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Feeding the Valley Alliance

Testimony for the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
Food Security Roadmap, January 24, 2024

Good morning, Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

My name is Monica Collins, and I am the director of a local volunteer non-profit, Feeding the Valley Alliance. We serve the communities of Rochester, Hancock, and Granville by distributing fresh food at no cost to residents in need. Our funding comes from grants and donations. I also work at Vermont Law & Graduate School with Masters students – many of whom focus on food and agriculture law and policy.

I became involved with the Roadmap because it was critical to have representation from small rural organizations and communities, given the differences in the challenges we face. I have worked on farms and am a former select board chair, a current regional planning commission rep for my community, and someone who has experienced food insecurity.

The focus of my message today is that there are existing tools for communities to work with to ensure food access in general and in the context of emergency preparedness, and resilience. An example is the Farm to Plate Network's Food Access Toolkit for Local Planning published in 2019, shortly before the pandemic began. Understandably, focus shifted but now it's 2024, and the toolkit should be something that communities are aware of to incorporate food access planning into their Town Plans. This information will help them keep issues like access to farmland, economic development for local food stores, and emergency management, in mind as they update their plans.

Where I see the disconnect is that there is often funding available to communities for planning, but that same level of funding is not readily available for implementation of those plans. Town plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, and Local Emergency Management plans are all great tools that can incorporate food security generally and in the context of emergencies, but smaller communities do not often have dedicated employees to do this work and they cannot afford them. They operate mostly through volunteers and frankly, it is proving difficult to find people who have the time, energy, and, as the issues increase in complexity, the skills to do all the work that needs to be done.

You can help us to make this work a reality by supporting the local decision-makers who know their villages and towns. Help us with capacity building and funding to empower the participation local residents who know their communities.

This Roadmap will lead to food security – with your support.

Thank you.