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-Memorandum-

To: House Committee on Education
Fr: Betsy Rosenbluth, Farm to school Director Shelburne Farms
Re: FTS Awareness Day
Da: February 8, 2024

My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Farm to School Director at Shelburne Farms, and I am here today as a member of the VT Farm to School & Early Childhood Network, with over 300 members from schools, farms, businesses, early childhood providers, parents and nonprofits across the state.

We are asking you to support the Governor's budget proposal for both the VT Farm to School & Early Childhood grant program and the Local Foods Incentive for schools with level funded, base appropriations of \$500,000 each, for Fiscal Year 2025.

I wanted to thank you for having us here today to share the impact that investing in FTS&EC is having here in Vermont on our students, our communities and our farmers. Its a win-win-win! Today you will hear directly from schools about how farm to school has made a difference. Please reach out anytime if you have further questions of any of us.

What makes Vermont's farm to school program unique is the integration of food access with local food purchasing, and agriculture and food education. We do this by combining grant funds to schools with technical assistance and professional development. We provide support to schools through strong partnerships between state agencies, statewide nonprofits and regional or local organizations.

The Local Foods Incentive and full funding of the grants program is a lever that provides the financial and technical support to schools to integrate FTS. Vermont passed the local foods incentive so that more of the \$20M schools spend each year on food stays here in the VT economy and with VT farmers. Last year over \$1.2M was spent on local food by schools. And over 100 VT farms across the state now sell to schools and early childhood programs. We have a strong start but we know we need to grow local purchasing and we have been reaching out to every school nutrition director to hear more about their challenges, as we work towards changing the school food system.

With full funding of the grants program, we are doubling the number of early childhood providers and schools receiving grants. Over the last few years, 101 early childhood educators and after school programs received CSA grants to purchase and utilize local, nutritious food directly from farmers. And demand is growing!

By integrating food access, food education and local purchasing in schools, we are providing our children critical nutrition and they are understanding what that food does for the health of their bodies and their communities, all while benefiting our local farmers and building healthy habits and a connection to VT foods, for a lifetime.

We are looking for your support of level base funding for both the Local Purchasing Incentive at \$500K, and for the FTS & EC grants program at \$500K. These programs work together to support VT families, VT farmers and VT children.

Thank you