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Op-ED: Farmers and Food Business Lead Vermont in the Age of the New Normal

By Secretary of Agriculture Anson Tebbetts

Agriculture has quietly gone about its business for decades. Stores shelves have always been stocked with an endless supply of milk, meat, produce and so much more.

The picture changed overnight when COVID-19 entered our world. Consumers rushed to make sure they had enough food as they began to self-isolate in hopes of slowing the spread of the virus.

This new world has made us all adapt and change our behavior. We really don't know how long the new normal will last, but as Vermont responds, we see so many reacting calmly and compassionately. From those working in health care and childcare to those on the farm, all are helping lead us through this pandemic.

While there may be disruptions in your shopping routine, you can be confident our farmers are working to make sure Vermont and the world continues to be fed:

- ✓ The cows are milked;
- ✓ The meat plants are open;
- ✓ The bread is baked;
- ✓ The maple is produced;
- ✓ The greens are growing;
- ✓ And yes, spring is coming.

In short, the food supply chain is there and will be there. Yes, there will be disruptions, but farmers and producers are great at what they do. They will deliver as they have for decades. The truckers, distributors, warehouse workers, shelf stockers and cashiers are there for us too.

At the same time, we know many are suffering. We are thinking of those in the hospitality, beverage and restaurant industry. Many are now on the sidelines waiting for the world to open for business, once again.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is working on short-term and long-term strategies to get us through this. Our economic development team is talking with farmers, producers, retailers and those who make a living off the land so we can respond as quickly as we can. If you have suggestions or need help, please contact us at: agr.covidresponse@vermont.gov

The can-do attitude is alive and well in the Green Mountains, as it has been for centuries. Let's commit to "we can do this" and we *will* do this – together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. S. Tebbetts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anson Tebbetts | Secretary of Agriculture, Food & Markets