

TO: House Commerce Committee
FROM: Amy Shollenberger, on behalf of the Food Security Coalition
DATE: June 18, 2020
RE: \$1million request for Local Food Purchasing

The Food Security Coalition request was developed by:

- John Sayles, CEO, Vermont Foodbank
- Betsy Rosenbluth, Project Director, Vermont FEED
- Grace Oedel, Executive Director, Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont
- Anore Horton, Executive Director, Hunger Free Vermont

Thank you for your consideration of the request from the Food Security Coalition for \$1million for the purchase of Vermont products direct from farmers and producers. This memo will summarize our request and hopefully answer some of your questions.

Our request is part of package put together by the Food Security Coalition to address the issue of increasing demand on our food security system because of COVID-19. At the same time, the members of the Coalition believe that a strong and resilient local food system is critical to our State's long-term well-being, as well as to our short-term response to COVID. During the pandemic, the markets for local food that been developing for years were disrupted as schools, restaurants and farmers markets were closed down. So, as the group developed its proposal to address the needs of hungry Vermonters, they also wanted to ensure they were doing all they could to support our local producers. That is why this part of the package was included in our original request.

Our original full package request can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xwbx5qfg3l6wtwa/Food%20Security%20Coalition%20ltr%20june2020.pdf?dl=0>

- To date, close to 150 schools and other organizations have signed on to support this request (see list at the end of this memo).

Yesterday, the House passed H.965, which included \$16.6 million of this \$18 million request. Essentially, the H.965 allocated CRF dollars for the "food security" part of the request, and for that, we are very grateful, as we know it will help to provide food to many families and children who need it over the next several months. We thank you and your colleagues for your support for that package.

We are coming to you, the House Commerce Committee, to request an allocation of CRF dollars for the "local purchasing" part of the request - \$1 million to allow schools to easily purchase direct from farmers and get a direct reimbursement and to support low-income Vermonters in purchasing direct from farmers. Specifically, we are asking for:

- **\$930,000 to the VT Agency of Agriculture for grants through the Farm to School Grant program.**
- **\$70,000 to the Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont for their Crop Cash Program.**

Details of our request:

Crop Cash (request: \$70,000):

- Crop Cash is a program that allows shoppers using 3SquaresVT benefits to double their benefits when purchasing local fruit and vegetables at farmers markets. So, every \$1 of 3SquaresVT cash that the individual brings to the market is matched with \$1 extra to spend while there.
- An additional \$70,000 toward Crop Cash in 2020 would allow NOFA-VT to double the benefit we can provide to families in this time of increased food insecurity, from \$10 matched to \$20 matched - a significant increase for a food insecure household needing support to access nutritious food.
- Crop Cash and 3SquaresVT payments are operating in a similar fashion as they have in previous years at Farmers Markets, with a few key adaptations. This year, customers receive only \$1 wooden tokens when

they swipe their EBT card (as opposed to \$5, \$10 and other denominations in previous years). They can use these tokens to purchase any SNAP-eligible items at the market. They also receive matching \$1 crop cash coupons (up to a current max of \$10 per visit) for fruits, veg, herbs, seeds and starts. Providing only \$1 tokens eliminates the need to make change, so the transaction can be touchless for vendors. Markets are then quarantining tokens that are recirculated through the market and the coupons are not reused.

Financial support for local food purchases from VT producers and farmers for school meals

(request: \$930,000)

- Provide VT supervisory unions that participate in National School Lunch, School Breakfast and Summer Food Service programs and can demonstrate economic hardship due to COVID-19 closures, with financial support for local food purchases from VT producers and farmers for school meals for July-December 2020.
- Disbursements would be capped at \$20,000 per SU with student enrollment above 1,000 students, and \$10,000 for SUs with a student enrollment of 1,000 and below.



Knowing your interests as the Commerce Committee, we wanted to address a few points that we think might be important to you.

How might this investment help to create or maintain jobs?

Local food purchasing - \$930k

- Due to COVID-19, schools are facing extremely tight budgets in the coming school year. School Nutrition programs are being asked to trim budgets and school food service jobs could be cut as schools look to find savings. This funding will support school meal programs and allow them to continue purchasing local food, which means “cooking from scratch,” helping to maintain jobs.
- According to the Economic Policy Institute, every \$1 million in final demand for agricultural products creates 5.9 direct jobs, and 10.1 total jobs. (Updated employment multipliers for the US economy.)

How will this investment support Vermont businesses?

- **School Food:** This funding will be spent directly on purchasing food, supporting local farmers and producers across the state. 53% of schools cited their budget as a major barrier to buying more local food (Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan - School Food Procurement). We know that local farmers lost markets they count on overnight, including restaurants and higher education. This funding will help preserve the school meal program market for local farmers and save Farm to School efforts from losing years of growth in just a few months.
- **Crop Cash:** The Crop Cash program will support the financial viability of both farmers markets and their vendors this summer. Crop Cash benefits are used exclusively to purchase food from local farms. With farmers market attendance down by an estimated 40% around the state, increasing Crop Cash benefits would directly make up for some amount of loss farmers are experiencing because of COVID-19.
 - Farmers markets are unable to count on tourism this summer to sustain them. Vermonters shopping at farmers markets are more important than ever this year. Helping to bring new shoppers to the farmers market and expanding their purchasing power while there will help to sustain farmers markets and their vendors in an uncertain time. Also, some Vermonters are unfortunately experiencing food insecurity for the first time ever. These folks may be regular farmers market shoppers but as they may now rely on 3SquaresVT, may not otherwise choose to shop at the farmers market without this incentive.
 - Crop Cash doubles the purchasing power of participants, allowing them to spend twice what they would otherwise. Since Crop Cash was introduced in Vermont, farmers markets have also experienced an increase in EBT sales, demonstrating that it has brought new sales to farmers

markets and thus, increased the amount of federal dollars being spent in direct markets. Money being spent at farmers markets stays wholly in the state of Vermont, rather than profits going to businesses with their headquarters based out-of-state.

How will this investment inject money into the Vermont economy?

- The \$930,000 for school meals will all be spent directly in the local economy with local producers, contributing \$1,488,000 to the VT economy. In 2015, UVM conducted a study that found for every dollar that Vermont schools spend on local food, \$1.60 is contributed to the Vermont economy, further amplifying this funding.
- From *Farm to Plate Food System Plan Market Brief: School Food Procurement*: “A 2016 UVM study found that in 2013-14, Vermont schools spent \$915,000 on local foods, or 5.6% of all food dollars spent. This in turn generated \$1.4 million in the Vermont economy, including \$374,000 related to the farm and food processing sectors.

Do VAAFM and NOFA-VT have the capacity to administer these funds?

- School Food: VAAFM was part of the discussion when developing this proposal to support the economic recovery of local producers and farms through local food purchasing at schools and has expressed support to our Coalition for the proposal and agreed to administer the funds using existing staff. VAAFM already administers the well-established Farm to School grants program.
- Crop Cash: Yes! NOFA already administers Crop Cash can easily administer an increased amount.

Will the funds be able to be fully spent by December 30, 2020?

- School Food: The \$930,000 allocated for this program, would support all 54 Supervisory Unions receiving \$10-20,000. This is a small fraction of their total food budget, but a significant boost to local producers. Local food would include vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat, poultry, eggs, legumes and grains purchases, including value added products that meet the State definition of local (or has a majority of ingredients that are local).
 - In a 2018 report by the VT Department of Health, nearly half (49%) of schools said that they expected to increase the amount of local food that they purchased for the 2018/2019 school year. The desire is there, and this stimulus would support schools to make local purchasing more viable, while facing the impacts of COVID-19.
 - By allocating this funding in the summer it will allow schools to spend this money on local purchases in their summer meal program and to plan their local purchasing for the fall harvest season. Schools will also be able to preserve locally grown food with light processing and freezing, or other preservation methods, allowing money that is spent prior to December 31 to continue feeding our students throughout the school year.
 - The school food service directors who gave input to this proposal indicated that this funding could be spent down before the end of the year.

With 24 hr notice the School Nutrition Directors of these districts across the State signed on to support this proposal: Karyl Kent, Lamoille North School District • Harley Sterling, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union • Ali West, Windham Southeast Supervisory Union • Nina Hansen, Winooski School District, Maple Run Unified School District • Caryn Getman, Slate Valley Unified School District • Robert Hildebrand, Central Vermont Supervisory Union, Orange East Supervisory Union • Doug Davis, Burlington School District • Jennifer Graham, Addison Central School District • Kathy Alexander, Addison Northwest School District, Mount Abraham Unified School District • Megan Lavalley, Franklin West Supervisory Union, LNSU • Maureen O’Neil, Southwest VT Supervisory Union

Here is the list of all of the other organizations that have signed onto the Food Security Coalition request:

1. Academy School
2. ACORN Network
3. Arnold Block, LLC
4. Aunt Dot's Place
5. Barre Housing Services
6. Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.
7. Bethany Bowl at Bethany Church
8. Black River Good Neighbor Services
9. Brandon Area Emergency Food Shelf
10. Brattleboro Housing Partnerships
11. Brattleboro Winter Farmers Market
12. Bread Loaf Mountain Zen Community
13. Bread of Life Food Pantry - Vernon, VT.
14. BROCC Community Action
15. Burr and Burton Academy
16. Cabot Community Theater
17. Cathedral Square Corporation
18. Center for an Agricultural Economy
19. Chappelle's Vermont Potatoes
20. City Market, Onion River Co-op
21. Colchester Community Food Shelf
22. Colchester Food Shelf
23. Community Harvest of Central Vermont
24. CW Print + Design
25. Darling Inn Senior Meal Site
26. Deep Root Organic Co-op
27. Deer Ridge Farm
28. Delmar Bookkeeping
29. Downstreet Housing & Community Development
30. Dr Nancy Shephard
31. EnRoute Consulting
32. Eternity
33. Everyone Equals Morrystown Community Center
34. Evolution Physical Therapy and Yoga
35. Faith in Action
36. Family Center of Washington County
37. Farmer Hil
38. Feeding Chittenden
39. Five Vine Consulting, LLC
40. Food Connects
41. Forward Philanthropy
42. Full Value Communities, LLC
43. Good Food Good Medicine, Highgate Non-profit
44. Good Samaritan Haven
45. Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services, Inc.
46. Green Mountain Farm to Scho
47. Greensboro United Church of Christ
48. Groundworks collaborative
49. GT Brown
50. Harmonized Cookery
51. Harwood Union Middle School
52. Health Care Without Harm
53. HeartSong Reiki
54. HIS Pantry at SHSF
55. Hunger Council of Lamoille Valley
56. Hunger Mountain Cooperative
57. Intervale Center
58. Jericho Settlers Farm Inc.
59. Jewish Community of Greater Stowe
60. KidSucceed LLC
61. Lamoille Community Food Share
62. Last Resort Farm
63. Laughing Child Farm, LLC
64. Let's Grow Kids
65. Main Street Alliance of Vermont
66. Maplehill School
67. Maya Zelkin Pottery
68. Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op
69. Milton Family Community Center
70. Mt Asutney Hospital and Health Center
71. National Life Group
72. NEKCA North
73. Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging
74. Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Inc.
75. Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital
76. Our Community Cares Camp
77. Outright Vermont
78. Oxbow Senior Independence Program
79. Park Street Healthshare, LLC. DBA Rutland Free Clinic
80. Putney Food Shelf
81. Putney Mask Tree organizer
82. Randolph Area Food Shelf
83. Richmond Food Shelf and Thrift Store
84. Rooney Farm
85. Rural Vermont
86. RuralEdge
87. Rutland County Parent Child Center Brandon
88. Salvation Farms
89. Samuel Morey Elementary
90. Scott Farm Orchard
91. Shelburne Food Shelf
92. Sheldon United Methodist Church Food Shelf
93. ShiftMeals - Skinny Pancake
94. Shires Housing/SASH
95. Shrewsbury Institute for Agricultural Education (SAGE)
96. Singing Cedars Farmstead
97. Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
98. Springfield Family Center, Inc.
99. St Brigids kitchen and pantry
100. The Community Kitchen
101. The Garland School
102. The Janet S. Munt Family Room
103. The John Graham Shelter
104. Three Thirty Three Foundation, Inc.
105. Upper Valley Haven
106. Vermont Achievement Center
107. Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems
108. Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
109. Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
110. Vermont Evaporator Company
111. Vermont Farmers Food Center
112. Vermont Fresh Network
113. Vermont-NEA
114. Vital Communities
115. Vitality Healing Arts
116. Volunteers in Action
117. Westgate Housing Inc.
118. Wild Carrot Farm
119. Wild Hill Organics
120. Wilder Farm
121. Woodbury/Calais Food Shelf
122. Worcester Community Kitchen and Food Shelf