

Grant John Gorton
953 Northrop Road
Sheldon, VT 05483
jgortonfarm@myfairpoint.net
802-933-4487 (home)
802-734-8967 (cell)

I am John Gorton from Fairfield, and I am here to ask you to **Please support the Foodbank's request for \$5 million in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont.**

I would like to describe how important the budget of the Vermont Foodbank is to those of us who are boots on the ground working to combat food insecurity. I am a US Naval Academy graduate, retired from active duty in nuclear submarines, retired from providing engineering ship design support to the navy as a Dept of Defense contractor, and semi retired as a farmer. I am currently very active in social service work including the FGI Community Partnership, FGI Hunger Council, Franklin County Food Shelf Alliance, and FGI Building Bright Futures Council, and the Farm to Early Childhood Coalition. And, most important to this testimony, I am a certified lay servant in the United Methodist Church and with support from about 20 other volunteers, I run the Sheldon Methodist Church Food Shelf. We are a network partner of the Vermont Foodbank.

The Sheldon Food Shelf is currently serving between 350 and 400 families, over 1000 people, distributing between 20,000 and 25,000 lbs of food per month. We are open 4 days a week and operate a variety of programs to reach families. We have a dedicated time for school families, we stock a "share refrigerator" at the Sheldon Elementary School, work with CVOEO and other churches to support families transitioning from temporary to permanent housing, and distribute weekly "grab and go" meals and a monthly free senior lunch both sponsored by Age Well. We will be collaborating with the Dept of Health to do WIC nutritional training.

To put our effort into sobering financial perspective:

For the year 2023, the food we distributed represents between \$60K and \$70K worth of food every month, North of three quarters of a million dollars of food for the year. We did that on an operating budget of about \$35,000. Before the pandemic we were serving about 100 families a month. When the pandemic hit in 2020, we quickly doubled that to just over 200 families per month. Since the effects of inflation have kicked in we have close to doubled again from our pandemic level of need. For each of the last 3 months of 2023 we saw 30 (one a day) families access our food shelf who had never been to a food shelf before.

Over 85% of the food we provide our clients comes from or thru the VT Foodbank. Their funding is the foundation which we leverage to accomplish what we do. We are one of over 200 "network partners" of the VT Foodbank. The specific statistics and operating programs of other partners are different, but the key result is the same for all of us. Collectively we Foodbank Network Partners would multiply the \$5 million of VT Foodbank funding into tens of millions of dollars in direct food aid to families and children in every community all across this state. It is a return on investment that is hard to beat.

In closing I would like to share not "a story" but what I think is "the story". We used to call ourselves an "emergency food shelf". A few families a month came to us when they had a car breakdown, appliance failure, medical situation, or some other incident that busted their budget that month. No longer - we are now a "grocery store" for several hundred families monthly who consistently thank us profusely for being treated like friend and family and for the help they get and state unabashedly "they wouldn't be able to feed their families if it weren't for what they get at this food shelf".

I encourage you to include this Vermont Foodbank \$5 million budget request in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for food access in communities throughout Vermont in the FY2025 budget.

Thank You,

John Gorton