

**tasty tv**  
BY GEORGE DICKIE

Erin French



## How 'The Lost Kitchen' chef Erin French learned to roll with the COVID-19 blows

Viewers of Season 1 of "The Lost Kitchen" on discovery+ got to bear witness to an entrepreneur's mind in action, as restaurateur Erin French brainstormed ways to keep her Freedom, Maine, eatery The Lost Kitchen afloat amid the lockdown conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among her solutions was to create an online farmers' market, where she could peddle the meats, seafood, cheeses, produce and other locally sourced ingredients that would normally go into her menu items to retail customers, a venture that turned out to be quite successful.

Needless to say her vendors, who were also feeling the financial stresses of quarantine, loved her for it. But it also underscored to her an important point about the industry she's in: That it's not just a group of buyers and sellers but a financial ecosystem, where if one piece falters, the community feels it.

"To be able to support people and small makers in a place you call home, I think there's no greater way (than) to eat the food that's grown in the place you live ...," French reasons. "I had this black box of the most amazing farmers who were making the most food and it

was like my Rolodex of the best makers around. And I got to share that through COVID with my customers and saying, 'I'm going to get this food straight to you because I can't cook it for you right now.' And that was a really nice piece of joy to be able to share all of those secret ingredients and to introduce people to those farmers in this place because that's how you thrive in the place you call home."

"The Lost Kitchen" returns for its second season Friday, Oct. 29, continuing to follow the day-to-day machinations of French and her staff at the rural Maine eatery about 30 miles northeast of Augusta, where she has a long waiting list of diners from around the country and world waiting to feast on dishes created from the best of locally sourced ingredients.

"If I had to tell you (one of the) things that made this place successful, it would be sourcing local food," she says. "I mean, part of it is that I believe that vegetables feel jet lag and the closer (to harvest) you get them, the fresher they're going to taste. And even as a cook, it's shaped me because I never make a grocery list and go shopping. I look at what there is available and then it's my job to figure out what to do with it."

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