

## Activate Local Foods to Feed Vermonters

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- ✓ CARES Act Request: \$5million to provide 18,500 meals per week through 12/30/20
- ✓ Statewide expansion of 2 local pilot projects that have a proven model of delivery
- ✓ \$180k in administrative costs to run the program in 12 locations (hubs) through 12/30/20 with \$4,820,000 going to local restaurants participating in the program.
- ✓ Longer term funding from FEMA may be pursued, but is of unknown certainty at this time.
- ✓ Host entity for the funding: we are recommending Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) as they are managing the \$100,000 FEMA funded pilot in Brattleboro that is about to launch. Carolyn Sweet ([csweet@sevca.org](mailto:csweet@sevca.org)) and Steven Geller ([sgeller@sevca.org](mailto:sgeller@sevca.org))

Multiple agencies and partners have come together on a program to help feed the hungry while also supporting local restaurants. The statewide group is aiming to expand the concept of Shiftmeals program that Skinny Pancake started to provide meals to those in need by using restaurants. We have \$100,000 (FEMA reimbursed) to start the program in Brattleboro (with funding from the Public Service Dept.) using 16 restaurants offering meals 4 times per week or 10,000 meals over the course of 4 weeks. The cost of the meals is \$10 which helps the restaurants out and provides good healthy meals to those in need from local restaurants. The program in Brattleboro should kick off in about 2 weeks and will expand statewide when we identify a funding source.

**Partnering Entities:** The team we have been working with includes ACCD, Ag, AHS, PSD, SEOC, CAP agencies, VT Food Bank, Hunger Free VT, VT Hunger Council, Sustainable Jobs Fund/Farm to Plate, School meal programs, Vermont Community Foundation, Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, Shiftmeals, Mama Sezz and others.

### **Program Goals:**

- 1) Feed those who are food insecure
- 2) Support VT Restaurants who are positioned to make the meals and help their bottom line during this critical survival time, utilizing as much local food purchased from local farms as possible

The Governor's **Local Support and Community Action Team** is in support of this initiative as identified in their recent report to the governor. The **Vermont Restaurant Coalition**, led by Sue Bette is also in support. This funding could serve two very important needs for our state right now. Here is the priority identified by the Local Support and Community Action Team:

### **Activate Local Foods to Feed Vermonters**

Demand for food assistance has increased significantly since the pandemic hit Vermont. At the same time, restaurants and institutions are closed and Vermont farms are struggling

with a limited market for their products. Vermont should develop a system to purchase local foods from Vermont farms and producers and redirect foods to Vermont households in need, or to institutions serving Vermonters in need, with food assistance or prepared meals. In the near term this effort can build on the “Shiftmeals” project, replacing FEMA MREs and boxed meal programs with local meals prepared with local foods by Vermont restaurants, “Farmers to Families” distributions, and other starting points to expand local foods and food security.

#### **Program Specifics:**

- ✓ **12 community-scale hubs** across the state that could coordinate restaurant engagement and meal distribution through their communities. The role of these hubs could be played by community action agencies or larger restaurant feeding programs (like ShiftMeals/Skinny Pancake).
- ✓ **\$5,000,000 allocation to support Vermont restaurants supporting mass feeding with heat and serve and ready to eat meals**
  - **\$180,000 administration costs** through 12 community hubs (could be community action agencies, larger restaurants, or other community organizations) will coordinate programming that involves food handling, logistics, service to food insecure Vermonters, and contract management. Admin costs are not directly variable with the program budget, we could expect some reduction in admin costs at a smaller level of funding, but not much less than 50%. That is, if the program budget went down to \$1M it would cost approximately \$90,000 in administration costs vs. \$180,000 at \$5M.
  - **\$4,820,000 direct payments to restaurants for meals**
    - @\$10/meal = 18,500 meals/week through 12/31/20 across the state.
    - @10% local ingredients purchasing = \$200,000 in purchases from local farms and producers
    - Assuming larger restaurants fulfill 60% of meals, target participation from 5 larger commissary kitchens (>\$5M annual rev), and 40 smaller restaurants (<\$5M annual rev) to fulfill meals through a hub and spoke model. Annual gross revenue is being used here as a proxy for kitchen size, ability to manage multiple enterprises, ability to manage multiple contracts and subcontracts.
    - Each large restaurant would earn \$100,000/mo in revenue from this program
    - Each small restaurant would earn \$9,000/mo in revenue from this program
    - Program participation provides valuable operational throughput for restaurants providing critical financial support for operating overhead and labor expenses, especially while traditional sales are down due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Hunger relief advocates are seeing the benefits of engaging local restaurants in mass/emergency feeding because this program:

- leverages local assets that are currently underutilized, provides elasticity to scale up and down to respond to the need;

- expands current emergency feeding infrastructure by adding new kitchens and distribution points;
- provides nourishing meals from a recognized business - brings a higher level of dignity to receiving food assistance;
- supports restaurants which are essential to VT's economy. keeps Vermonters employed; and
- uniquely supports newly food insecure (unfamiliar with emergency food channels), homebound populations which have increased due to COVID-19, and sheltered populations (also increased due to COVID-19).