our mission of advancing relationships among farmers and chefs through sector-focused projects. VFN is partnering with the **Vermont Grass Farmers Association** on a grant to increase the competitiveness of Vermont pasture-raised beef by facilitating connections, communication, and camaraderie among food system stakeholders. VFN and culinary members co-authored a restaurant market channel brief for the **Farm to Plate Strategic Plan 2021-2030**. We are serving as VFN member advocate during statewide partner meetings and weekly calls for the **Vermont Everyone Eats** advisory board.



## Celebrating 6 years of Vermont Open Farm Week

VFN leads and manages this week-long event through the DigInVT platform with a committee of statewide local food and farm partners. In 2020, **Open Farm Week** focused on events appropriate for pandemic-related guidelines: self-guided tours or one group/family at a time, on-farm picnics, farm trails, virtual/online events, social media participation (i.e. posting a farm pic of the day), and other creative activities.



## Other Special Projects

In the fall of 2020, VFN received funding from **Vermont Breakfast on the Farm** for a dairy-focused project that integrated educational dairy content with the first ever Vermont Hot Chocolate Week (February 2021). We also participated in the **Maple 100** pilot project, spearheaded by Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, engaging restaurant members and the public to think outside the box when it comes to maple. As part of this work, we added a sweet Maple Creemee Trail to DigInVT!



## Vermont Farm Trails

VFN is a project partner in the **Farm Walk Trail Network**, an initiative of food, farming, and agritourism organizations to create a directory of walking trails on farms across Vermont. These trails offer Vermonters a healthy and safe place to be outside, engage with the working landscape, and get to know their agricultural neighbors. Hosted on DigInVT, these trails are on or adjacent to working farms or conserved historic agricultural land. The concept was so popular over the summer, that we were able to expand and add a **Winter Farm Trail** version thanks to a UVM grant.



## Seasonal Promotions & Mail Order Gift Guide

In 2020, we expanded our annual Local Turkey Finder to a **Holiday Meal Guide** featuring farms and markets. Vermonters could locate ingredients for a truly Vermont-grown meal. We also published a list of the VFN member restaurants & inns serving delicious holiday meals prepared with Vermont ingredients for dine-in or takeout. Additionally, we received grant funding from UVM to develop a **DigInVT holiday gift guide** to promote mail order sales for local Vermont products and restaurant gift certificates.



## Member Professional Development

We partnered with UVM Extension on a **webinar series** to help Vermont's farm and food system build resiliency and support safety during the pandemic. Topics included direct sales, e-commerce, agritourism, virtual events, and pick-your-own guidance. Also, UVM Extension and DigInVT staff published a **best practices guide to help agritourism businesses navigate COVID-19 regulations**.

# Thank you to our 2020 sponsors.

See our 2020 Annual Financial Report for the full list.

# www.vermontfresh.net

