

Please Support the NOFA-Vermont Request for \$478,500 for Crop Cash (plus) and Farm Share

Messages from individuals to the House Appropriations Committee:

From Crop Cash Customers

These are folks who are using their 3SquaresVT EBT card to increase their ability to purchase local food at farmers markets.

“[Crop Cash] had an enormous impact on our ability to buy local, healthy food for our family. Never before have we been able to afford to buy fruits, veggies, meat, and dairy every week from farmers so near to us...Our kids got to know the farmers at the market and they were much more likely to eat their beans when they [knew where they] came from...The program allowed us to stretch our 3SquaresVT dollars and support our local farms at the same time, and we felt like an important part of our community food web. Because of the generosity of the match over the summer months, we were able to buy extras and do some canning and freezing so that we can enjoy some of those local foods all winter long, really boosting our food security, which feels so great. We appreciate Crop Cash so much, and we would love to see the program continue.”
- Nikki, Cabot

“[Crop Cash] has been an incredibly wonderful program for me and my family. I really hope that this program continues, it gave me access to so many fresh fruits and vegetables direct from our farmers. The Crop Cash Plus was also so great to buy other things such as meat and dairy. Please continue this program!” -3SquaresVT participant from Elmore

“Our family loves Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus...Crop Cash offers a great way for consumers to access fresh, local produce at a reduced price [and] also supports local farmers...Seriously, what better way is there to spend public funds?” - Chris Dussault, St. Johnsbury

“I am [an EBT] user. As you know, the cost of food continues to rise. These matching funds mean a lot to those of us with limited funds. In addition, they are an added incentive for those less familiar with farmers markets to try local, often organic foods. This contributes to healthier choices for meals, as well as increasing sales for our local farmers. I hope all of this will be considered and funds obtained to again make Crop Cash available.” - Carol Toles, St. Johnsbury

“I [strongly] support the continuation of Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus. As a resident of Vermont, these initiatives have profoundly impacted my family's well-being and our community's agricultural economy. The programs have been a lifeline in enabling us to access fresh, local produce and food products. With their support, I've had the opportunity to prepare healthier, more nutritious meals using a diverse range of organic vegetables, fruits, and locally sourced meats...Moreover, these programs have been instrumental in bolstering local farmers. The pause of these programs on December 1st [was] deeply concerning. Their discontinuation would not only diminish our family's access to high-quality food but also adversely affect the local economy and the livelihoods of small farmers.” - Greta Quintin, St. Johnsbury

“I am devoted to the farmers markets, nice weather or pouring rain. Being able to take home more choices and variety than otherwise possible made a huge difference. I loved being able to get a larger variety of vegetables and fruits and more microgreens at each farmers market, as well as a couple times getting to treat myself to goat meat and Starbird fish. I did/do not take the help lightly or feel entitled to such help, but I see it as a wonderful gift and I remain extremely grateful. Also, because my Social Security is under \$400/ month, the CSA cost reduction I was granted this past year was another key factor in partaking of the incredible abundance and quality we have from our VT farmers. They are total heroes in my book and often under-appreciated. I like being able to tell them in person of my awe and appreciation for their love and efforts.” -Chery Sittle, North Hero

“I'm [advocating] as much funding as [possible] be allocated for Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus. It's hard to find words to express the value of these programs. I am a senior who will be 75 soon, and live with an income way below the poverty line...These programs give almost everyone access. Please continue to help us all, and know that you are much appreciated.”
- Ed, Montpelier

“The Crop Cash program has been a wonderful gift to my family. Money that goes directly back to our local farmers and growers is money well spent. I can feel good about feeding nutritious, locally grown food to my children. The addition of Crop cash plus this year was a wonderful surprise; we were able to purchase meats, fresh pasta, eggs, bread, etc and support

many more vendors than in previous years. I am so grateful for all we received this year, and hope the program continues. Without it, we could not afford the amount of healthy, local food that we ate this year.” - Emily Rich, Grande Isle

“I’ve been using Crop Cash for years and it’s helped me eat much healthier than I would otherwise. I really hope you renew the grant for it. It’s really important to me.” - Rutland 3SquaresVT recipient

"Crop Cash is a lifesaver for us. As two senior citizens struggling to make ends meet on a very low fixed income due to age and disabilities, we were very relieved to [receive 3SquaresVT]. As grocery prices [rose]...it was getting harder and harder to afford the healthier foods we relied upon...By doubling (and sometimes even tripling) our EBT card's buying power [with Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus], we are able to go to the farmers market and purchase fresh, very high quality, usually organically grown, local produce from our neighbors and friends, in enough quantity that we can even put some of it up to see us through the winter! We are confident in saying it has saved [our lives]...[One of us] no longer needs the diabetes and blood pressure medicines once prescribed to him. And, at all his recent visits, his doctors say, "Whatever you're doing, keep doing it! It's working!" -Hardwick Farmers Market Customer

“I support the crop cash program and want it to come back 2025. This program helps some of the residents to purchase food at the local market and it makes it really flexible for them to make some chores. Thank you.” -Faustina Sepenu

“I just wanted to write in support of funding for crop cash. It would allow me as an ebt recipient to shop more at local markets. Keeping this money local is so important but often times I can’t afford it with the high price of housing and food the crop cash makes buying local accessible for people like me when otherwise I can only afford bargain shopping at grocery stores. It would be so great if we could spend tokens/crop cash on prepared food as well, because it would support these local vendors and hopefully allow more low income people to shop at the market when otherwise it’s inaccessible and not affordable.” -Kelli Catana, Shelburne

“We fully support the Crop Cash programs with NOFA and would like to continue to see them included in the budget. We are a family of eight that are able to take advantage of local and farm fresh vegetables strictly due to this program.” - 3SquaresVT recipient, Wallingford

“I want to write in support of the EBT matching Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus programs for VT farmers markets. My family in Shelburne benefited greatly by having access to fresh produce through these programs, and I know the farmers also saw increased sales opportunities as a result. The number of local families that utilized the extra funds available to them, coupled with the fact that the dollars remained in the community with small businesses, seemed like a massive win for Vermonters at large. This came at a time when flooding drastically affected many farmers, and caused instability in their long-term financial wellness. Continued support for these programs will help build stronger communities for so many people, and I hope to see it for years to come. Thank you for your time and attention to this incredibly important subject.” -James Stillman, Shelburne

“I would like to show my support to maintain funding for the Crop Cash program. It is important to me that all community members receive fresh, local produce. This program is beneficial in maintaining the health and wellness of this community and throughout our state.” -Alexandra, Burlington

“I support the Crop Cash/Crop Cash + programs, and hope to see them back at our farmer’s markets. As someone who has experience working at a local vegetable farm that strives to feed its community (fairly), I think these programs are crucial to accessibility. Every Vermonter deserves access to healthy, locally grown food.” -Eliana Pacheco, Burlington

“I wholeheartedly advocate for continued financial support for Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus programs, which connect farmers to people, and give people access to affordable, local produce.” -Caitlin, Burlington

Vendors

“Cash Crop Plus was a huge benefit for myself and the folks using [it]. When Crop Cash Plus showed up at the market this summer I was overwhelmed with joy (I sell cheese and meat). Over the last many years, I had a few [Crop Cash customers] in the season. With Crop Cash Plus, I was turning in several hundred dollars worth of coins every other week. It was so good to see the folks have so much more buying power. How thrilled they were to have that extra cash. How thrilled I was to see so many new folks attending the market. Crop Cash Plus added an extra 20% to my weekly sales.” - Laini Fondiller, Lazy Lady Farm, Westfield

"[Crop Cash provides] invaluable support...particularly the Crop Cash Plus initiative. This program has been instrumental in fostering accessibility for our community, enabling them to access our organic, pasture-raised chicken, an opportunity that has significantly impacted both our customers and our farm...This past summer [we achieved] our best sales year ever at the farmers markets. It's estimated that a noteworthy 10-20% of these sales can be directly attributed to Crop Cash Plus...The reverberating effects of this program's discontinuation are already being felt. Several of our loyal customers have expressed their concern that without the continuation of the Crop Cash initiative, they will be unable to shop at the farmers markets, a significant blow not just to our business but to the community's access to wholesome, locally produced food. Continuing Crop Cash holds immeasurable significance for both our farm and the community we serve. It's not merely about financial gains but about preserving access to quality organic produce and fostering a sustainable, interconnected local food system." - Vanessa Rose, Leaping Bear Farm, Putney

"We were extremely pleased with Crop Cash and related programs that many of our produce customers used to shop with us this year. Not only did these programs bring brand new faces to our farmers market table, but our preliminary analysis also shows that these programs boosted our sales between 5-10% this season which is tremendous! We sincerely hope these programs will continue into 2024 and beyond as we continue our mission of bringing healthy, local and organic produce to as many VT families as we possibly can." -Katie Rose Seward, Head Over Fields, Shelburne

"The way food aid works in the US generally feels broken, demoralizing, and condescending. Putting limits on what people can and can't buy with that aid has never felt like a good path. There have been times as a bakery vendor at markets that I have had to turn people away who have tried to use the SNAP/ 3squaresVT/ Crop Cash, and I've hated it. Usually just gave away whatever it is they were planning to use the Crop Cash for. This past summer I was able to accept Crop Cash Plus at the Norwich Farmers Market, and it felt like progress, a step in the right direction. While the demographic of that market tends to be fairly wealthy and I don't see as much in circulation as I did at Burlington, it still is such a net positive that I hope you can find ways to continue offering Crop Cash & CC Plus. A vendor at Montpelier recently informed me that the CC+ covers meat, while CC does not. This also seems like an incredible net positive for the community!" -Carina Gressitt, Straw Brook Bakery, Hartford

"Please [find] the funding to continue Crop Cash...This has been an incredibly successful and well used program that has benefited our farm financially, [and brings] us exposure to many new customers who likely wouldn't otherwise shop at the farmers market...This is a small but incredibly important step in the right direction toward things like: prioritizing health of people in our communities;...keeping money in our communities and strengthening the local economy; [and] building a culture of resilience, self-reliance, and community. Somehow, as a culture, we need to address the epidemic of chronic disease at its root, rather than continuing the costly strategy of treating symptoms. If we can recognize that our food and agriculture system is the best way to do this we will make regenerative agriculture the focus of our healthcare...Crop Cash is currently the best tool I have seen to actualize preventive healthcare." -Ryan Yoder, Yoder Farm, Danby

"We participate in the Barre, Plainfield, and Isham Farm farmers markets. Through Crop Cash Plus we were able to service people who were unable to purchase our organic products. Every dollar we spend is a vote for how we want the world to be." - Sue and John Morris, Marshfield

"Food access provides food security, and Crop Cash & Crop Cash Plus means veggies, fruits, growing plants, & seeds for individuals and families struggling to feed themselves and those close to them. It expands the definition of Farmer to Consumer, and our agricultural vendors at Farmers Markets." -Mark Montalban, Green Acres Homestead, Burlington

"As both a vendor at multiple farmers markets and as a shopper, I don't want to see Crop Cash [Plus] go away!" - Jay Kramer, Sky Farm Kitchen LLC, St Johnsbury

Service Providers

"I...support the request to continue Crop Cash budgeting in 2024, and even increase the funding. As someone who works with older Vermonters and those who are under age 60 and receiving unearned income from Social Security, I truly cannot express just how important this benefit is...[Since] the less nutritious foods are often also less expensive, for folks on a budget, it can be difficult to access healthy, nutritious foods like those supplied at farmers markets. With Crop Cash, folks can obtain more healthy and nutritious foods. We also have folks who enjoy gardening and it helps them have a task that they can still do even when other tasks may be more difficult...[People can purchase] seeds and plant starts from the farmers markets [with] Crop Cash. [Vermonters] have a long history of living off the land and with inflation and the cost of groceries rising, it's just so important for those who qualify for 3SQVT to be able to utilize this benefit to obtain fresh, locally grown produce and seeds."
-Dawn Mitchell, North Troy, Northeast Kingdom Community Action

"I work at Community Action and am a low income advocate, and there's a food shelf in our office. Since the rise of food prices during COVID, we have had many more people using the food shelf and talking about how hard it is to make ends meet with the cost of food. I got rid of my Farm to Family coupons in record time this summer. So I know there's a big need." -Rebecca Moyer, Franklin Grand Isle Community Action, Fairfield voter

Farmers Market Managers

"Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus have had a huge positive effect on sales for our farmers and food makers across the board...Customers reported spending more at the farmers market as a result and trying things that might normally be out of their budget. We saw new customers shopping at the market as a result of [the ability] to stretch their 3SquaresVT and P-EBT benefits while supporting small local businesses." - Aprille Soons Palmer, Champlain Islands Farmers Market Manager

"[Crop Cash Plus] really benefited some of our meat producers and allowed them to tap into a new customer base. We had such a big turnout for Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus this year...The programs also greatly benefited many of our producers who had a difficult year and allowed them to expand their regular customer base." -Nica Mieloch-Blinn, Norwich Farmers Market Manager

"Crop Cash Plus was hugely successful for our farmers market. It brought more customers to the market and I felt like more customers were using their benefits for healthy locally grown food." -Barre Farmers Market Manager

"Our market's use of EBT has tripled since last year due to Crop Cash Plus. More and more people are shopping at the farmers market, buying local foods and supporting local vendors. All I heard all summer was great things about the program from both vendors and customers. I hope Crop Cash Plus runs again." -Randolph Farmers Market

"Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus directly impacts our community, particularly this year with the flooding." - Jennifer Yocum, Townshend Farmers Market Manager

"So many customers loved this program. Once they found out it helped the farmers too, they used all their EBT money at our market. I have letters from farmers stating that their sales increased by 10% this season, which is wonderful when their profit margins are always so slim. I saw lower income families able to buy more healthy food for their children, and heard many people say, "this means I can afford to buy [something] I could not before." I'd like to see Crop Cash Plus permanently funded!" -Shelburne Farmers Market Manager

"[Crop Cash Plus] really brought folks out to the market because they could get many of their food needs met, not just produce. It also brought in more business to support our other vendors selling meats, eggs, cheeses, tortillas, salsas, etc." -Kris Coville, Craftsbury Farmers Market

“Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus are an integral part of our market! We have a strong, steady base of EBT customers who rely on these programs to be able to afford fresh, local food that can sometimes cost more than it would at the grocery store. Having the additional matching money this year encouraged these customers to come back week after week to take full advantage of their benefits, supporting our vendors more than they would have been able to otherwise. When the Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus programs paused for winter, we saw a dramatic decrease in SNAP usage at the market. Folks could no longer fit the Farmers Market in their budget.” -Sarah Brunkhorst, Winooski Farmers Market Manager

“Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus have been game-changing for our customers who have been able to access local, fresh, and nutritious food. The program has brought a more diverse group of people to the market, and contributed to a more robust sense of community and belonging. Continuing to offer Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus would bring immeasurable benefit to the wellbeing of our customers, the impact of which can't be underestimated.” -Georgie Rubens, Burlington Farmers Market Director

“EBT accounted for about 16% of [market sales]. This is huge for us. At our final market of the 2023 season, I had [a] customer come up and [share] their ability to purchase higher quality meat (local grass fed beef) because of the Crop Cash Plus, which is something that was outside of their food budget prior to participating in the program but now allowed them to occasionally include this in their diet.” -Hardwick Farmers Market Manager

The Crop Cash program has been pivotal for the Old North End Farmers Market, assisting low-income residents in accessing fresh, healthy food and supporting local farmers in sustaining their businesses, especially after the devastating 2023 flooding. This program nourishes our neighborhood and fosters a vibrant, resilient community, and I hope to see it continue to bridge the gap between our farmers and those in need.” -Ben Rodgers, Old North End Farmers Market

“Food budget expansion (especially [for] seniors and youth) makes life better for all; it is a true ripple effect for the whole community. Also, the additional market income is way more likely to be kept in the local economy!” -Dorset Farmers Market Manager

“This program was a huge success for the customers, the local economy, and the market vendors.” -Rachel McKeen, Vermont Farmers Market Manager

“[Crop Cash] has been really good for business and I am so glad to be part of the program.” -Greensboro Farmers Market

“We really appreciate [the Farmstand Match Program], it was wildly popular and we definitely gained some loyal customers by being able to offer it.” -Joie Lehouillier, Foote Brook Farm, Johnson

“As the [former assistant market manager]...I saw firsthand how crucial it is for people to be able to access local produce and plants and simply have enough money to buy the food they need to live. [Crop Cash] helps keep markets accessible for all people, regardless of income, and I saw how it brought people to the market who would otherwise not have had a reason to go. As such, I also saw every week how much money this program put into the pockets of local farmers. These two things combined are crucial for growing local food security. Every week I heard from both of these groups how much they relied on Crop Cash...I urge the state of Vermont to support NOFA's request to support Crop Cash Plus in 2024 and to expand the program as much as possible to meet and encourage continued growth!” -Leo, Norwich

“I support NOFA-VT's request for FY '25 funding for the Farm Share and Crop Cash Plus program. In my experience as a farmer and as the manager of our local farmers' market, this is a very popular program. Last year was the first year our market participated in the Crop Cash program and we are disappointed that there is no funding to support another year of the Crop Cash plus pilot for 2024. Our market processed \$1,260 of Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus funds in 2023. Community members were thrilled to have the additional spending for fresh fruits, vegetables, and

other food products and our produce vendors commented that they saw increased sales and high use of these coupons. As a veggie vendor myself, we received the benefit of community members spending more of their EBT dollars at the market, and as the market manager, I can attest to the many grateful comments I received from individuals and families with Food Benefits that they could not only support the market, but that their SNAP funds went further. Furthermore, our farm is participating in the Farm Share program this year. We were able to support two CSA members in our 25 member CSA with this cost share. We attempted to join as a farm last year, but the demand was so high in 2022 that our farm didn't make the cut. Despite making it into the program this year, the lack of funds meant that [not] all of our farm's potential cost share applicants could be funded. The program is so popular that in less than one month, community members seeking funding were being waitlisted. Vermonters want to support local and organic farms, but with the cost of living on the rise, they need support. Funding these programs addresses food access and supports local farms; what could be more important?" -Emily Reiss, Fledgling Farmstead and Chelsea Farmers Market Manager, Tunbridge voter

"Crop Cash/Crop Cash Plus has transformed our market. With P-EBT and the universal school lunch distribution, the whole community enjoyed supporting local farmers with the CC incentives. Crop Cash Plus is really important because we can only have 3 vegetable farmers at each market. Still, there are countless other agricultural vendors selling cheese, meats, and bread that the Crop Cash Plus program supported this year." -Miranda Dalton, Waitsfield Farmers Market Manager, Hinesburg Resident

Farm Stand Match

"I vividly remember the first time I learned of Foote Brooke Farm. I had taken my daughter to a local playgroup and another family was raving about the "organic farm" in town and imploring me to shop there. At the time, our entire grocery budget, around \$300, was dependent on ebt. While shopping, I mentally added the cost of everything I put in the cart to ensure I would be able to pay at checkout. I did not believe I had the privilege to prioritize local or organic foods.

It took me years to finally visit the farm stand and in that time our financial situation had greatly improved. We occasionally still qualify for a small amount of ebt and when we do I prioritize using it at Foote Brooke Farm with the Farm Stand Match Program [a companion program of Crop Cash, used at farm stands]. The benefits of the Farm Stand Match Program are straight forward, Vermont families are able to buy more and better food while supporting Vermont farms. Through the match program I am able to double the amount of fresh produce I feed my family, but it is the ability to buy my produce at Foote Brooke that I value most.

The produce at Foote Brooke is incredible, but Foote Brooke is so much more to my family than a farm stand. Only a mile from our home in Johnson, the farm and the Lehouillier family are a staple to our community. In addition to their own produce, the farm stand sells products from other Johnson families, including bread baked by my daughter's kindergarten teacher and berries grown by her classmate. The farm also host field trips for the Elementary classes and offers job experience to local teens. Off site, Joie Lehouillier volunteers her time to various town and school organizations.

In addition to supporting my community, when I shop at the farm stand I am supporting the environment. Foote Brooke uses organic and/or sustainable farming practices and because the produce is grown locally there is less packaging, processing and transporting. This also means the produce is fresher and last longer, which decreases food waste. The proximity of the farm to my home allows me to drive less, especially after the loss of our local grocery store.

Truthfully, this is a vague overview of what Foote Brooke Farm means to me and the benefits of the Farm Stand Match Program. It is not lost on me that the assistance I have received is supported by the community of people I value, through the Farm Stand Match Program I am able to return a small amount of that support." - Mckinley Fagan-Barry, Johnson

Farm Share Program (Participants & Farms)

"I was an AmeriCorps in 2023. Living on a very limited stipend in Burlington was no easy feat, and the opportunity to support a local farm and receive fresh fruits and vegetables was incredible. I was able to make healthy meals and also share with the community where I worked as a volunteer if I had extra (the kids really loved the apples!) NOFA-VT's Farm Share program needs to be preserved and funded so that people with limited resources can easily access fresh produce and do so within their communities. It's such a beautiful program and the bounties are mutual- all the benefits truly ripple throughout the community!" - Burlington resident

"We have been enjoying our CSA membership so much! My family has been eating so much better building meals around the produce we get each week. The Farm Share Program provides us with the amazing opportunity to have a CSA membership, which we otherwise would not have been able to access. Due to the program, we were introduced to the beautiful Ananda Gardens farm, and my toddler and even teenager have benefited from weekly visits to the farm." - Kylee Zura, Berlin

"I love [the Farm Share] program to help me afford excellent, local produce from our farms. It helps me afford to eat veggies and fruits which are so expensive, especially organic, and our groceries don't have enough local produce so [Farm Share] is a great subsidy. There isn't always enough funds to get this program support to help those of us in need of financial assistance and my budget and food supply suffers in years when there hasn't been enough funding for the program to offer all of us. There needs to be more State support to fund all of us struggling to eat from local farms. Please fund this program - we need it in Vermont to afford to eat healthy!" -Beth Baras, Norwich

"The Farm Share Program is an amazing resource that provides access to fresh, organic, local food. I know that I would not be able to afford a farm share on my own, without this program subsidizing the cost. The Farm Share Program benefits families and farms. Instead of embarking on funding for endless new projects, our state should expand funding for programs that are already proven to work, like the Farm Share Program." -Michelle, Dummerston

"I fully support the Farm Share program. We were members last year and received beautiful and delicious vegetables. Because we are retired and on a fixed income it allowed us healthy and nutritious fresh vegetables which we would not have had otherwise." -Ginny, West Berlin

"Programs like NOFA-VT are vital to strengthening a distinct part of Vermont community: supporting farms with funding to help provide food for those who need it. It's a circle of care. Our little green state should do whatever it can to promote the art of agriculture." -Zara Bodē, Brattleboro

"As an AmeriCorps service member, the farm share program has been great in helping me supplement my living allowance and access healthy, organic produce while making ends meet." - Montpelier resident

"I support the Farm Share program because it allows me to choose healthy options for my family and support farms that I care about all while being affordable. I also receive a piece of community when I pick up my goods which is super important to my wellbeing!" -Lacey Beetham, Brattleboro

"NOFA has made it possible for us to support our local farmers and feed our infant child fresh vegetables and local proteins. Being new parents puts us on a tight budget, and without the Farm Share Program of NOFA-VT we could not have continued our CSA shares during this crucial time for our kiddo's development and good health. Please fund NOFA-VT to the fullest amount within your power! Their work is helping us raise the next generation of Vermonters with a love of local food and local farmers." -Eli K. Coughlin-Galbraith, Brattleboro

"I was able to have a workshare with Lost Barn Farm for a couple of seasons, but when my circumstances changed I couldn't do it anymore. The Farm Share Program allowed my family to still maintain our share and support the farmers." -Christina Hollenbeck, Putney

"I have participated in the Farm Share program for four years and find it invaluable. The CSA I join provides a wealth of locally-grown organic produce as well as locally produced bread and other baked goods, eggs, maple syrup, pickles, cheeses, and meat. It is wonderful to have access to these products at a price I would never be able to afford without the farm share program. In addition, my CSA sells vegetable starts that have enabled me to grow a large vegetable garden, from which I freeze and can then harvest for use over the winter. This year there was so much demand for this program that I only received a half share. I am immensely grateful for this, but I'm sad that I will only be able to purchase half of what I could in years past. I would encourage the legislature to fund this program so more people can take advantage of this wonderful opportunity NOFA is providing to low-income Vermonters." -Marilyn, Halifax, VT

"To our legislators: During the Vermont winter, I struggle to purchase healthy food, transportation is difficult, but cost and availability limit me. When Spring arrives, and I look forward to the greening of our lands, the promise of high-quality organic vegetables, thanks to the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program, buoys my spirit. This program allows me to join a summer CSA in my area. I save during the winter months to be able to contribute 50% to enjoy a summer of health, full of abundant nutritious meals. I would not be able to do this without the Farm Share Program. It is incredibly important to my health. By supporting our Vermont farmers, and allocating additional funds, you are helping to provide high-quality food to those who need a boost. You are supporting low-income Vermonters by providing them with the opportunity to receive weekly deliveries of awesome variety and quality. Please consider more funding for this vital program! Thank you so much." -Suzen, Woodbury

"Writing in support of the NOFA request for additional funding for the Farm Share program. This program has truly been a benefit to my family, as two retired persons on a limited income. First, it helped us greatly through the COVID time, secondly, it introduced to us the benefits of the CSA program offered through Pete's Greens and it allowed us to stretch our food budget with the 50/50 match program to support Vermont farmers and eat locally. Thank you for the ongoing support in the legislature for this important program supporting Vermonters." -Stephen Mease, Williston

"The Farm Share Program promotes food accessibility and supports local farmers, fostering community resilience and nutrition. Increased funding can expand its reach, providing more fresh produce to those in need and bolstering sustainable agriculture practices." -Florence Damon, Colchester

"Food is one of the main pillars of well being of all ages - it provides not only food for the body, but for growing brains and mental and emotional well being. In a time when stress is at an all time high, good quality food is even more vital. We are fortunate to have a state where amazing food is grown and is available and [the Farm Share] program supports so many of us so that we can then go into the world and offer our own gifts. This program is vital to the wellbeing of not only humans, but animals and the natural world as well!" -Suzanne, Dummerston

"The financial support I received [through the Farm Share program] makes it possible to have fresh, local vegetables throughout the year. Without this help, my children and I would not access as many vegetables due to the cost and being on one income. Food is an area where you can either have great or just ok products. We love being able to eat the carrots and tomatoes right from the bag when we get them home! Thank you for your support." -Heather, Calais

"The Farm Share program is a beautiful thing. It has allowed our family, on a small income, to enjoy local, organic fruits and vegetables as well as support the local farmers that work so hard. It's such a wonderful program that helps so many on both sides of the fence. It should be given special attention for funding to make sure it continues to thrive." -Melissa, Pownal

"I would like to support the State Budget Request to fund more Farm Shares in 2025. My name is Nancy and I vote in Morrisville. The Farm Share Program has helped my partner and I tremendously these last 3 years especially when the both of us lost our jobs due to COVID-19 in March of 2020. I'm sure there are other elderly people as well as families that could benefit from the Farm Share Program. We can not thank NOFA-VT enough for enabling us to participate in this much needed program and we appreciate everything they have done for us." -Nancy, Morrisville

"The VT Farm Share [Program] is an extremely important food access program that has double benefits, supporting local farms AND helping low income Vermonters access healthy fresh food. Please fully fund this program!!!" -Danielle Allen, Root 5 Farm, Fairlee

"2023 was a very hard year for my family financially. Despite the hardship we qualified for very little support. I stumbled upon NOFA and was so excited to find a program that would help us purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. I remember applying a bit past when the application period had opened and worrying we would not be able to receive the support that would mean providing my toddler with an exciting way to learn about and be exposed to new fruits and vegetables. It was the first year that food insecurity became a very real possibility for our family. Luckily, there was still funding available. This program gave us access to more produce than we would have been able to purchase at the grocery store and provides funding to farms to support their employees. It helps so many Vermonters in different ways and not receiving additional funding would prevent others from receiving the same amazing benefits we were able to receive." -Rachel, Londonderry

"I strongly support increased funding for the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program. Investing in programs like NOFA-VT's Farm Share Program is crucial for the well-being of Vermont communities and the resilience of our local food systems.

The NOFA-VT Farm Share Program is the only way my family can get affordable access to fresh, locally-grown produce, and supports healthier eating habits for us. This program supports local farmers by expanding access and buy-in from lower-income folks like us who would not otherwise be able to buy a local CSA share at full price. We also feel strong community ties by supporting local farmers.

Investing in the Farm Share Program aligns with Vermont's broader goals of promoting sustainable agriculture and supporting local farmers. By making CSA shares more accessible, we not only provide direct support to farmers but also contribute to the growth of our local food economy and the preservation of our agricultural heritage.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your support in ensuring the success and expansion of the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program." - Laura, Waterbury

"Our involvement with the Farm Share program has created a tipping point, where we are able to afford local organic food and also support the farmers that nourish both the land and our bodies." - Phoenix, Worcester

"Farms are Vermont livelihood for so many and the benefits of fresh local food are so great. Adults, youth, and farmers are interwoven in a mutually beneficial, future forward way. Please support NOFA!" -David L, Brattleboro

"The NOFA-VT Farm Share Program has allowed me to enjoy fresh, healthy, high-quality food from farmers in my community, farmers I know. I'm a disabled working person, so my budget is extremely tight. Without the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program, my diet would be limited to foods less fresh and more highly processed; foods come from mega-corporations headquartered far from Vermont. And, my farming neighbors would lose the money they are paid to feed me. More public funding for this program means better food for Vermonters, and fewer farms lost to developers every year." -Wendy M. Levy, Bellows Falls / Rockingham

"My husband and I moved to Vermont in 2022. We are committed to building a life in the state and even purchased our first home in 2023. We don't have children, and with our combined incomes, we don't qualify for any state assistance toward food, utilities, and health insurance. At the same time, our budget is tight, especially as new homeowners. Meaningful assistance programs attract young professionals interested in moving to this state, and the NOFA Farm Share Program gives us the small assistance we need to be able to afford healthy, local food. We otherwise could not afford to participate in a farm share - and we use every item we receive each week. We are

big advocates for the program, and we firmly believe that more people would participate in these benefits if additional funding were available.” - Meggie Patton, Westmore

“I am disabled and have used [the] NOFA [Farm Share Program] for the past four years to help me obtain fresh organic produce, without their help I would not be able to afford to purchase this high quality food. The demand for help from NOFA has only increased and their ability to meet this demand needs support from the legislature.”
-Leon Betts, Waterbury

“I am writing to express my support for additional funding for the VT Farm Share Program in 2025. By allocating a portion of the state budget funds to support this program - we are ensuring that existing & future farmers continue to supply our local economy with high quality, nutrient-dense foods, while helping to grow our families and communities. As you may be well aware, it has been increasingly challenging for farmers to make a living, due to the rising costs of just about everything. This is a huge concern, as Vermont has always held a rich history in leading regenerative, agricultural practices - which our future depends on. Not only does this program help our local farmers to stay afloat, but it is also an incredible resource to help families like mine, living on a frugal income, to eat. Having access to this program has been invaluable, and I truly hope that you’ll consider including access to this resource in the upcoming budget. Our families, farmers, and future depend on it.” -Brianne Primmer, Newbury
“The Farm Share Program helped our family through a very difficult time. Not only did the food nourish us, the program lifted our spirits to be positive, to look forward and to feel connected to the greater community. We are very grateful for this.” -Peacham resident

“The Farm Share program has been very important for me personally, but I also think it is super-important as a way to strengthen local farms. For myself, as a person with disabling chronic health issues, I need to eat very clean unprocessed food, but I can't work enough to cover basic expenses, so it's hard for me to buy enough high quality foods.

Furthermore, after COVID hit, grocery stores increased the use of perfumed sanitizers and cleaners, so now everything in the stores is saturated with fragrance chemicals that make my health conditions flare up terribly, and I can't go in the stores. So having help to pay for a farm share at the local farm stand where the air and food is very clean has become an enormous help to me.

However, I was unable to get a winter share this year, I think because there was limited funding. So I really support increased funding of farm shares. Due to Long COVID there are now a lot more chronically ill people who aren't earning as much, and I'm sure many of them would be grateful for farm share assistance.” -J.H., Brattleboro

“It is with great enthusiasm that I write in support of NOFA's budget request for the Farm Share Program. This program is a win-win; it creates a direct pathway for low income folks in our community to access fresh and locally grown food and helps to generate much needed revenue into farms across the state. Our small CSA vegetable farm is proudly participating in the Farm Share Program for the third year and we are able to provide fifteen low income members of our community with CSA shares as a result. Our farm and our community are stronger because of the Farm Share program; NOFA's work to secure this funding is essential to building a more just and sustainable local food system.” -Jonah Mossberg, Milkweed Farm, Westminster

“I support funding for the Vermont Farm Share Program as it helps me eat clean and healthy and I wouldn't be able to do that without state assistance. I appreciate it so much. Thank you for your support.” - Ethan Evans, Montpelier

“My name is Rick Agran and I live and vote in Worcester, VT, a small town served by NOFA-VT and its Farm Share program. The nearest grocery is an 18 mile round trip. I have been a beneficiary of the Farm Share program for the last two years. I was able to get affordable fresh food in three seasons that was raised organically within three miles of my home through the Farm Share program. It was super nutritious, minimally packaged, and minimally transported. I supported a local farm family. It was a triple-win with buying locally, eating locally, and living more sustainably, with a minimal carbon footprint.

We had a surprise flooding event which made our town an island for three days. Three roads washed out and two went underwater. We became much more aware of our town food dependencies and supply chains in this extreme circumstance. The local farm played a crucial role in feeding a small town of 965 people. Farm Share vegetables and staples were a big part of that. Flooding also raised the prices of food, statewide, and our shares were prebought and stable. That was super helpful to many rural families who are under-employed, or elderly and on fixed incomes. Please consider supporting this vital agricultural program and the organization whose muddy boots are on the ground keeping food and farms vital in Vermont. Demand for clean local food has outstripped the abilities of the Farm Share program budget. I am without local food this winter and spring consequently.” -Rick Agran, Worcester

“This program does make a huge difference in our family’s fresh vegetable consumption. Also, because of this program my children have learned taste difference in carrots and are truly thrilled each and every time we get them in our pickup. Please continue to fund this program so we can continue to participate in our CSA.” Rebecca, Bennington

“I support any expansion of this funding because my family of 3 children has benefited exponentially from this program! Having access to healthy, fresh, local food is already irreplaceable as a pillar of building a healthy future. But for this program to increase access to so many underserved populations not only benefits the recipient but the farm! It is a win-win through and through, and helps sustainably support Vermont's future!” -Korinne, Corinth
“My name is Matthew Benevento, and I live and vote in Burlington, VT. I am writing to express my strong support for the NOFA-VT Farm Share Program and to advocate for the inclusion of its funding in the state budget for 2025.

As someone who relies on a disability income of \$922 per month, managing my finances is a constant challenge, with my rent alone consuming nearly all of my income at \$900 monthly (and will be higher come April). The Farm Share Program has been instrumental in ensuring that I have access to nutritious, locally-sourced food despite my limited financial means. This program not only supports my health and well-being but also reinforces my connection to the Vermont community and its local farms.

I firmly believe that expanding the Farm Share Program will provide essential support to more individuals who find themselves in precarious financial situations. Increased funding would significantly enhance the program's capacity to offer discounts to more people, making healthy, local produce accessible to a larger segment of our community facing similar financial hurdles, as well as ensuring guaranteed income for the farms themselves, especially important in the wake of last summer's flooding. Thank you for your consideration.” -Matthew Benevento, Burlington

“This program truly helped our family be able to afford fresh and local fruits and veggies. This was so key to our families mental and physical health because we were able to afford better fresh foods and it helped me get my teens involved in cooking and meal planning. It not only helped us better fuel our bodies but helped us come together as a family and helped us build stronger connections with our teens while we were going through some very difficult times. Without the financial support we would not have been able to afford the farmshare. The program needs more funding because there are any more families in Vermont who could benefit from this program in the same way we did and it cannot currently support all the families in need. We were not able to get access to the financial support we needed for the program this winter and because of that were not able to purchase a farmshare.” -Bridget, Hyde Park

“Being a disabled elder on a very tight income I have had issues with affording nutritious food. That is until I discovered the Farm Share Program through NOFA -VT. With their help and the generous participation of local farmers I have been able to afford nutrient dense local meat,dairy and vegetables. We are so very blessed to have the Farm Share program and local organic farmers in our beautiful State of Vermont. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” - Ellen, Danville

“NOFA-VT [Farm Share Program] is an essential program for low income people to be able to eat fresh organic produce. It also supports small organic farmers, which is so important for the local economy, and the necessity for us to not rely on big Agra for our food. I’m a senior and have benefitted from this program for several years. I

am deeply grateful that this program exists. More and more Vermonters have been applying for this program, so more funds are needed for NOFA to expand and service more people. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables is essential for good health and for many they are too expensive. This program is beneficial to all those who participate.” - Abbey Schoenfeld, Dummerston

“The Farm Share Program helped our family through a tough time of being unemployed, student loan repayments restarting after the pandemic, and significant unexpected medical expenses for our family. One of the components of the Farm Share program that I valued the most was the ability to self-identify need and choose the farm we wanted to participate with. A huge weight is lifted knowing I can feed my family healthy, locally produced food, even during financial hardship. This program benefits both families and farmers and I urge you to support it so we can continue to strengthen the local Vermont economy.” -Jessica, Dummerston

“Vermont is a clear leader in the United States when it comes to locally grown food. Providing funding to NOFA for the farm share program will allow more Vermonters to become aware of and involved in our local regenerative food systems. Funding for farms and access to healthy food is crucial to the long term health of Vermonters and the success of Vermont's farms. Healthy people are less of a burden on our medical system and support for farms ensures the state's local food security and economy. The farm share program has helped my husband and I access local organic food this winter, we are grateful for the assistance we received and hope to be able to financially support NOFA in the future. Please support NOFA's budget request; it supports the health of Vermonters and our local food systems.” -Kristina, Waitsfield

“I would like you to know how fortunate our family has been to be able to participate in the Farm Share Program for 2 years now, and the quality of life it has brought our family in these uncertain and challenging financial times could only be described as life saving. A single Mom raising 3 teenagers to young adults, 2 of which have special needs, it's this very program that got us through to make ends meet and not lose our home. We have always included in our many prayers how fortunate we are to live in Vermont where these programs are available and so beneficial. Thank you for all your support. Bless you all.” -Jennifer Newsome, Ludlow

“The Farm Share program has made a huge difference to our family in the years we received a share. It greatly increased our access to local, organic produce and also strengthened our relationship with local farmers.” - Lydia, Corinth

“When I first moved to Vermont, I was excited to learn about the opportunity to participate in the Farm Share Program. The availability of this program and a continued funding support allows families like mine get involved in community participation, get nourishing meals out of the harvest, be able to offer my family a balanced meal and get to consume more home grown vegetables that contribute to a healthy community. Please continue to fund this program that is so important to both the consumers and the farms. Thank you.” -Anonymous, Berkshire

“Food is a basic human right, everyone deserves to eat fresh and local items despite their socioeconomic status.” -Rebecca, Shaftsbury