

June 4, 2020

DigInVT and Collaborative Marketing

Tara Pereira, Executive Director - Vermont Fresh Network, Managing Partner - DigInVT.com Partnership

Good Morning to you all, I want to say thank you to the Chair and other members of this committee for inviting me to speak.

My name is Tara Pereira, I'm the Executive Director of Vermont Fresh Network. The [Vermont Fresh Network](#) was founded in 1996 in a spirit of partnership and collaboration to bring our state's chefs and farmers together. We work across the food system to build strong relationships between farmers, producers, culinary professionals, and consumers who share similar beliefs, values, and a dedication to the health and strength of Vermont's food and farm economy. **Our 284** partner members can be found in every region of the state.

And as we've seen, heard, and personally experienced the recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on Vermont's culinary and agricultural tourism sector. With the cancelation of many of the featured events of the summer, our producer associations have lost the opportunity to raise vital funds that allow us to continue our important work of helping and supporting our sectors. 2020 will be the first time in 24 years, that Vermont Fresh Network won't be holding our Annual Forum dinner - a public celebration of Vermont restaurants and farms on the first Sunday in August. Because of the current crisis, we have estimated an 85% loss in our operating income for 2020. **2021 will be the Vermont Fresh Network's 25th anniversary and we hope to be here for 25 more. But without funding and support...we won't be.**

Vermont Fresh Network is also the managing partner of DigInVermont (DigInVT) for the DigInVT Partnership. Developed 10 years ago, DigInVT.com is an interactive website that allows users to explore authentic food and farm experiences in Vermont. This online resource combines the information of 10 member-based VT producer organizations in a comprehensive collaborative marketing platform focused on strengthening Vermont's agricultural and culinary tourism industry. With the site, we introduce and tell the story of the people, the places, the foods and beverages that make Vermont special.

DigInVT and the DigInVT partnership is uniquely positioned to support the proposed COVID recovery effort and offers a valuable tool and very effective team that can be utilized to help our local economy in conjunction with the marketing efforts proposed by the Vermont Department of Tourism.

The DigInVT partnership of producer associations meet quarterly to plan and develop promotional efforts for the events and activities that are important to our members. (e.g. Maple Open House Weekend, VT Brewers Association, VT Cheesemakers Festival...etc.) We look for opportunities to connect on shared projects. We share resources, and share experiences as we work together to help our members and Vermont's food tourism economy. Our combined work has established a firm foundation across multiple organizations for the shared goal of strengthening our state's economy.

Website analytics show that DigInVT.com users find actionable information that lets them transition from general awareness of Vermont food and Vermont agriculture into active participation in the local food economy. In addition

to offering a comprehensive way to market Vermont food and farm experiences online, DigInVT has a collaborative information infrastructure that can be leveraged for other projects. **Our database is a foundation for designing campaigns to reach specific targeted audiences and to increase awareness of what is happening in different regions of the state.**

Melissa Corbin of VT Brewers Association and I had a good conversation with Commissioner Pelham yesterday and she looks forward to working with DigInVT under the framework proposed in the draft legislation. DIGINVT and our other member organizations are staffed with skilled marketing professionals and are ready to hit the ground running to support the proposed marketing campaigns and consumer stimulus programs to help with our state's recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. In closing, we have all had to pivot and become more nimble over the last few months. This isn't anything we could have planned for, but we can all work together to move forward in a way that allows us to play a role in our state's recovery.

In addition to the Vermont Department of Tourism and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets as advisory partners, the DigInVT partnership includes:

- Vermont Fresh Network
- Vermont Brewers Association
- Vermont Cheese Council
- Vermont Cider Makers Association
- Vermont Grape and Wine Council
- Vermont Farmers Market Association
- Vermont Fruit Tree Growers Association
- Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association
- Vermont Organic Farm Association.