

Senate Appropriations: Advocates Budget Hearing
Wednesday, April 4, 2018, 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. in room 10
Vermont Farm to School

- **Introduction:** My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Project Director of VT FEED – a Farm to School partnership of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms. I also coordinate the VT Farm to School Network.
- **Thank You** for your support last year increasing the investment in Farm to School by \$50,000 and for expanding its reach to more schools and ECE providers.
- In less than 1 year:
 - 22 Early Care programs are being funded to improve their nutrition education and connect little ones with eating healthy local food. This also improves quality care in those programs.
 - 1,700 more VT students have access to a universal free school meal and this State investment has leveraged over \$90,000 in federal reimbursements and \$25,000 in grants. And schools implementing new universal breakfast after the bell programs saw an average increase in breakfast participation of 92% over last school year.
 - School grantees are increasing their local food purchasing by more than 10%. Direct technical assistance is underway directly with Farmers to help them navigate school purchasing. For some VT farms, school purchasing is an important part of their business model.
- Yet we still are unable to meet the demand from schools – less than a third of the grant funds requested this year were awarded.
- The VT FTS Network has determined that a base appropriation of \$500,000 is needed to fully fund the State's FTS program. Increasing funding by an additional \$300,000 for this grant program is a win-win for the state: reducing childhood hunger, improving child health and learning, and contributing to the VT economy by keeping our school purchasing dollars here with local farmers and producers.
- In recent years childhood hunger declined by 37% and we know a major contributor is the success of school nutrition programs and Farm to School.
- VT also spends over \$2 billion on chronic disease and 26% of our high school youth are overweight or obese: FTS is a recognized prevention strategy and schools with FTS programs have reported twice the national average in vegetable consumption.
- Every \$1 spent on local food in VT schools contributes an additional 60 cents to the local economy. VT schools purchase about \$16 million of food each year in total, so think of the potential as we grow that percentage of local product.
- Thank you very much and I hope you will consider an increase in the FTS budget this year, we can put it to good use, immediately for more grants to schools and more technical assistance and resources to farmers and schools.

VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

Growing healthy Vermont schools, farms, & communities



FARM TO SCHOOL IN EVERY COMMUNITY

- Expanding Farm to School funding in Vermont will allow more schools and childcare programs to participate in the program and increase participation in and sustainability of child nutrition programs in schools.
- **Please support a base appropriation of \$500,000** for Vermont Farm to School through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.



OUR PROGRESS & IMPACT

- Since 2007, Vermont's Farm to School Grant Program has supported **157 schools and 22 childcare programs serving 46,000 students.**
- 2018 FTS grant applications came from all **14 counties**, but available funding only met **32% of requests.**
- Local food purchased by schools contributed **\$1.4 million** to Vermont's economy in a single school year.
- **92%** of Vermont schools report serving locally grown food, **75%** have school gardens, and **63%** conduct taste tests.

"Vermont has long been a pace-setter in the farm to school movement. By bringing local food to the cafeteria table and into the classroom, we improve nutrition, promote healthy eating choices, and help all children understand where their food comes from. It's a winning strategy for our farmers and our students, and Vermont is proving how well this program works."

— U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)

"With the right interventions, we can give every child a chance to get the nourishment and support they need to thrive and grow. When our children eat healthy foods, we know that they grow stronger brains and they're better able to learn. When children are well fed, they have fewer discipline incidents and are able to engage in learning. We know that the best food we can give them is fresh food: unprocessed, full of nutrients straight from our farms to their plates."

— VT Secretary of Education,
Rebecca Holcombe

VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL OUTCOMES

— February 2018 —

Growing the VT Economy

Every \$1 spent on local food in Vermont schools contributes an **additional 60¢** to the local economy.

Vermont schools contribute **>\$1.4 million** each year to the state economy by purchasing local food.

FTS helps keep food purchasing dollars within the Vermont economy; if schools double their local purchasing, FTS will contribute **\$2.1 million** to the Vermont economy annually.

The VT Agency of Agriculture has said that Vermont institutions — schools, hospitals, and colleges — are a potential **\$11 million market** for local foods.

Vermont spends **over \$2 billion annually** on chronic disease! An investment in FTS can help save on health care in the future.



Strengthening Education

In schools with universal meals, nurses report improved academic performance and improved focus in class, declines in absenteeism, declines in school nurse visits as high as **72%**, and at least **10%** declines in behavioral referrals.

1 in 7 Vermont children face the adverse childhood experience (ACEs) of hunger. Helping more kids eat school meals is crucial to helping all children to grow up healthy and succeed in school.

90% of the brain has developed by age five. Healthy, nutritious food is vital to healthy brain development.

Improving Health & Nutrition

Vermont schools with FTS programs have reported **2x the national average** in vegetable consumption.

Students who know a farmer or grow their own food eat more fruits and vegetables.

FTS helps schools serve healthier, local food, which increases participation in school nutrition programs and teaching kids lifelong healthy eating habits.

Fighting Hunger

Childhood hunger rates **declined 37%** from 2010-2015; a major contributor is the success of FTS and school nutrition programs.

In 2017, **65 Vermont schools** provided universal breakfast and lunch to **over 13,500 students**.

Thanks to the new FTS grants helping schools increase participation in their nutrition programs, over **1,700 students** have access to at least one universal meal each day at school.

Thank You!

Because you expanded the Farm to School Grant Program and increased its funding, over 1,700 more VT students now have access to a universal free meal program

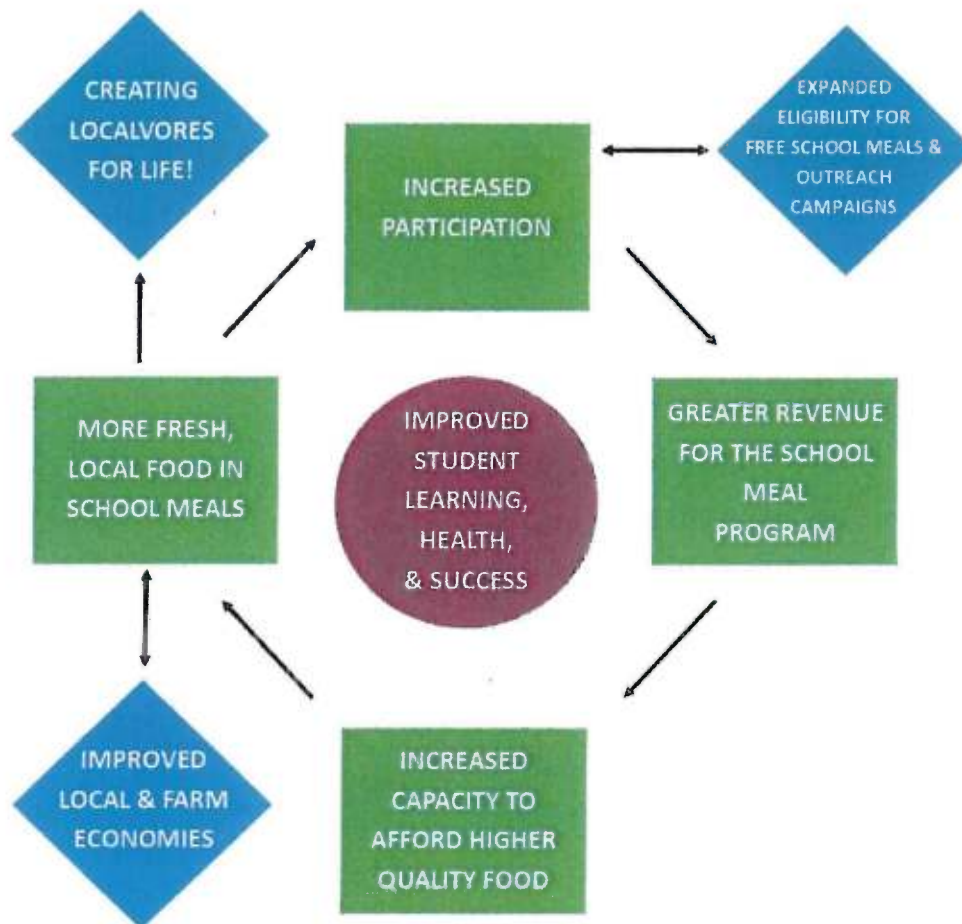
Thanks to this grant program, Hunger Free Vermont provided support to:

- St. Johnsbury School
- Currier Memorial School
- Craftsbury Elementary School and Craftsbury Academy
- Windsor State Street School and Windsor High School
- Poultney Elementary School



- In the 2017 pilot year, five schools received Universal Meals Farm to School Grants, and two schools brought along their high schools—meaning seven schools implemented at least one new universal meal program for the price of five!
- So far, \$65,000 in State funds leveraged over \$90,000 in federal reimbursements—plus an additional \$25,000 in grants
- All seven schools have increased participation in at least one meal program, some by over 100%
- And, all seven schools increased their local food purchasing by more than 10% - in less than one year

The Farm To School—Child Nutrition Program Virtuous Cycle Works!



- Adding fresh, local foods, and making meals universal whenever possible, improves school meal quality and student participation.
- Increased participation means school meal programs have more resources for purchasing and processing local food.
- Strong school meal programs ensure that no student goes hungry.
- Farm to School and universal meals mean all kids get better nutrition and learn to love new foods – creating localvores for life.
- Local farmers get new orders, improving farm viability and Vermont's economy.

The Universal Meals Farm to School Pilot Grants are:

- Improving children's nutrition & health
- Reducing child hunger
- Supporting local producers
- Strengthening local economies

