

Pandemic-Era Delivery Services Bring Local Food to Your Front Door

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- Sally Pollak © *Seven Days*
- Kyle Doda (left) and Betsy Simpson of 1000 Stone Farm in Brookfield making a delivery in Burlington

Depending on whom you ask, online shopping and food delivery apps have either ruined us or made modern life worth living. During the COVID-19 pandemic, placing orders with a click has become preferable to browsing in person — and only part of the boom can be linked to people looking to support the United States Postal Service.

According to a [Hartman Group report](#) released in September, "the need for safety and security [is] a fundamental driver of consumer food sourcing decisions." The report explains that shoppers' concern about exposure to COVID-19 "shapes every choice they make" about how and where they shop for food. Forty-eight percent of respondents said they shopped via online-only or direct-to-consumer outlets more often in the previous 30 days than they had six months before, just before the pandemic.

Vermont businesses have stepped up — or started up — to join the world of grocery delivery and meet that increased direct-to-consumer demand. Farmers, bakers, grocery store owners, restaurants, specialty food producers and tech startups are among those now stocking online shelves and loading refrigerated trucks to bring local food to front stoops all over the state. Here are five delivery services working to fill your freezer and pile groceries into your pantry.

— *J.B.*

Growing and Trucking

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- Sally Pollak © *Seven Days*
- Delivery from 1000 Stone Farm

1000 Stone Farm, Brookfield; weekly deliveries in Burlington and Montpelier for \$5, or free for orders of \$100 or more. Online ordering is open Sunday through Wednesday.

Over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we ... oops, hang on, my bad! We're not going anywhere this year. But Kyle Doda and Betsy Simpson of 1000 Stone Farm in Brookfield will cross a river, truck through the woods and come to you.

The central Vermont farmers make home deliveries on Saturdays in Burlington and on Tuesdays in Montpelier. Their goods range from organic vegetables grown on their home farm to cheese, yogurt, bread, meat and specialty items produced by other Vermont farmers and makers. The weekly food runs amount to a mini Vermont grocery store on wheels. (No toilet paper.)

The delivery service started in the summer when, due to changes at the Burlington Farmers Market, only one farmer of the 1000 Stone pair was needed to run their market booth. This freed the other farmer — Doda or Simpson — to make deliveries to CSA customers who typically pick up their shares at the market.

The service was designed for customers who, because of the pandemic, felt more comfortable getting their food at home, Doda said. Since 1000 Stone farmers were already making individual food drops in Burlington, they decided to expand delivery beyond their CSA customer base and keep going after the market closed for the season.

Burlington and Montpelier residents can order from 1000 Stone Farm's online store to purchase an array of local food, including the farm's Brussels sprouts, spinach, lettuce, onions, carrots, beets, garlic, potatoes, mushrooms and more.

For regular customers, delivery is a chance for farmer and consumer to connect, even if it's a momentary, "Hey, what's up?" Doda said. (The delivery can be contactless.) For Doda, the 100-mile-plus route he drives on Saturdays is a chance to get more local food to more people, an endeavor he cares deeply about.

"When we look at the whole picture of the Vermont economy and where we find ourselves in this moment of turmoil, local food and agriculture is a necessity," the 35-year-old farmer said.

Doda founded 1000 Stone Farm in 2013. He added a self-serve farm store in the summer of 2019. Like the delivery service, the store sells locally sourced products that augment the harvest from 1000 Stone Farm's four productive acres.

"We're carrying 20 different local businesses or farm products that are getting business through our business," Doda said. "The whole point is to get more local food into more local homes in Vermont, while making it financially sustainable for farms."

The store at the Brookfield farm is open every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. If you forgot sweet potatoes or decide you need half a gallon of chocolate milk to go with your holiday cider, you're in luck. The 1000 Stone Farm store will be open on Thanksgiving.

"Sure," Doda said, of staying open for the holiday. "I'm not going to be hanging out with anybody else."

— *S.P.*

Global Goods

click to enlarge



- Melissa Pasanen
- Global pantry items from Asian Mart

[Asian Mart](#), Essex Junction, 310-1332; delivery starting end of November, within 10 miles (minimum order to be determined).

Damber Adhikari didn't need to deploy his Champlain College degree in digital forensics to reveal that 2020 called for building an online ordering system for Asian Mart, his newly expanded global grocery store in Essex Junction.

"Every business is going in the direction of online ordering," Adhikari, 32, said.

Once the order portal is up on his website, the young entrepreneur will add home delivery service by the end of November. Customers will be able to place and receive orders for fresh banana flowers, Kewpie mayonnaise and frozen cassava without leaving their homes.

Adhikari knows his way around technology and understands the demands of business in 2020. Delivery was not in the plans until the pandemic. But now, he acknowledged, "People want to stay away from other people."

"Every business is going in the direction of online ordering." Damber Adhikari

When Adhikari bought Asian Mart, formerly Everest Asian Market, in November 2017, it was located on the Pearl Street side of the Post Office Square mall in a 2,000-square-foot space. After the Backstage Pub closed in March 2019, his landlord offered him the larger space in the back of the building. Adhikari undertook significant renovations and moved his market into more than double the square footage in June 2020. He runs it with the help of his wife, Uma.

The business, he said, was started by someone originally from Vietnam with a focus on ingredients that the community could not find easily in local supermarkets. The second owner was Nepali and added a new set of products. Adhikari himself was just 4 years old when his family fled ethnic persecution in Bhutan. After 17 years in a Nepalese refugee camp, they resettled in Vermont in 2009.

[click to enlarge](#)



- Melissa Pasanen
- Damber and Uma Adhikari of Asian Mart

Adhikari has continued to add items at the request of customers missing the tastes of faraway homelands. He stocks liver spread from Argentina and cornmeal from Venezuela; noodles from Korea, Thailand and Japan; an earth-toned rainbow of lentils used across southern Asia; and African palm oil and the mustard oil used in his own kitchen. Freezer cases hold ube and young coconut ice cream from the Philippines, whole frozen squid, and "so many dumplings," Adhikari said.

In the coolers, south Indian dosa batter sits next to tubs of tofu pudding. There is even the infamous, barely Vermont-related Vermont Curry, a popular seasoning base from Japan. "I don't know half of the stuff," he said with a laugh. "A lot of stuff you can't get anywhere else in Vermont."

A sign in Vietnamese at the register advertises fresh squid and catfish. Adhikari announces on the market's Facebook page when he has fresh blue crabs and the highlights of twice-weekly deliveries of fresh fruits and vegetables sourced from Boston and New York. He

routinely carries lotus root, half a dozen kinds of eggplant, curry and lime leaves, fresh bamboo shoots, longan fruits, and small sweet mangoes.

The business should properly be called Global Mart at this point, Adhikari conceded, but changing an established business name is a project for another year.

— *M.P.*

Data Base



- Jordan Barry
- Delivery from Local Maverick

Local Maverick, Burlington; Friday delivery to Chittenden County locations for \$5.

Ryan Nakhleh doesn't mince words when he talks about Amazon's impact on Vermont's economy.

"Our money is slowly being siphoned out of our communities with transactions on those digital platforms," he said.

He hopes that his technology and marketing startup, Local Maverick, can help recapture some of those dollars for local producers — along with the user data that online platforms collect with every click.

"Even when local businesses earn a spot on those bigger platforms, it's still a problem because our data is leaving, too," Nakhleh, 27, explained. Those data give the Amazons of the world insight into what consumers want — and how to draw them back for another sale.

Local Maverick partnered with the Burlington Farmers Market to launch online ordering site BFM Direct in August 2020. When the market ended for the season in October, that pilot program became Maverick Market. The online platform purchases items wholesale from local farmers and food producers, offering customers a one-stop shop with weekly delivery and pickup options.

Beyond eggs and kimchi, Maverick Market also fights the algorithms with producer profiles, sharing the stories behind the gourmet marshmallows and sourdough it sells.

"I'm someone who always wanted to buy local, but I never fully got there," Nakhleh said. "Speaking to all these farmers, food producers and local businesses, that storytelling makes all the difference.

"We want to make that easier to connect for lazy people like me," he said with a laugh. "To not only shop local but also to meet the people behind the food."

Maverick Market has also started a digital cooking magazine called Maverick Kitchen. Recipes give customers ideas for how to cook the chicken they purchase from Maple Wind Farm, onions from Hudak Farm and kale from 1000 Stone Farm. (One-pan chicken and kale skillet, anyone?)

The market offers meal kits, which include all the ingredients needed for dishes such as veggie-stuffed beef burgers and fries — complete with a wedge of Stony Pond Farm's Swallow Tail Tomme cheese and a loaf of Slowfire Bakery's country-style sourdough bread.

Local Maverick launched BFM Direct with products from five Burlington Farmers Market vendors. Since the transition to Maverick Market, that number has grown to nearly 20 local farms and food businesses. The online store is stocked with items such as Nomadic Kitchen's handcrafted marshmallows, ice cream from Sisters of Anarchy, chocolate bars from NU Chocolat, macarons from Matryoshka's Bakery, Bakeology's maple Keto granola, kombucha and other ferments from Sobremesa, apples from Windfall Orchards, Eco Bean + Greens' smoothie kits, teas from Misuba, Fortify Foods' plant-based shakes, cured meats from Agricola Farm, and more.

The site will grow to include about 40 vendors in the next month, Nakhleh said. He has a whole team in place to handle the logistics of an influx of vendors — and, hopefully, orders. Local Maverick is also looking for a retail space, where products would be available for walk-in customers. In the meantime, the company has expanded its current space on Main Street and plans to add pickup days.

"This community loves to support local," Nakhleh said. "That willingness to try new things and support new local businesses is exciting to see."

— J.B.

Meat Here



- Melissa Pasanen © *Seven Days*
- Snug Valley Farm delivery, including the farm's meats and pet treats plus bread, dairy and cured sausage from other producers

Snug Valley Farm, East Hardwick, 472-6185; weekly free deliveries to Lamoille and Washington counties and greater Burlington for minimum order of \$30. Order by Monday afternoon for Wednesday or Thursday delivery.

Farmer Ben Nottermann believes his small, family-owned business owes a debt to Amazon.

In mid-March, when Snug Valley Farm abruptly lost most of its wholesale customers, the family pivoted hard to sell more beef and pork directly to home cooks. Nottermann believes that acceptance of doorstep deliveries of bacon, steaks and kielbasa was eased by

the online retail behemoth. "Amazon has helped," the farmer explained. "People have grown to expect a delivery option."

Snug Valley built on an email list from previous years of monthly winter "meat-ups" that catered to its Burlington-area summer farmers market customers. Over the pandemic, the list has grown from 300 to 800 households, generating 15 to 40 weekly deliveries.

But now, customers don't meet the farmers at a central location; a white van painted with a curly-tailed pig and mustachioed cow (in honor of Nottermann's father's distinctive facial hair) pulls up to their door.

The East Hardwick farm is located on Pumpkin Lane; Nottermann's childhood pumpkin patch helped pay his college bills. An only child, he came home in 2010 to join his parents, Helm and Nancy. Nottermann, now 38, and his wife feel lucky to be raising their 3-year-old son with close ties to the land and his grandparents. "I grew up on a farm and I loved it," Nottermann said.

In 2019, wholesale demand prompted Snug Valley to scale up to 450 to 500 hogs a year and 120 head of 100 percent grass-fed beef. Revenue was about 60 percent wholesale to restaurants and schools, as well as consolidators such as Middlesex-based Farmers to You, which delivers to Boston-area families. The rest came largely through a handful of summer farmers markets.

The Nottermanns had been working on an online store, but other tasks kept bumping it down the to-do list. Suddenly, it became top priority. "It took a global pandemic to put the last six hours in to finish the online store," Nottermann noted wryly.

Even when some summer farmers markets started up, Snug Valley didn't return. Ben said his parents are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications due to age, so it seemed safer to reduce the family's exposure.

Snug Valley has partnered with farmer friends who also lost markets to deliver their cheeses, milk, yogurt, bread, cultured butter, maple products and European-style cured meats to customers. They will soon add chicken. Even the family pooch can partake with Snug Valley liver snacks.

Delivery has helped Snug Valley soldier on. Compared with farmers markets, the sales are more predictable and are not subject to inclement weather or competing events. "It's really surprised me pleasantly. I do think this has longevity," Nottermann said. Still, he's looking forward to the return of wholesale business. "We're not going backwards, but we're not setting the world on fire."

— *M.P.*

Direct Cause



- Jordan Barry © *Seven Days*
- Bakery and pantry items from Kingdom Direct

Kingdom Direct Food Delivery, Irasburg; weekly deliveries to parts of the Northeast Kingdom, Lamoille, Washington and Chittenden counties with \$30 minimum order. Order by Sunday night for Thursday or Friday delivery.

Thomas McCurdy never felt particularly passionate about grocery delivery. But that hasn't stopped the professional pastry chef from leaning into tasks such as shopping for refrigerated trucks and taking glamour shots of dried cranberries for an online store.

"A phrase I've used a lot this year is, 'Well, this is my life now,'" McCurdy, 33, said with a chuckle. "When we first launched Kingdom Direct back in April, it was very much just a reaction to COVID. We thought it would be a temporary little thing to get us through perhaps until farmers markets started or, you know, once COVID goes away in a couple months."

Kingdom Direct is now in its 33rd week of selling McCurdy's baked goods; weekly "dinner parties"; prepared foods; eggs, cheese and other products from area farms; pantry staples; and pork, beef and flowers from Ardelia Farm, which McCurdy owns with his husband, Bailey Hale. He says the service is here to stay, at least for a while.

Pre-pandemic, the flowers Hale grew were mostly destined for florists and events in New York City; McCurdy's pastries were sold at the Burlington Farmers Market and served at weddings. With Kingdom Direct, the couple is increasing the farm's local presence one flower arrangement, box of peanut-butter brownies, cellophane bag of spiced-oatmeal-everything cookies and whole pumpkin-spice-latte cake at a time.

When Kingdom Direct first launched, its weekly dinner parties for two were based on dishes McCurdy served as part of his 52 Dinners project in 2019. As business has grown, though, he's had to rethink the meals from a production standpoint.

"There isn't too much rhyme or reason to it now," McCurdy explained. "I said earlier this summer that I had to stop thinking like a chef and start thinking more like a lunch lady. A fancy lunch lady."



- Jordan Barry © *Seven Days*
- Chinese dinner party for two from Kingdom Direct

A recent dinner party featured Chinese takeout-style dishes, including vegetable lo mein, sesame broccoli with chicken, sweet-and-spicy meatballs, and two takeout containers of white rice, "because one just isn't quite enough." The order came with two sets of red-wrapped wooden chopsticks.

The operation has grown since the spring, too. Kingdom Direct now employs a delivery

driver for its refrigerated van and an "almost full-time" kitchen person, chef Liz Chadwick, in addition to McCurdy and a bakery assistant. Ardelia's director of operations and e-commerce, Emily Dolly, handles order processing, organizing delivery routes and answering customer questions.

Eighty percent of Kingdom Direct's weekly orders are from repeat customers, McCurdy estimated, and many order every single week.

"It's been really special the way people have incorporated it into their lives," he said.

"Rather than just being a reaction to not being able to go to a restaurant or not feeling comfortable going to a store, it's more like, 'Oh, let's see what the dinner is this week.'"

—*J.B.*

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