As we start to come together after a year of social distancing, you’re making sure Vermont neighbors can enjoy summertime meals.
Summer’s arrival in Vermont always feels like a new beginning. And never more so than this year. While nothing is “normal,” many of us are venturing out more and craving summer activities like picnics, barbecues, or long days at the lake or in the woods with family and friends. Gardeners and local farms are transplanting seedlings, anticipating a bountiful harvest. Like the summer rush of green that gives our mountains their name, we’re bursting forth to reconnect. Hesitantly at first, but with more confidence as time goes on.

Because of you, Vermont neighbors who still need a hand will have locally grown food on those picnic tables, at barbecues, and along for hikes. Recovery will take some time, yet we’ll be here, together, until the need is met.

While we were separated, we remained joined in a chain of action and compassion to ensure that millions of meals were served on tens of thousands of Vermont tables. As we physically come together again, let’s keep taking action and make sure that this recovery includes everyone.

Thank You!

John Sayles
CEO
Diane is living on a fixed income. After paying bills, there isn’t much money left for food — so Diane visits her local food shelf. Thanks to friends like you, she’s able to bring home fresh foods and pantry staples and has the ingredients to cook delicious meals for her grandsons.

Diane is cheerful and bubbly and proudly shows off pictures of her twin grandsons at the first chance she gets. After spending just a few minutes with her, it’s easy to see that Diane is a ray of sunshine for everyone around her.

What might be harder to spot about the 77-year-old is that she struggles with hunger.

Diane is living on a fixed income after retiring from a career in home care.

“After I pay my rent, electricity, and other bills, what’s left?” Diane says. “You know, not much for food.”

Diane is signed up for SNAP benefits, a program that provides her with some money each month to purchase groceries. But it’s not enough to get her through the month, and she needs some extra help.

To make ends meet, Diane visits a food shelf and is able to take home food she otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford at the store — staples like protein, dairy, and shelf-stable goods. Thanks to you, food shelves in every county in Vermont are stocked and ready to support community members’ well-being.

“I’d be eating much less than I do now if it weren’t for this,” Diane admits. “This is a true blessing.”

And the food Diane receives means more to her than having a full plate for herself. It means she has enough to cook for her two grandsons.

Because you help keep shelves and refrigerators stocked with food, families and neighbors across the state are able to come together around tables full with summertime favorites. Whether it’s grilled chicken or sweet corn, slaw, melon, or strawberry shortcake … after more than a year of being isolated from our loved ones, it’s especially joyful to eat together once more.
A family enjoys food they know and love, thanks to you

Maria lives in rural Vermont without her own transportation. Getting to the grocery store can be challenging, and finding the ingredients her family prefers is even harder. Because of your help and community effort, Maria can receive boxes of local, culturally familiar food directly at her home.

“I have no favorites. I like everything,” Maria laughs, when talking about her favorite foods. “I like to eat a lot of eggs and beans … I like to make an egg and spinach omelet.”

Maria, who is from Guatemala, lives in the Northeast Kingdom with her children and her husband who works on a dairy farm. She has lived in Vermont for seven years.

Maria likes to cook, and she does most of the cooking for her household. When the kids aren’t in school, they like to help her. “Sometimes they want to help and sometimes they don’t,” chuckles Maria. **But it can be difficult for Maria’s family to access the food they like to cook and eat.**

“We can’t find some ingredients,” shares Maria. “Like seasonings.”

There is also the challenge of getting food home, a common experience for people who live in rural Vermont and don’t have access to transportation.

“Sometimes a friend brings me [to the grocery store] or someone else. Like, sometimes my boss brings me,” says Maria. “Sometimes once. Sometimes two times a week. Because often the vegetables don’t last long in our house.”

Additionally, COVID-19 has affected the type and quantity of food available on grocery store shelves. Even if Maria
finds a ride to the store, it has become increasingly difficult to find certain food items that are familiar to her family.

Maria explains, “Here in the stores, sometimes we have not been able to get what we need from the store because they were closed, or some products from other countries … sometimes the products are delayed or the products can’t get into the US because of the virus.”

Now, thanks to community collaboration and your support, Maria and her family are able to enjoy local, culturally specific food delivered right to their home. Food boxes are intentionally packed with Vermont-grown produce and fresh eggs, and veggie varieties and other food items are selected based on participant input.

Maria shares that the responsive food boxes have allowed her family to incorporate more fresh vegetables and greens into their diet. Her favorite part of the boxes? “The salads,” she says. “They are great.”

Because of your dedication to your community, migrant farmworkers who keep Vermont’s dairies running have also been able to keep fresh, familiar food on the table through a particularly trying time.

Thank you for helping to make local and meaningful food accessible to everyone in Vermont.

*Maria’s family is participating in a pilot program exploring a local food home delivery model that addresses food insecurity amongst the migrant farmworker population in Vermont. This original interview was conducted in Spanish.

Are you interested in leaving a gift in your will?

Over the years, many donors have informed us of their intention to include a gift to the Vermont Foodbank in their wills. Solving hunger takes generations. You can join these supporters and make sure help is always there by including the Foodbank in your will or estate plan.

Request your informational brochure today by contacting Allison Mindel at (802) 477-4108 or amindel@vtfoodbank.org.
The summer of 2020 was the summer that wasn’t. No gatherings. People staying in and keeping to themselves.

Now, with the opening-up of Vermont, there’s excitement in the air. The smell of outdoor cooking drifts through neighborhoods and sounds of laughter and small talk come from backyards.

For Eric, co-owner of Burlington-based Pitchfork Farm, the return to sharing food with friends and family at backyard barbecues and celebrations is the return to normalcy he’s been waiting for.

“Like most people in Vermont, we took [social distancing] pretty seriously,” Eric says about last summer. “We listened to the advice of our elected officials, the advice of scientists, the CDC, and we opted to not congregate in any real way.”

This year, it’s a return to pre-pandemic food-focused gatherings, and Eric is excited for a joint celebration coming up and happy to share what he’ll be bringing.

“We’re planning a big get-together this weekend for our birthdays,” he says. “I got these beautiful gem romaine heads that are poppin’ off right now, so we’ll probably do like wedge salads. And my personal favorite of our ferments … it’s a spicy, funky red cabbage-based kraut that’s got a lot of habanero in it. It’s really good on a burger or a hot dog.”

And there’s more that Eric is excited about for 2021. As a farmer whose business provides food to restaurants and stores throughout Vermont, last year was difficult for Eric and co-owner Rob. Eric says seeing the chefs, servers, produce buyers, and store employees that he’s come to know as friends struggle due to closures was difficult to say the least. “It was really hard talking to chefs, talking to restaurant owners and just watching how stressed out they were and how terrible it was. I’m excited for a return to normalcy and for people to get back out there …”
Eric shares that 2020 wasn’t a disaster for Pitchfork Farm. Business was down, but the farm continued to get produce out into the community and onto the plates of neighbors facing hunger, thanks to your support. Because of you, the Foodbank is able to purchase local food from Pitchfork, and other Vermont farms, to distribute to people facing hunger. And Pitchfork Farm hosts gleaning volunteers who rescue excess produce to share with neighbors, as well. Being part of these programs and helping the Vermont community, even before the pandemic, is something Eric feels proud that Pitchfork Farm can play a role in.

“It’s tremendously important,” Eric says of his work with the Foodbank. The roughly 30-acre farm situated along the Winooski River grows cabbages, beets, carrots, and winter squashes that are distributed through the Foodbank. “We grow very healthy food, and it’s important that the more vulnerable in our communities, not just Burlington, but all of Vermont, it’s important that they have access to fresh, healthy food as well. We’re tremendously proud of the small part we can play in that.”

And with summer here at last, and the return to normalcy, there’s one crop in particular that Eric is waiting for and is excited to be sharing with friends, family, and Vermont.

“You just can’t beat a watermelon,” Eric says. “Cutting one open in July or August on an 85 degree day, 90 percent humidity, when you don’t have any water at hand, but you got a watermelon, there’s nothing better.”
The pandemic has changed a lot about our lives, but it hasn’t changed our basic human rights. If you or someone you know needs help filling the refrigerator, please visit our website at vtfoodbank.org, or reach out at (802) 476-3341. We’re in this together.

We all have a right to nourishing food.