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February 21, 2019

Testimony submitted by Rebecca Mitchell

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of you today. My name is Rebecca Mitchell and I am the Child Nutrition Initiatives Specialist at Hunger Free Vermont.

I'd like to express Hunger Free Vermont's support for the Farm to School program and ask the committee to restore the \$50,000 cut proposed in the Governor's budget, and to further increase funding for Farm to School and Early Childhood so that the program is able to meet demand and reach its goal of robust Farm to School programming in 75% of VT schools by 2025.

The Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program is incredibly impactful in its reach and return on investment.

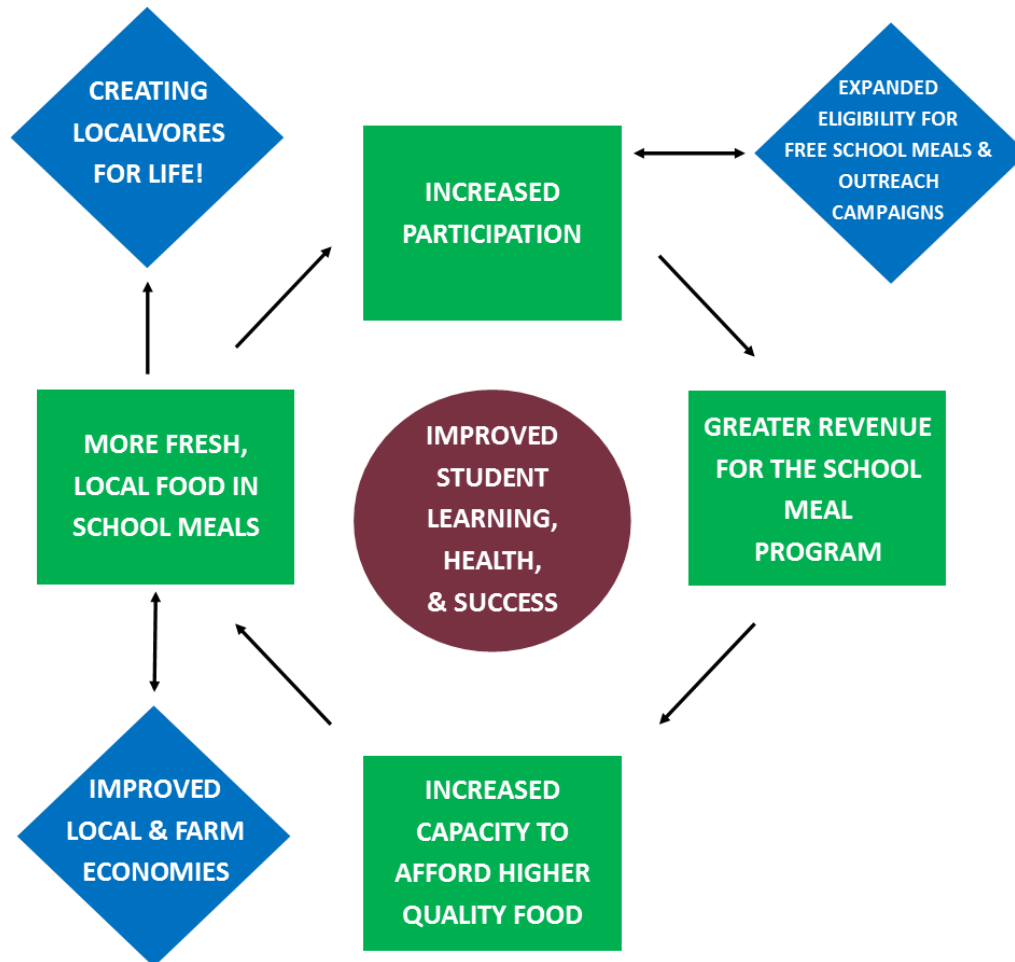
- Farm to School is good for schools: Schools who receive FTS support services increase school meal quality, see more students participating in school breakfast and lunch, are able to explore universal school meal models, and are more readily equipped to integrate agricultural and nutrition education into their curriculum.
- Farm to School is good for students: Children who are well-nourished have improved academic performance, fewer absences due to illness, and better social skills. Through FTS activities, students gain knowledge and skills that are carried into adulthood.
- Farm to School is good for communities: As a result of this grant program, schools increase their local purchasing, creating new markets for Vermont producers and reinvesting money into the local economy.

What is really striking is the how far-reaching these positive outcomes are. The FTS grant program of course has a positive impact on grant recipients, but we've also seen a ripple effect across entire supervisory unions and school districts. When Craftsbury Elementary School was a grant recipient, Craftsbury Academy also moved to a universal breakfast after the bell model, and all schools in Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union benefited from a new local food tracking system. Last year, NewBrook Elementary School began universal breakfast and lunch as a result of the support services they received through the grant program. This has been so successful that district leadership are hoping to expand this model to even more schools in the coming years.

We are also pleased that the legislature is moving H.107, the paid family leave bill, forward. Hunger Free Vermont supports paid family leave because we know that the most dignified way to end hunger is to ensure that those who are able to work have access to good paying jobs that they can retain long-term — through family changes and periods of life that require taking time away from work to care for family members. Many Vermonters live one missed paycheck away from food insecurity. Vermonters shouldn't have to choose between keeping their job and putting food on their tables — and caring for their families. We know that this bill likely requires an initial appropriation. We strongly encourage you to include this funding in the budget.

# The Farm To School–School Meal Program “Virtuous Cycle”

Improve Child Nutrition, Reduce Child Hunger  
& Strengthen Local Economies



- 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 school 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.