



Anson Tebbetts: Giving thanks for Vermont's strength

The year 2020 — what a year. The pandemic has forced all of us to look closely at our place in the world. Last year at this time, we only saw masks at the dentist or in the operating room. Today, a mask is part of our wardrobe. A year ago, we were shaking hands, hugging and there were no issues with big crowds. Today, we are keeping our distance and limiting the number of people in a group. Last year, the only thing that would close a school was a snowstorm. Today, many learn remotely on the computer and when we do send students to schools, it is not the same as we all try to get everyone safe from this virus.

Despite all the challenges and heartache, we have so much to be thankful for. Vermonters stood tall and sacrificed to limit the spread of the pandemic. Vermont's straight-forward, science-based approach has limited large outbreaks and when one occurred, Vermonters rallied and limited more illness. Vermonters are doing their best by washing their hands, wearing masks, keeping their distance, and staying home if they are sick.

We are also focused on Vermont's economic health. The pandemic has destroyed business plans and forced some operations to close. Others are doing their best to survive. The Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets spent the summer and fall distributing millions of dollars to farmers, producers, slaughterhouses, value-added food businesses and those who make their living off the land. We were grateful federal CARES dollars were available to hundreds of agricultural businesses so they might survive and come back stronger in 2021.

As agriculture weathers this pandemic, Vermonters are doing their best to support them with their pocketbook. During the holidays, shoppers can help their neighbors by buying local. You can find a large selection of local meats, cheeses, maple, and valued-added Vermont products in your grocery store. You also can thank a farmer by shopping at a farm stand or signing up for local products at a CSA or shop at a winter farmers' market.

Buying from your neighbors is also just a click or two away on the computer. Many businesses have set up new websites to buy their products on-line. Vermont can be sent around the world or to your home. The Vermont Fresh Network's Local Holiday Meal Guide helps you find where to shop for local turkey and more. You can also plan a trip to a holiday farmers' market and use the **DiginVT** map to search by category and location for other great ingredients to complete your meal.

The pandemic means we have new neighbors as well. Many have decided to leave the cities for the hills of Vermont. Welcome to our little corner of the world where we are thankful agriculture is part of our daily lives. Vermont is a state where you can really find where your food comes from. The milk that went into making the cheese could have been produced next door. Or if you cook with maple, it's likely you can visit that sugarhouse and see how the sweetness is made. Again, we are thankful for this opportunity to be so close to our farmers and producers.

We are thankful for those who keep us safe and healthy and if possible, on a routine which seems like a luxury under a pandemic. So, as we enter the season of giving thanks, we raise our glasses and toast all those who make sacrifices to support our neighbors. We are thankful for those who provide us with fresh local food and those keeping us safe under COVID-19. Thank you.

*Anson Tebbetts is Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Food & Markets
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