

**Coming soon to a computer near you—New Hampshire's first
Virtual Farmers' Market!**

By

Gail McWilliam Jellie, Director, Division of Agricultural Development
NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food

The NH Farm to Restaurant Connection is spearheading the development of a new website that will allow chefs, food service buyers and others to shop for New Hampshire products online, as their schedules allow. Products will be delivered directly from the farm to their location through a variety of shipping options arranged with the farm.

The site has been under construction since August and is now being tested by volunteers to assess operation and ease of use. It is expected to go "live" before the end of the year. Sponsors hope that the website, called "New Hampshire's Virtual Farmers' Market" will help restaurants, schools and other food service buyers more handily (and therefore more frequently) source New Hampshire products.

Demand for New Hampshire products for use in restaurants has been steadily increasing. But a common frustration expressed by buyers is "How do I *easily* find New Hampshire products—I don't have time to call half a dozen farms to find and order my products for the week." The Virtual Farmers' Market gives buyers a central location to shop for a diversity of products. "Chefs can sit at their computer with a cup of coffee, peruse the offerings and place their orders with a click of the mouse," says Charlie Burke, President of the NH Farm to Restaurant Connection, "The concept of this website is very exciting to those who have heard about it. We expect the site to get a lot of use when it's available."

On the seller's end, farmers will be able to create a customized listing on the website where they can provide detail about products offered, price and shipping options. They will be able to go on the site as needed to update information—a listing will expire within in a specific timeframe to make sure the most current information is available. Once an order is placed, it goes directly to the farm (s) involved, via email, where it will be confirmed by the farmer and payment terms established.

After the site is up and functioning, use may expand to general consumer purchases for home use. Emphasis will be on commercial purchases to begin with.

Funding for the New Hampshire Virtual Farmers' Market came from project partners, NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food, UNH Office of Sustainability Programs, Farm Credit's AgEnhancement Program and the NH Farm to Restaurant Connection. The NH Farm to Restaurant Connection is a standing committee within the NH Made statewide marketing organization.

For more information about the New Hampshire Virtual Farmers' Market, contact Gail McWilliam Jellie, NH Dept of Agriculture, Markets & Food, tel. 271-3788 or email gmcwilliam@agr.state.nh.us.

###