

Annual Meeting - 2023

Opening Remarks, Goals for 2023, Tara Pereira

Thank you Jake and Doug - Thank you all for coming today. Our annual meeting is an opportunity to connect with each other and share experiences. It is great to meet in person again.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our board of directors. The last few years have been quite the ride. I wouldn't have been able to do my job without their guidance and support. And thank all our sponsors. Our organization could not be as effective without the support of all of our sponsors, our partners and our members. I would also like our current staff members Emma Arian, Gordon Simowitz, Koi Boynton and also our former membership manager Peggy Briggs who had to step away from VFN earlier this year. They all played an important role in getting VFN back on track for 2023.

The Vermont Fresh Network was founded in 1996 with the mission of advancing relationships among farmers, chefs, and consumers to grow markets and eat more locally grown food. VFN has helped to create a culture around our food that values fresh, local ingredients at the center of delicious meals and thriving communities - communities that support their homegrown businesses all the way from the field to the plate and the farm to the glass. It is great to be at ECHO today because Vermont Fresh Network members are also dedicated to a flourishing local food system for the benefit of our environment, our health, and a strong working landscape.

Before we go on to the rest of the day, I want to talk a little about our major focuses in 2023.

- Transparency, increasing network partnerships
- Agritourism & culinary tourism
- Strategic Planning

Transparency and strong partnerships are essential to VFN's mission. And we will continue to cultivate these relationships and work towards strengthening connections. This coming year, we are planning three more networking events around the state. The first is coming up in March in the Northeast Kingdom.

Some of our partnership work also involves supporting the growth of little known products. This year, we are working with the Vermont Tree Nut Processors on market development for oils made from locally grown nuts. They'll have a table up later today, but sure to stop by sample.

Our work in agritourism and culinary tourism is part of Vermont Fresh Network's broader effort to educate the public about local food and making informed choices. This year, we will continue in our commitment to **Building a Larger Narrative Around** the local food and farm experiences that make Vermont special.

This involves deepening and increasing the touch points the public has with local food as it relates to VFN members and members of the DigInVT Partner Associations.

Towards that effort, we are planning a series of Chef farmers market tours for the public and a short podcast series about local food partnerships.

We are also working with partners to officially launch an International Tasting Trail as part of a cross border collaboration that connects existing food, craft beer and wine trails in New York, Ontario, Quebec and Vermont. We'll have more information on all of these projects in the coming months.

As we continue to move beyond the last few years of instability, it is important to take a look at where we've been, where we are and where we should go as an organization.

To that end, the board and staff be working on a strategic plan that will inform VFN's future. To be successful, we'll need your help. We will be reaching out to members for their thoughts and feedback as we move forward on this.

The Annual Meeting *is* a networking event so we encourage you to change tables between sessions to meet and speak with new folks each time. So today if you can, make it a point to meet someone new and learn about them and what they do. Thanks.
