

For Immediate Release:

October 29, 2008

Contacts:

Kelly Loftus 802-828-3829

Helen Labun Jordan 802-828-3828

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 its finest restaurants as well as non profit groups such as the Vermont Foodbank, 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 during a working day devoted to exploring ways to get more local foods into state government facilities this spring,” explained Helen Labun Jordan, with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. “We heard from many buyers that they would like to find more local options, they just needed an efficient way to have those conversations with interested producers.”

“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. I commend the VT Agency of Agriculture for spearheading this event. Statewide collaborations like this are essential to developing a viable local food economy,” commented Meghan Sheradin, Executive Director of the Vermont Fresh Network

“The timing of this event is perfect considering the increased interest in purchasing local,” said Jim Harrison, President of the Vermont Grocers’ Association. “The forum provided an excellent opportunity for our supermarkets, Co-ops and individual markets to make new contracts and to meet new suppliers.”

“Vermont’s agriculture and food industries are an important sector of our economy. The Vermont Specialty Food Association estimates there are nearly 400 food-related companies in Vermont generating \$1 billion in revenues annually,” said Mike Quinn, Vermont Commissioner of Economic Development. “Providing producers with an opportunity to sell to these companies is a way to strengthen both sectors.”

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.

“Based on the great response we received this year, we will certainly look into making this an annual event. The goal was to create opportunities for farmers, food producers and buyers to contract with each other to get more local foods in more outlets,” said Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Anson Tebbetts. “The key is to put more local foods on more dinner plates to support Vermont farmers and the Vermont economy.”

###