

Annual Meeting - 2020

Opening Remarks, Goals for 2020, Tara Pereira

Thank you all for coming today. And thank you for making my first year as Executive Director such a great experience. I'm sure I can speak for Zea and Amelia, when I say that it is our privilege to promote our partner members and collaborate with you all on our shared mission. I also want to take the time to thank our board members, our sponsors and our meeting host - the Inn at the Round Barn.

Before we go on to the rest of the day, I want to talk a little about 2020. There is a lot going on, but I'll try to make it quick.

Looking ahead, we'll continue to be focused on:

- Transparency, and our network partnerships
- Agritourism & culinary tourism

Transparency messaging will continue to be a priority in 2020, as it is an essential aspect of VFN's mission and, of course, as we head into 2021.

As we head toward our 25th anniversary, increasing transparency across the food system is more important than ever. We want everyone to know what the VFN logo stands for. This year, we will be highlighting VFN member partnerships as part of a campaign in our outreach and marketing. We have such a wonderful and diverse network of members. We want to see farms promote their restaurant partners and restaurants promote their producers. And we want to share that with the public. In addition, we will continue our work on particular foods, like vermont wine and bringing the public onto farms through Open Farm Week as part of our effort to help everyone learn where their food comes from.

It's important that we keep our brand strong, and effective. Here's what you can do to help us with that.

If anyone thinks a VFN member might be misrepresenting their local purchasing, or a VFN farmer member thinks any restaurant is misrepresenting the purchase of *their* food, we'll look into it. That's what we do.

- Call us if you have a question, email us
- AND of course reply to our verification emails

Agritourism is part of our broader effort in transparency education and offers an increased connection with where our food comes from and how it is produced.

Leading into our agritourism panel, I want to make an official announcement: Vermont Fresh Network has been awarded a three year USDA grant to work on projects to strengthen Vermont's agritourism industry. It's our first federal grant.

This new grant will allow us to improve training in best practices for farms and to help farms translate agritourism activities into ongoing local & regional product sales. We'll also be involved in improving technical assistance for navigating current regulations around agritourism enterprises.

The funds that we'll receive through this grant will:

- Fund our work on Open Farm Week
- Develop resources and technical assistance for farm stays through a program that replaces Vermont Farms! Association
- Collaborate with culinary & agritourism stakeholders across the state
- Additional DigInVT website development funding to increase its effectiveness, and research how DigInVT should develop capabilities to support product sales connected to agritourism

- Advertising funds to promote Vermont agritourism

All *VFN* members are served by the time and resources we've invested in developing *DigiInVT* and our agritourism work. If you aren't open to the public, it is likely that either someone you sell to or buy from is. Sending staff to visit a farm to learn about how our local food is grown and having our farmers visit the business where their products are used and served this part of our mission. We want everyone to understand where their food comes from and how it is produced in Vermont. This can only help strengthen connections between *VFN* members and their partners, and between our members and the public. It sounds like we are going to be pretty busy this year!

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.