



# Highlights from 2018

## 22nd Annual Forum Dinner

We welcomed **650** enthusiastic participants to the **VFN Annual Forum Dinner** at Shelburne Farms this August, in an event featuring **22** different chefs and over **35** food producers. Every year we draw a mix of regular participants (for over two decades!) & newcomers discovering this event for the first time. **Save the date of August 4th, 2019** for the best meal of the summer!

## A New DigInVT.com

In early 2018 we relaunched the DigInVT.com website - one of the largest **collaborative food & farm tourism** platforms in the country. DigInVT brings together **10** food producer organizations to guide visitors and Vermonters exploring our working landscape & delicious cuisine. Our site visits **more than doubled**, we featured almost **1,000 events** in 2018, grew the **Fresh Feed** to **4,600** subscribers, profiled **537** places, and collaborated on projects including **Vermont Wine Week**, **Open Farm Week**, and the **International Tasting Trail**.

## 4th Annual Open Farm Week

**Open Farm Week** brought curious visitors to over **70** events on **41** farms around the state. VFN managed 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. This is a collaborative project that began at the **Farm to Plate Agritourism Task Force**. In 2019, VFN will co-chair this task force, which works to make Vermont a world-class destination for authentic on-farm and farm-related experiences.

## International Tasting Trail

VFN worked with UVM Extension, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Vermont Department of Tourism, and representatives from Quebec, New York, and Ontario to launch a first-of-its-kind **International Tasting Trail**. The Vermont portion takes visitors along Lake Champlain and is called the **Lake Champlain Tasting Trail**. VFN has funding in 2019 to develop this trail by engaging farms and eateries that are stops along the way, creating materials to tell the story of agriculture in the Lake Champlain Basin, and continue to build the international system.



## Wine Project

Our Vermont wine project has worked with **20 wineries** -- plus distributors, restaurant wine buyers, wine writers, & the wine appreciative public -- to build a stronger market for wines made locally from local ingredients. We sponsored the first **Vermont Wine Week** in March, published guides to Vermont wine tasting and Vermont grapes, offered workshops and a wine pairing event, and led field trips for restaurant groups. Vermont wine sales are growing and our winemakers are garnering national praise -- now is the perfect time to explore Vermont wines.

## Conference Program

We launched the **VFN Conference Program** - a program that helps food system professionals attend nationally significant conferences (& other gatherings outside our region), then share what they learned with the larger VFN network. In 2018 participants attended **Slow Food Nations** in Denver, the **FoodTank Summit on Food Waste** in NYC, and the **Food Loves Tech Expo**, also in NYC. We want Vermonters represented in food discussions all across the country!



## Professional Development

In 2018 we offered two new resources for professional development, **Marketing Webinars** & the **Fresh Insider** newsletter. The Fresh Insider provides twice-monthly news, announcements, original articles like our series on labeling, and notices from our members. Our webinars are presented live, then followed with recordings, notes, and links to more resources - they are part of our effort to reach all regions of the state with professional development opportunities.

We also expanded our **Annual Meeting** and moved it to the end of January. While we still address core VFN business with members in the meeting, we've added more panels, discussion, and networking, and welcome non-members.

## A Growing Network

The Vermont Fresh Network is celebrating its 23rd birthday - and our network is growing! We had **51** new partner members join in 2018, plus a very successful renewal period with an **85%** retention rate. We have **274** partner members, **111** agricultural, **159** culinary, **4** distributors. And through the DigInVT partnership, we have an opportunity to work with over **500** exceptional food businesses across the state. We look forward to working with everyone and continuing to grow in 2019!



**Thank you to our sponsors:** In 2018-2019, the Vermont Fresh Network Affiliate Partners are Black River Produce, Farrell Distributing, Foley Services, and Hotel Vermont. We also have sponsors and funders for each of our individual projects and major events, see our 2018 Annual Financial Report for the full list.