

Senate Appropriations Committee Advocates Hearing
Tuesday, April 16, 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 – we had three times the requests for funding than we could award.

- 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.

- For this year, Please support the House increase of \$50,000 to bring Farm to School back to level-funding AND please also increase Farm to School funding by \$75,000, so we can support more schools and early childhood programs
- The program is a win-win-win for the state: reducing childhood hunger, improving child health and readiness for learning, supporting VT farmers and contributing to the VT economy.
- VT schools purchase about \$16 million of food total each year, and we want VT farmers to have a share of that market, keeping our purchasing dollars here in the State.
- For every dollar schools spend on local food, an additional 60 cents is contributed to the VT economy
- 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. We spend over \$2 billion on costs related to chronic disease each year
- I hope you will consider an increase in the FTS budget this year. We know that we can put it to good use, immediately. A small amount of money can have a significant impact on a school community and is an important step towards supporting more rural economic development activity in the state, including the farms and businesses in all corners of the state which sell product to their local schools and other institutions.