

Hello,

I am Timothy Hughes-Muse, owner and operator of Laughing Child Farm where we grow 23 acres of organic sweet potatoes and ship throughout VT, NH, MA, and NY. I am here to express support for new state funding in the amount of \$500,000 for the Vermont Foodbank to continue to build their Vermonters Feeding Vermonters initiative. I would like to tell you how the VFV provides security to farms, equity to Vermonters, and builds the local economy.

Laughing Child Farm has been a past participant in this program, as well as a current participant with Vermonters Feeding Vermonters. Each winter, the VTFB requests bids for produce from farms and secures contracts with competitive prices for the upcoming growing season. Not many of our customers are able to provide us with contracts. Having this security in an uncertain business is valuable to the health of us as business owners and to the health of our business. The security that the pre-purchase contracts provide to our farm have allowed us to expand and grow our business beyond the scope of just the product we contracted to provide to the Vermont Foodbank. This program has had big impacts on our farm and in our community.

Besides the lasting benefits that the VFV provides the farmers who grow the food, we are also grateful for this program for the way it addresses equity and hunger in Vermont. We've been on both sides of food insecurity. Sometimes local food is thought of as inaccessible to all Vermonters. This program is unique in that it provides all Vermont residents equity in this market. I know that Vermonters Feeding Vermonters has direct benefits for the families receiving the food and also for the state of Vermont. Specifically, families see better health outcomes when they have access to and eat fresh, local produce. We love the way our sweet potatoes are getting into the hands of so many people throughout Vermont, becoming a nutritious, everyday staple, rather than just a food to be served at Thanksgiving.

Additionally, this program provides a stimulus to our farm and to the economies and communities that our farm supports. Specifically, on our farm, we value paying our workers well, many of which are local Vermont residents. The VFV program directly helps us do that. Vermonters Feeding Vermonters is helping keep Vt's money where the mouths are.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for the support of this important program.