



Vermont Council on Rural Development

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Fairfield's New Library Partners with Online Farmers Market

In one busy month Fairfield opened a beautiful new library, launched a community newsletter, and unveiled an online farmers market.

Fairfield is a town of 700 households in Franklin County, chock full of dairy farms, maple sugar producers and many other farmers and artisans. During the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Community Visit process in fall 2010, Fairfield residents identified top priority needs of improving community communication and advancing agricultural development. Members of the local e-Vermont steering committee saw how digital resources could be tapped to meet both challenges.

On the agricultural front, Fairfield residents expressed a desire to launch a buy-local campaign and build a Fairfield Agriculture Brand. A traditional farmers market would seem like a logical initial step, except that Fairfield's small size and proximity to Burlington lead producers to make the drive south to bigger crowds on Saturday mornings.

Instead, Fairfield opened an online farmers market through the Yourfarmstand.com ^[1] platform, in which participants place orders each week by Wednesday night and producers then drop goods off at the Bent Northrop Library the following day. After less than six months of operation, the market has attracted 130 members and 30 producers while facilitating more than \$7000 in sales. They continue to add members and vendors each week, including turkey producer Jonathan Gates and the Vermont Cranberry Company just in time for Thanksgiving!

On the communications front, a community newsletter was a core focus, and providing a digital option opened the door to potential savings of both budget and labor. As of November, about 40 people in town had signed up for the e-newsletter version, thereby eliminating roughly 10 percent of the copies that needed to be printed, folded, and mailed.

[Front Porch Forum](#) ^[2] and feedback tools on Fairfield's new municipal website fill complementary community communication niches by fostering dialogue on local matters. One out of five Fairfield households are already subscribing to Front Porch Forum.

e-Vermont's Fairfield steering committee is pleased with the initial results and determined to build off the early momentum. The committee is currently gathering prizes for a raffle drawing with "tickets" given to online subscribers to Fairfield News as well as members of the online farmers

market.

It's no accident that the new library, community newsletter, and farmers market all popped up simultaneously. As Community Librarian Kristen Hughes says, "We've not only built a beautiful building, but we've created a way for people to connect to their communities."

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[2] <http://frontporchforum.com/>

[3] <https://www.vtrural.org/programs/e-vermont/community-stories>

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