

VFN Annual Meeting 2021: Membership Presentation

Peggy Briggs, Membership and Communications Manager

I am pleased to join the VFN team as Membership and Communications Manager. I joined the team this Fall and learned quickly our membership is in a time of transition in many ways, including in relationship to VFN. Many members have stayed actively engaged and used VFN as a resource during the last two years. Others have paused their membership while navigating a challenging new landscape in the food sector. Our membership goals for 2022 are simple: re-engage current members and bring new folks into the fold.

Despite the obstacles of last year, we are happy to have 13 new members, including Salt and Bubbles Wine Bar and Market, Blake Hill Preserves, Aries Hill Farm, Johnny Seesaw's and Foam Brewers. And let me extend a special welcome to our first new member of 2022 - Rocky Hill Farm in Westford. They grow organic vegetables and raise pastured rabbits. Welcome to all our new members, and please reach out to partner with them in 2022!

We have 63 Gold Barn members who are the chefs that are setting the bar with at least 15 farm partners, purchase 35% or more annually from local food producers, or spend more than \$350,000 annually on locally grown food. On the call today, we welcome Gold Barn member and Board member, Doug Paine of Juniper Bar and Restaurant and Blue Northeast Kitchen of Hotel Vermont; Board member, Eric Warnstedt from Hen of the Wood, Doc Ponds and Prohibition Pig; Linda and Ted Fondula of Odyssey Events; Susanna Keefer of Sussana's Catering; co-owners, Jeff Clarke and Kris Ryan-Clarke of Edelweiss Mountain Deli; and Kate Hays of Wake Robin. Thank you all for your dedication to local sourcing and for your active role in VFN. In the coming year, we will champion the work you do.

This May, we will focus our content on Gold Barn members, and we will be looking for chefs to profile, Gold Barn chef recipes to promote and ideas for our social media

efforts. We are also considering a mentorship program, pairing Gold Barn chefs with members who are eager to reach the GB goal.

As an introduction to new members and a review for others, VFN membership benefits include:

- The use of the iconic VFN sign, stickers and electronic assets, tell consumers you have a high standard for purchasing local food, membership
- Participation in our sister site, DigInVT enables you to access our growing following of people looking for authentic food and farm experiences with our event listings, recommendation lists and the Fresh Feed newsletter that reaches over 8,200 subscribers.
- Networking is an important benefit, starting with our business to business online tool for connecting with VFN partners. The Annual Forum at Shelburne Farms is this summer and is an important opportunity for chefs to convene with other chefs, producers and consumers. We are also hosting four matchmaking events this year - please contact us if you would like to host or participate.

I am here to help you network! Please contact me if you need to update your partner list, get an introduction to another member, or need assistance to expand your marketing efforts of farm and food products. It's my goal to meet the members in 2022. In Q1, I'll be reaching out to farmers and chefs in Franklin and Grand Isle counties to start the year off. I'll be gathering stories, photos and most importantly, learning about your business and how VFN can support you. Please contact me if you'd like a visit!

And finally, think of us as part of your creative team. We are looking to team up with VFN members to create blogs, articles and social media posts. This week we are working with the folks at Farrell Distributing, Edelweiss Mountain Deli, Shrubbly, Skinny Pancake, Bitter Bubble, AquaViTea and Hotel Vermont to devise content including three weeks of Instagram takeovers during Dry January. It's a great way to partner and engage, so please be in touch with your creative ideas!

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

