

Annual Meeting - 2022

Opening Remarks, Goals for 2022, Tara Pereira

Hello Everyone. My name is Tara Pereira, I'm the executive director of Vermont Fresh Network. On behalf of the VFN Board of Directors welcome to our 2022 annual meeting.

Our annual meeting is an opportunity to connect with each other and share experiences. When we meet in person, it is very natural to start speaking with someone new and go from there. I know we'd all much rather we be speaking in person, and I hope we can all meet in person next year. Since we are online today, we're changing things up a little.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our board of directors and our affiliate partners Farrell Distributing and Foley Services. Our organization could not be as effective without the support of all of our partners and our members. And because of that continued support Vermont Fresh Network celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2021.

VFN was founded in 1996 with the mission of advancing relationships among farmers, chefs, and consumers to grow markets and eat more locally grown food. Use of our iconic VFN logo reflects a commitment to food transparency and meeting local purchasing standards.

A lot has changed in 25 years. Vermont has become a leader in promoting local food and our partner members reach across the state and across the food system. Vermont Fresh Network has helped to create a culture around our food that values fresh, local ingredients at the center of not only delicious meals but also thriving communities - communities that supported their homegrown businesses all the way from the ground to the plate.

Financial

- Like many other organizations, over the last two years, our funding channels have shifted during the pandemic. Funding from member dues, event sponsorships and events are down, while funding from grants and project related sponsorship increased. In 2021, We were able to take on some fee for service projects that involved agritourism marketing support for the Vermont Fruit Tree

Growers Association and with UVM extension, for work on the International Workshop on Agritourism that is coming to Burlington in August.

- A highlight of 2021 was partnering with members and sponsors on fundraising campaigns. Our summer picnic series to celebrate 25 years and our partnership with Farrell as part of their give back program.
- Our current operating reserves are within bounds for the recommended levels of cash on hand. In 2022, we will have/work towards a balanced stable budget and focus on making the most of the projects we have in place. The Vermont Fresh Network is ending the year with more than 4 months operating expenses in reserves
- Something that's been instrumental to our ability to continue programming and opportunities for members is our sponsorship, and in particular our Affiliate Partners who have invested in VFN as an organization: Farrell Distributing and Foley Services.
- This coming summer, we hope to have our first Annual Forum in two years. In past years, that has been our major fundraising event and we are looking forward to bringing it back.

Over the last few years, Vermont Fresh Network's major marketing focus has been on promoting Vermont culinary and agricultural tourism with DigInVT.com. As we head into 2022, food transparency across the food system is more important than ever. Our work with DigIn establishes a platform for collaboration across multiple organizations for the shared goal of strengthening Vermont's agricultural and culinary tourism.

We use it to increase our reach and expand our marketing services for members in many ways

- **Information sharing & technical assistance:**
 - Workshops, conference presentations to share and develop information about agritourism and best practices.
- **Big projects with collaborative teams:**
 - Open Farm Week - entering 8th year
 - Statewide marketing plan for Vermont agritourism
- **Smaller projects in partnership:**
 - Maple 100
 - Vermont Apple fall campaign
- **Policy discussions**
 - Farm to Plate Agritourism Task Force
 - Travel & Recreation Council meetings

- Meeting with legislators

This is part of our broader consumer education efforts on *where your food comes from* and what goes into food production on a Vermont scale. One of the highlights of 2021, that speaks to DigInVT's growth and strength as an effective marketing tool for our members, are the partnerships we cultivate and continue to build on.

In 2021, We began a paid partnership with the Vermont Dept. of Tourism & Marketing. As part of our work, DigInVT content is published monthly on the VermontVacations website, we have developed a DigInVT promotional booklet. They are printing 5000 booklets which will be handed out by VDTM at The Big E and other events as well as given as part of their Vermont tourism informational packets. And we are working together to add DigInVT businesses to their Travel Planning Directory.

We have a number of projects on the horizon. Looking ahead to 2022, as part of our current grant to strengthen agritourism in Vermont...the 8th annual Open Farm Week is scheduled for August and we will be hosting a series of four networking events across the state to connect farmers, chefs, and other professionals with resources from statewide efforts and encourage partnerships and business connections. The first will be in March at 14th Star Brewing in St. Albans. Some of our 2021 work included working with a destination and tourism marketing agency to develop a multi-stakeholder marketing plan for Vermont agritourism. We'll be receiving the final report in the next few weeks. It was a very interesting process, for those of you who participated in research discussions, Thank you.

From helping chefs locate farms that grow or raise a specific ingredient...to partnering with other organizations on information and resources to help businesses during the pandemic....to DigInVT content featuring the best spots to apres ski...Our work may be quite varied, but our programs and activities share a common theme. Communicating the value of supporting Vermont's local food and farms.

I look forward to working with you all in 2022 and beyond.

And now I want to introduce our new membership and communications manager, Peggy Briggs. She came on in October and has hit the ground running.