



A project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms

To: Senate Appropriations Committee

Fr: Betsy Rosenbluth, Project Director VT FEED, Shelburne Farms

Da: April 18, 2023

Re: Clarification of Local Food Incentive for Schools

Act 67 was passed by the Vermont Legislature in 2021 which included a Local Foods Incentive (LFI) for schools. The purpose was to support School Nutrition Programs to increase the percentage of Vermont foods purchased for school meals, thereby benefiting both Vermont farmers, with an expanded market, and Vermont kids, with expanded access to fresh, local foods.

The VT Agency of Education administers the incentive grant program along with other child nutrition programs. In just the two years since the program launched, 31 of Vermont's 51 School Food Authorities have participated - over 60% of the state's school meal programs. The goal of AOE has been to make the Local Foods Incentive as easy to use as possible for Food Service Directors while also ensuring that the grant maintains programmatic integrity.

In these early years of the grant program, the LFI is estimated to cost \$500,000, which was allocated in both of the past two years. In the FY24 budget, AOE inadvertently left out the \$500,000 funding. **We hope you will fund the LFI at \$500,000 base funding for FY24 to continue this successful program.** Base funding is especially important, as the program offers the incentive for the previous school year's purchases.

The Local Foods Incentive, Universal School Meals, and Vermont's Farm to School Grants Program, are three mutually reinforcing pieces of legislation, all critical to attaining our twin goals of farm fresh school meals for every Vermont child and thriving Vermont farm viability. Universal School Meals increases participation and equity in school meals, while the LFI and the grants program ensures those meals include local foods and food education.