

Farm to School Awareness Day Testimony

Wednesday 2/7/18; Room 10 before House and Senate Ag Committees

Good morning,

My name is Abbey Willard, I am the Ag Development Division Director at the VAAF, home to the Farm to School and Childcare program lives – managed by Ali Zipparo.

The Farm to School and Childcare grant program is celebrating 11 years of delivering high impact programming in classrooms (and now childcares), cafeterias, and communities across Vermont.

Since 2006, when the Rozo McLaughlin FTS bill was passed we have invested nearly \$1.2 million in state funds servicing over 45,000 students and children, reaching 157 schools, and now after one year is also funding 22 childcare programs.

Over these 11 years' of partnership we have maintained the same goal and objectives:

- Increase equitable student access to fresh nutritious local foods;
- Improve health eating habits and instill agricultural literacy in our youth through an understanding of where our food comes from; and
- Establish schools as community markets for our food and farm businesses.

As the program grows, we have instituted changes and new program components to move our state toward sustained programming, leading to the best possible program delivery, with greatest impact on students and children and our communities.

- Grants are now larger and longer
 - More time to plan and then implement sustainable program components and educational goals
- Childcare programs are new to join schools in benefiting from this program
 - We are reaching back to PreK to ensure our youngest children have access to, and appreciation for, healthy, local food options
- Significant focus on coaching and training, TA and professional development for grantees and other interested schools and childcares
 - TA focused on food/farm/nutrition education, school meals and procurement, school gardens, and network development
 - Concentrate on coordinating offerings from expert organizations, many here today, that are already well connected and knowledgeable of the schools and childcares
- New equipment grants to childcares and milk cooler grants for schools are now incorporated into the grant program

- Small infrastructure investments can make a big impact on successful program and serving of local food
- Focused resources for a pilot Universal Meal programs at seven schools in '17-18 school year
 - These pilot schools received information, access to TA, opportunity to participate in child nutrition programs, and the encouragement to explore new meal programs, and track their local food purchases
 - And every one of the schools has had an increase in meal participation
 - 76% average increase in breakfast participation over previous year
 - 31% average increase in lunch participation over previous year
 - Many have increased their local food purchasing by 10%
 - Nearly 1000 students, as a result of this pilot, are now able to eat one meal per day at school at no cost

The successful implementation of these program offers economic, health, and educational benefits to schools and childcares while also aligning with the administration's priorities of

- Supporting vulnerable Vermonters (our children)
- Focusing on economic opportunities for the state (in our food and farm businesses)
- And finding opportunities to leverage federal resources for Vermonters (through child nutrition programs).

Current spending on local food at Vermont schools is relatively small (over \$1 million each year) but the economic research demonstrates that for every \$1 VT schools spent on local food, it contributes an additional 60 cents to the local economy.

We believe the impact is greater and are confident that the FTS and Early Education Networks here in Vermont are building a culture of agricultural literacy, an expectation of healthy and local food, and an appreciation for the community that grows, prepares, and serves our food.

- This shift is increasing participation in meal programs and consequently the viability of our schools and communities, supporting our agricultural producers, and the health of our children.

Thank you very much for your support and your vision.

We have copies of our 2018 Annual Report Snapshot (Annual report to be out soon)