



Vermont Food Systems

Robin Morris

Founder Mad River Food Hub

Vermont is a great state to do business in - Vermont is a hard state to do business in!

Robin Morris

- Founder Mad River Food Hub - Waitsfield Vermont
- Vermont Land Trust Board of Trustees
- Vermont Farm Fund Advisory Board

Mad River Food Hub (MRFH) - Vision: Local Creation, Local Solutions, Local Vitality.

Commitment to use our assets to support local small food and beverage business growth.

- Opened in 2011 as a business incubator, in 8th year of operation, 10 employees
- Working with approximately 50 farms and value added processor customers.
- Shared Processing - USDA Meat Processing and non-meat processing.
- Cured/Aged meats facility - only facility in Vermont
- Storage - Frozen, Refrigerated and Dry Storage
- Distribution of Foods and Beverages in Vermont
- Education - Vermont Technical College "Meat Cutting" Courses, co-creator UVM Food Hub Management Program
- Marketing - *Mad River Taste* & Mad River Taste Place, Waitsfield, VT

Observations on Mad River Food Hub:

- Reduced enquiries from new and emerging food processing businesses in last 2-3 years
- In state meat prices are high, producers challenged with high costs
- Growth in premium dry aged meat, Food Hub has limited capacity, graduating two customers in 2019, new facilities being built in State
- Regulatory - State meat inspection is in a good place
- Consistent demand in storage, under capacity in frozen storage
- Distribution service has grown out of proportion to the business
- Education courses high quality, limited success in enrollment, 2019 focus on marketing
- Marketing
 - Mad River Taste brand focused on marketing (educating) locals and visitors on Mad River food and beverage products - Mad River Taste Week August 2018 (August 2019), Video Series
 - Mad River Taste Place - retail facility offering only Mad River & Vermont products focused on educating visitors about Vermont Foods and Beverages, home to VT Cheese Council - opened in July 2017, sales continue to grow, challenges with low margins

Key Issue presented to House Agriculture & Forestry Committee:

Vermont's Food System is a competitive and complex market place. Farm2Plate and Working Lands initiatives have been successful in helping grow local supply. Local customer purchasing initiatives have been less successful.

2016 - MRFH/CAE learning journey to Michigan - Key takeaway - Creating the connection with the customer via branding and education.

MRFH's focus for the last 3 years has been on creating a Brand - ***Mad River Taste*** - that represents our local foods and beverages, with a focus on educating our locals and visitor through storytelling and tasting.

Vermont's Food System requires a Vermont Brand that is structured to:

- Promote Vermont's premium Foods and Beverages
- Ensure authenticity, quality and consistency to protect Vermont's reputation

Key Issue presented to House Commerce and Economic Development Committee:

Mad River Food Hub's Key Challenges:

Hiring Staff

- Access to available & affordable workforce housing
- Cost of Medical Insurance
- Ability to offer competitive wages - pressure from more profitable industries
- Workforce skill sets

Operations

- Cell Phone Coverage
- Regulatory work shift