

For Immediate Release:

[DATE]

Contacts:

[CONTACTS]

Farmers and Food Buyers Hook Up at Local Foods Matchmaker Event
“Speed dating” event equals economic development for Vermont

Randolph, Vt – The first Vermont Foods Matchmaker took place at the Three Stallion Inn in Randolph on October 29th. The event brought together over 40 buyers, from the state’s largest supermarkets to specialty shops, to talk one-on-one with Vermont food producers interested in finding new customers. It was a chance for food producers to explore their options in wholesale or indirect markets, while buyers learned their own options for sourcing closer to home.

The Agency of Agriculture also found enthusiastic partners with their co-sponsors the Vermont Grocers’ Association, Vermont Fresh Network and Vermont Hospitality Council.

“The idea for hosting this event began to form as we heard from buyers that they wanted to find more local options, but first they needed an efficient way to have those conversations with interested producers.” explained Helen Labun Jordan, with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

With 400 food related companies in Vermont, that’s a lot of conversations to manage.

The Matchmaker model, which is essentially speed dating, has many advantages for building business relationships. Sellers sign up for 10 minute sessions with buyers, based on a pre-published participant list. Each seller gets a full 10 minutes to make their pitch, so they have time to explain advantages of purchasing local product and address concerns like distribution, volume and price.

Bill Suhr, owner of Champlain Orchards, commented, “It’s a rare opportunity to have a mix of buyers and sellers in one place with time set aside to focus on local foods. Setting up a meeting with just one of these potential buyers could have taken my business all day. Now we’re all in a room and the potential momentum is incredible.”

More than 40 buyers and over 70 sellers participated in the event. The response was greater than anticipated and the event was met with overwhelming enthusiasm.

“Today’s event was super. The topics were relevant and the energy was tangible. Buyers and sellers were connecting-a number of new relationships were formed. . .Statewide collaborations like this are essential to developing a viable local food economy,” commented Meghan Sheradin, Executive Director of the Vermont Fresh Network

This year’s organizers are already starting to plan for 2009.

###