

Appropriations Committee Advocates Hearing
Thursday, February 21, 2019
Betsy Rosenbluth, VT FEED & VT Farm to School Network

- **Introduction:** My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Project Director of Vermont 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 expanding Farm to School to more schools and early childhood programs. VAAFMT has immediately put this funding to good use for grants and technical assistance, supporting 105 schools and 39 early childhood programs to date, and reaching over 50,000 students.
- Yet, we still are unable to meet the demand from schools – only a third of the grant funds requested this year were awarded.

- The FTS Network has determined that a base appropriation of \$500,000 is needed to fully fund the State’s FTS program and to support farm to school in all communities. This year we are asking that you do *not* accept the Governor’s proposal to *reduce* Farm to School funding by \$50,000 from FY19’s appropriation of \$231,000, and that you increase it, if you can, by an additional \$75,000.

- A small amount of money can have a significant impact on a school community
- The program is a win-win for the state: reducing childhood hunger, improving child health and learning, and contributing to the VT economy.
- VT schools purchase about \$16 million of food each year, and we want VT farmers to have a share of that market, keeping our purchasing dollars here in the State.
- For many VT children a majority of their daily nutrition comes through school meals. Good nutrition is essential for their brain development, and their success in school. Establishing healthy eating habits early in a child’s life is critical for preventing chronic diseases later in life.

- Farm to School helps children of all financial backgrounds have access to nutritious food and to be connected to the local food system.



Growing Healthy Vermont Schools, Farms & Communities



Farm to School in every community

Please support a base appropriation of \$500,000 for Vermont Farm to School through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

Expanding Farm to School funding in Vermont will allow more schools and early childhood programs to participate and strengthen child nutrition programs.



Our progress and impact

Since 2007, Vermont's Farm to School Grant Program has supported **105 schools and 39 early childhood programs serving over 50,000 students.**

2019 Farm to School grant applications came from **13 counties**, but available funding only met **38% of requests.**

Local food purchased by schools contributed **\$1.4 million** to Vermont's economy in a single school year.

89% of Vermont schools purchase locally grown food, and 65% are connected to a local farm or farmer.



"We see how kids who eat nutritious food learn better and live healthier lives, and how our farmers thrive when they have access to local markets... It's a smart investment that yields broad returns from healthier students, to resilient farms, to stronger communities in Vermont and across the country."

**-US SENATOR
PATRICK LEAHY (D-VT)**

"When we serve local food in our schools, all students, regardless of their home economic situation, are getting fresh, wholesome, nutritious food in the regular meals."

**-CORNWALL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL,
JEN KRAVITZ**

Vermont Farm to School & Early Childhood Outcomes

FEBRUARY 2019



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 experiences (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 is developed by age five. Healthy, nutritious food is vital to healthy brain development in young children.

91% of early childhood providers polled indicated they are interested in implementing Farm to Early Childhood programming.

Fighting Hunger

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

76 Vermont schools provide universal breakfast and lunch to over **16,490 students**.

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 estimates 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.

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.

56% of early childhood providers are serving local food one or more times per week.

Learn more about the Vermont Farm to School Network @ vermontfarmtoschool.org
Questions? Contact Betsy Rosenbluth @ brosenbluth@shelburnefarms.org • 802-985-0318