

Farm to School Awareness Day Testimony
Vermont FEED
February 8, 2023

My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Project Director of Vermont FEED, a Farm to School partnership of Shelburne Farms and NOFA-VT.

First of all I want to thank you for having us here today to share the impact that FTS&EC is having here in Vermont on our students, our communities and our farmers. Its a win-win-win!

We are asking you to support the Farm to School & Early Childhood program with a level funded base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2024. And, to support the Local Purchasing Incentive program at \$500,000 in base funding.

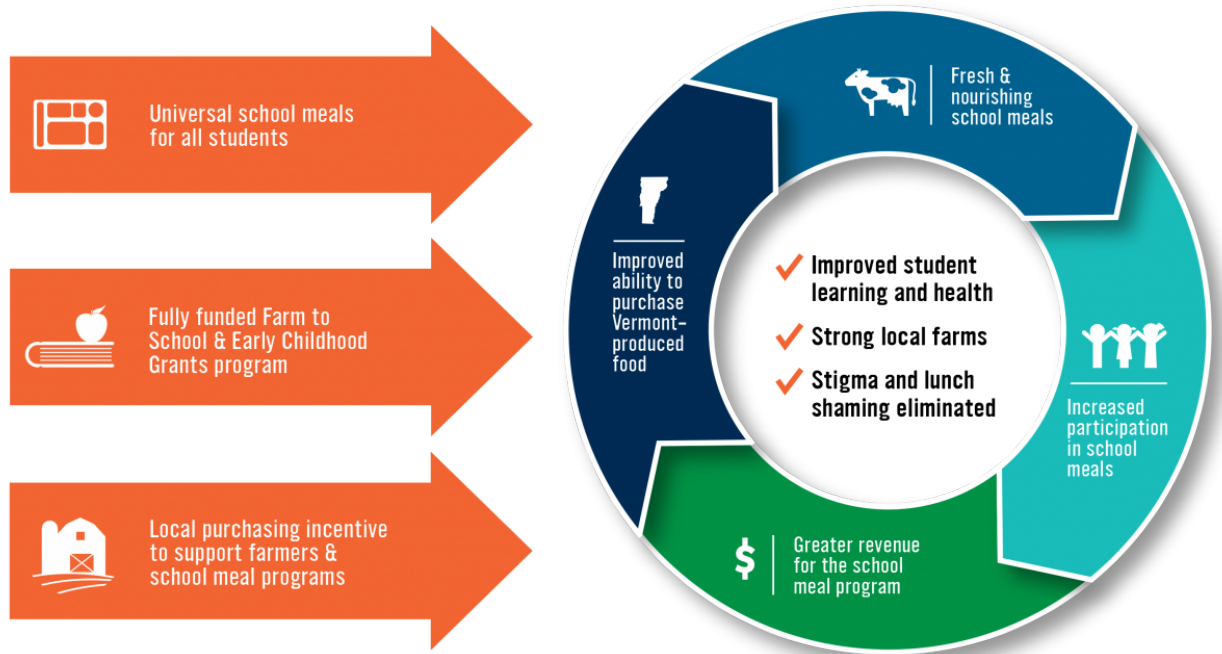
Vermont led the nation when we passed the Rozo McLaughlin Farm to School program back in 2007, supporting schools with both technical assistance, and grant funds. Since then over 200 grants have gone to schools and ECE programs. We have continued to be national leaders in Farm to School as we expanded the grant program to early childhood recognizing that 90% of our brain is developed by age 5 and good nutrition is critical to healthy brain development. Early childhood is also when children's food preferences are forming.

Vermont recently passed a local foods incentive for schools that supports increased local purchasing, so that more of the \$20M schools spend each year on food stays here in the VT economy and with VT farmers. We know from a UVM study that for every dollar schools spend on local food, an additional 60 cents is contributed to the VT economy. And over 100 farms across the state now sell to schools and early childhood programs.

The third leg of this stool is providing Universal School Meals to ensure equitable access to school meals for every student, in every zipcode in our state, funded off-the-top of the Education Fund. Since for many students, around half their daily calories come from school meals. We know its essential for our student's health, their learning and their success to access nourishing meals.

These three programs work together. Farm to School in Vermont integrates food access, food education and local purchasing, so that while we are providing our children critical nutrition, they are understanding what that food does for the health of their bodies and their communities, while benefiting our local farmers and building healthy habits and a connection to VT foods, for a lifetime.

We call this graphic the “Virtuous cycle” of farm to school: Farm to School and Universal Meals increases participation in school meals, which improves revenues in the program which allows more local purchasing, leading to more participation.



Today you will hear directly from farmers, school nutrition directors, food hubs and technical assistance providers, how farm to school has made a difference. We can take some questions after each speaker, and we should have time at the end for discussion. I also want to remind you of the handouts submitted to the Committee staff that can give you more information, but please reach out anytime if you have further questions of any of us.

We are looking for your support of full funding for both the Local Purchasing Incentive at \$500K base funding, and for the FTS & EC grants program at level base funding of \$500K. These programs make a huge difference in the ability of schools to buy their food from VT farmers and engage our students in understanding where our food comes from. The programs work together to support VT families, VT farmers and VT children.

Thank you

