



February 14, 2017

Teresa Utton-Jerman & Rebecca Buck
Joint Fiscal Office
Vermont State Legislature

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony with regard to expanding a base appropriation for the Vermont Farm to School Program through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets to \$500,000.

My name is Helen Rortvedt and I live in Brattleboro. I work for Food Connects, a nonprofit organization with a mission to cultivate health food and farm connections in classroom, cafeterias and communities in and around Windham County. We provide support for Farm to School Programs to area schools, and also operate a food hub, which primarily serves the institutional market (schools, hospitals & elder care facilities). We aggregate food from about 30 local producers and distribute it to about 50 local institutional buyers.

I have been working with schools across Southern Vermont to build and sustain Farm to School programs for the last five years.

Farm to School programs help schools to serve healthier, local food, which has been proven to increase participation in school nutrition programs. That means more kids, especially those coming from homes that are food insecure and struggling to put food on the table, are eating nutritious meals at school, helping them to grow, learn, and lead healthy lives.

I have personally seen kids go from avoiding vegetables on their lunch trays at all costs, to actually asking for them after they have been able to participate in Farm to School programs, such as Vermont Harvest of the Month taste tests, cooking in the classroom, working in the school garden, or going on a farm field trip.

Please see attached flyer from the Vermont Farm to School Network, detailing the impact and opportunities related to expanding Farm to School funding.

Sincerely,

Helen Rortvedt
Farm to School Programs
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VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

OUR PROGRESS & IMPACT



- Since 2007, Vermont's Farm to School Grant Program has supported **138 schools** serving **40,000 students**.
- Local food purchased by schools contributed **\$1.4 million** to Vermont's economy.
- 95% of schools with Farm to School programs report serving local food: Vermont vegetables, fruit, eggs, beef, poultry, milk, cheese, yogurt, cider, maple syrup, and more.
- Vermont schools with Farm to School programs have reported **twice the national average** in vegetable consumption. Students who know a farmer or grow their own food eat more fruits and vegetables.

Sources: UVM Center for Rural Studies; USDA Farm to School census; Vermont FEED

OUR OPPORTUNITY



Good for the Vermont economy

- The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets estimates that state institutions (schools, hospitals, and higher ed) are a potential **\$11 million market** for local foods.
- Every dollar spent on local foods contributes an additional 60¢ to the local economy. If schools double their local purchasing, **\$2.1 million** would be contributed to the Vermont economy.
- Programs leverage millions of dollars in both federal and private grants, and school and business investments.
- Vermont spends over **\$2 billion** annually on chronic disease! An investment in Farm to School can save on healthcare in the future.

Improves our children's health & learning

- **26% of Vermont teens** are overweight or obese, and **1 in 7** of Vermont children age 2-4 in the WIC program are obese. Farm to School has huge potential to improve life-long eating habits and the nearly 12 million meals served annually by Vermont schools.
- Currently, **1 in 7 Vermont children** face hunger, a significant barrier to growing up healthy and succeeding in school. But Farm to School and school nutrition are making a difference: between 2010 and 2015, childhood hunger **decreased by 37%** as school meal programs improved and expanded.

LET'S ENSURE ALL VERMONT CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY LOCAL FOOD!

SUPPORT EXPANDING FARM TO SCHOOL IN VERMONT



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

"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. We know that when children are well fed, they have fewer discipline incidents and are able to engage in learning. And 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 Network
www.vermontfarmtoschool.org

Working to engage Vermont students and school communities in a local food and farm culture that nurtures children's health, cultivates viable farms, and builds vibrant communities.