

**Joint Agriculture Committee Testimony**  
**February 7, 2018**

- My name is Betsy Rosenbluth, I am the Project Director of VT FEED, a partnership project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms
- I also coordinate the VT Farm to School Network – an amazing network of 40 organizations, state agencies, schools, farms and businesses from across the state, all working towards one single goal:
  - That 75% of our schools and our students will have integrated food system education, nourishing meals and community-based learning, with schools purchasing 50% of their food from local and regional sources, by 2025.
  - This spring we are collecting data from every school in the state to measure how close we are towards that goal, and what is the gap.
- First off I want to thank each of you for your support of the Rozo McLaughlin Farm to School bill. We already are seeing the impact of this legislation and the increased funding. More schools are applying for grants, childcare programs are really interested, the technical assistance around universal meals is leading to really positive results, and more schools and farmers are participating. You will hear this morning testimony on the details of this impact.
- Unfortunately, given the snowstorm the students that wanted to speak with you had to cancel. But we still have several farms and schools represented here today and even a taste test to share with you.
- At the same time we are increasing the reach and the impact of FTS and helping more schools and communities, the demand is still much greater than the resources we have. We had 80 individuals on the grant information calls; we had more than 3 times the funding requested than we had available in the grants program. VAAFAM has done a great job putting together workshops and technical assistance that will reach more schools than just the grant recipients, but still the need is greater.
- The Farm to School Network is asking for a total of \$500,000 from the State to help us achieve our goal of robust and lasting farm to school programming in every community. Last year, with your support the allocation was \$181,000 which was a great boost to the program. We have also leveraged other funding to support the work. So we are looking now for an additional \$300,000 to meet the demand and to provide help to schools to purchase local product, integrate food farm and nutrition education into the curriculum, expand their school nutrition programs and strengthen community and farm connections.
- Farm to School is a winning proposition for our economy. If VT schools purchased on average just 11% local product, \$2.1 Million would be contributed to the local economy every year. We currently spend over \$2 billion on chronic disease! A modest investment in a prevention strategy like Farm to school can save on healthcare in the future. And right now 26% of high school Teens are overweight or obese which we know leads to health issues later in life. We also know that FTS is investing in our future consumers, who we want to grow up understanding the value of VT agriculture and VT food.

- Lastly, Farm to School is helping vulnerable populations – including the 17,000 VT children that face hunger or the many children that get a majority of their nutrition from school meals. FTS is Growing our economy – by keeping our food purchasing dollars in the state with our farmers and producers. And FTS is making VT more affordable by supporting our school nutrition programs so that every VT child has access to healthy local food and the knowledge to know what it does for their bodies and for their communities.
- Thank you so much for having all of us here today

**House Education Committee  
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- Farm to school is good for Vermont's economy. Not only is FTS a market opportunity for farmers, but it helps to grow future generations of consumers tied to Vermont products- dairy, produce, meat, maple syrup, beans and more. The Agency of Agriculture has said that VT institutions – schools, hospitals and colleges, are a **potential \$11 million market** for local foods. And from a recent study we know that every dollar spent on local foods in school meals contributes an additional 60 cents. If schools can double their local purchasing, \$2.1 million will be contributed to the VT economy.
- Farm to school improves student engagement with learning. As the Secretary of Education has said when our children eat healthy foods and are well fed, we know that they grow stronger brains and are able to behave and participate and engage in learning. FTS activities are helping teachers to meet educational priorities including Next Generation Science Standards or career exploration.
- Farm to School improves our children's health. We are spending over \$2 billion on chronic disease this year! A modest investment in a prevention strategy like Farm to school can save on healthcare in the future. Right now 26% of VT Teens are overweight or obese, and 1 in 7 children age 2-4 in the WIC program are obese, and that leads to serious health issues down the road. Let's make the investment now, to reverse that trend, and improve the health of Vermonters.
- And what we have learned, is that the earlier we start with children, to form healthy eating habits and to be well nourished, the better the opportunity for long term success. Very young children are still developing their palettes and are open to trying new foods. So we are asking you to expand the FTS grants and technical assistance program to include childcare programs, so we can reach Vermont's youngest children and early educators.
- School meals for many of Vermont's children is a major source of their daily nutrition. Last year, the Vermont Legislature and this Committee in particular, was forward thinking in allocating funding to expand universal school lunch. S33 would add this critically important component to the Farm to School grant program, helping to expand and sustain school nutrition programs and support all kids to be ready to learn.
- Lastly I want to say that to reach our goal of robust and lasting farm to school programming in every community, to move the needle on local purchasing and healthier

Vermont children, we need a state investment of \$500,000. This \$500,000 is matched many times over through local, federal and private investments, leveraging millions of dollars across Vermont, but the state is a critical partner.