

Good morning,

My name is Abbey Willard, I manage the Food Systems Section at the VAAF.

Our VT FTS grant program is celebrating 10 years of delivering high impact FTS programming in classrooms, cafeterias, and communities across Vermont.

Since 2006, when the Rozo McLaughlin FTS bill was passed we have invested over \$1million in state funds servicing over 138 schools reaching over 40,000 students – that’s more than 50% of all VT students experiencing impact by a VT FTS grant.

Over these 10 years’ partnerships have grown and matured, the program delivery has innovated, and we have maintained the same 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.

Our experience, along with our numerous FTS network partners – many of whom are here today – is that FTS grants combined with the collective FTS efforts across the state are

- Increasing the quality of school meals, which is driving
- Increase in participation in school meal programs, which is supporting
- Increased sustainability of these meal programs
- Allowing kids to eat better and more meals at school and VT’s agricultural community to establish more reliable local markets in the state.

We have seen these grants, in every one of Vermont’s counties cultivate

- School administration, food service, and educators united support for the FTS concept;
- Relationships with VT producers through taste tastes and farm field trips;
- Exposure opportunities for students to try new healthy foods and then be willing to suggest these foods at home to their families; and
- School team and vision development for a healthy, equitable, engaged, and supportive school environment.

And over this time we have seen the increased need and demand for FTS grants continue to grow. Based on the past 4-year average, this grant program is able to fund 44% of requested funds, responding to less than 50% of schools, supervisory union and districts applying for grants.

Our future vision for the VT FTS grant program is

- Increase TA and training offered to schools in designing and implementing their FTS activities;
- Focus on sustainability- building on our planning and implementation grant concept by adding a 3rd tier to support on-going FTS programs and sustainable child nutrition program participation;
- Expand the FTS grant program's audience to include early education (ages 0-5), summer and afterschool meal programs;
- More direct connection to the ag community messaging the market opportunities in selling to schools and the specific products in demand by school meal programs; and
- Expand the reach of the program to meet the statewide FTS network goal of 75% of VT schools sourcing 50% local and regional food by 2025.

We believe this is possible and that these program goals align perfectly with our administrations 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).

And if we ever wondered whether FTS programs were contributing population level outcomes, a new economic research conducted by UVM Center for Rural Studies determined that for every \$1 VT schools spent on local food, it contributes an additional 60 cents to the local economy.

So, we believe FTS efforts across the state are well on their way to serving Vermont students, schools, farmers, and our local economy over the next 10 years.

Senator- if I may, I have a few handouts to share with you. Our 2017 Legislative Report highlighting 2015 FTS grants, more on the economic impact research I mentioned, and the goals of our FTS grant program.

Thank you very much for your support and your vision.