



38 Eastwood Drive, Suite 100
South Burlington, VT 05403

P: (802) 865-0255
F: (802) 865-0266
HungerFreeVT.org

The Vermont Food Security Roadmap to 2035: Government Ensures Food Security for All in Vermont

Testimony presented to the Senate Committee on Agriculture

Anore Horton, Executive Director

(802) 231-1293 / ahorton@hungerfreevt.org

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I'm Anore Horton, resident of Williston, and Executive Director of Hunger Free Vermont. I'm also here today as a founding member of the Mass Feeding Group established by Vermont's SEOC in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic when it became clear that the pandemic was also a hunger crisis, and that food access and food security were not effectively woven into our emergency response systems. The Mass Feeding Group continues to this day as a space in which state agencies and nonprofits accountable for ensuring food security can keep in regular communication and strategize together. The value of the Mass Feeding Group, and the realization that the goal of food security is not consistently well-integrated into government operations, led directly to my own personal passion for helping to create the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, and we are here today, not to explain the Roadmap to you, but to infuse you with the same passion we all feel for creating a future of food security for everyone in Vermont!

Every time we got together to work on creating the Food Security Roadmap, we paused and tried to imagine what it would be like if we were standing in 2035 and we knew everybody in Vermont had food security and climate resiliency, and that our agricultural sector was thriving and providing for our people. I invite everybody in this room right now to imagine that day. Imagine that hidden hunger does not exist in Vermont because everyone has the food we need. Imagine the possibilities available when nobody in Vermont is hungry. Imagine that we had all worked together, in our mutually supporting roles, to create permanent, equitable, Vermont-grown food security for all. How proud, how joyous, how fulfilled we would all feel to know we had dedicated our lives and our work to achieving this outcome—and that we had succeeded.

The Vermont Food Security Roadmap leads with the goal that our government ensures food security for all in Vermont. None of us would be here today if we did not believe that food security is a policy choice that we can make. We know this is true, because of all the policy choices that this Committee and this Legislature has already made, and that have already put us on the road to food security in Vermont:

- You created and funded the State Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program.
- You created and funded the Vermont Farm to Plate Network.
- You created and funded the Local Food Purchasing Incentive Program for our schools.
- You have begun supporting our critical Meals on Wheels and charitable food networks.
- You made Vermont the 6th state in the country to provide permanent universal school meals for all students in our public schools.
- You have supported Vermont farmers in innovative ways that others are better equipped to describe than I am!

In this current legislative session, we have new opportunities to hike down this road to food security and get to the next hut together, including:

- You can provide additional base funding for the Vermont Foodbank Network and for Meals on Wheels.
- You can provide funding to NOFA-VT to support the Crop Cash program.
- You can pass S.215 to launch the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Vermont, and to move toward giving 3SquaresVT a boost so food benefits are adequate for more Vermont households.
- You can pass H.701 to expand the Vermont Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, so lower income working families can keep more of what they earn.
- You can support the Land Access and Opportunity Board and Working Lands.

All of these policy initiatives support and inform the Vermont Food Security Roadmap we are presenting to you today.

You can see that our collective action has already begun, and is more necessary now than ever, to ensure food security across Vermont, in times of crisis and calm. We look forward to continuing our work together, and we thank this Committee for leading the way.