

TO: Senate Health & Welfare Committee
FROM: Food Security Coalition
RE: Food Security CRF\$ Request
DATE: June 12, 2020

Contact People:

- 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

BACKGROUND. COVID-19 has been sweeping through our nation for almost four months now, and the virus has had several other impacts in addition to the immediate health issues associated with the sickness. One of these impacts has been a food security crisis for families from all walks of life. This crisis has spurred unrepresented collaboration and innovation among Vermont organizations to address hunger. Nonprofits, businesses, and the state have been partnering in bold new ways to ensure that people have access to the food they need in ways that support the local economy and local farmers. From buses delivering universal school meals to paying restaurant workers to prepare meals for people in need, Vermonters have done what they do best – help their neighbors – and have done it in creative new ways. These organizations are creating new systems that address the challenges around food access during the pandemic and can help us to envision a new future for food access and partnership moving forward. These efforts are inspiring and effective, but the state cannot rely solely on its private partners to address this crisis. This fundamental safety net support system must be the primary responsibility of the State of Vermont, working with these private partners, to ensure that Vermont families get the help they need throughout this crisis.

In addition to the crisis for Vermont families trying to make sure they have the food they need, Vermont farmers are facing a crisis as restaurant and institutional markets have disappeared overnight. Thus, efforts to connect local food with people facing hunger were proven to be more critical than ever as the pandemic hit. Not only do programs like the Vermont Foodbank's *Vermonters Feeding Vermonters* program and NOFA-VT's *Crop Cash* and *Farm Share* programs provide ways to get more food to people in need, they also provide an important stimulus to Vermont farmers during this time, along with any local food purchasing by Vermont schools. Further funding these programs helps move our state in a direction where we are building resilience by supporting our local producers and addressing multiple COVID-19 related challenges.

Another key area of innovation is between restaurants and nonprofits. At the same time that restaurants shut down and furloughed their workers, food shelves and meal sites accustomed to feeding people through congregate meal sites were forced to switch to prepared meals to-go, which is a much more labor-intensive model. The charitable food system alone did not have the capacity or facilities needed to prepare enough meals to meet the increasing demand. But through innovative partnerships with restaurants, including the Skinny Pancake, the Vermont Foodbank was able to fund the preparation of these to-go-meals by restaurant workers, putting furloughed employees back to work and getting critical meals out to places that needed them. This new model lays a foundation for continued creative collaboration between these two sectors that will be valuable during pandemic times and beyond.

New collaborations and innovation have been necessary to implement the USDA's new *Farmers to Families* food box program. Because of challenges with the program design at the federal level, few states other than Vermont have been successful in making it work. But here in Vermont, the State, our local distributor the Abbey Group, and the National Guard joined forces to ensure that we could put forward a Vermont bid for the program, bringing federal money to the state to purchase from local producers. This unique partnership has been able to bring 1.6 million pounds per month of produce, dairy, and meat to people facing hunger. The

need and turnout at distribution sites has been incredible, and we are working through our plan for continuing this program through the end of the calendar year. However, we do have a serious concern.

The existing level of National Guard support will not be available for much longer and new systems need to be developed to get this food to people in need. It is absolutely necessary for the State to continue to step up its support for this distribution. Specifically, we need a strong and clear commitment that the State will be a partner in funding, planning and implementing the ongoing program. Continuing the food distribution program will require unique collaborations and the building of additional capacity (including purchasing refrigeration systems) at food shelves throughout the state so that they can help be a part of getting this food to people in need as we shift our distribution models. These improvements and systems will be both key to surviving the pandemic and also to strengthening the charitable food system for the future. It is necessary for the State to sustain and increase its efforts in the face of this unprecedented need. **We request that the Legislature direct the appropriate agencies and departments to provide the needed support to underpin this system.**

As we have all seen the long lines of people in cars waiting for food at these distribution events, it is clear that there has to be a better way to do this distribution. Even as planning takes place around how to shift the *Farmers to Families* food box program to a model that provides a better client experience and less intensive traffic management, there is another program that already exists that can efficiently address food insecurity – 3SquaresVT.

Of the different ways that we can quickly and responsively react to such a dramatic increase in food insecurity, 3SquaresVT is uniquely positioned to do that efficiently and effectively. It can get more food to more people, on their own terms, without making them wait in long lines of cars for hours, it allows them to choose the food that is culturally appropriate for them, and it supports local retailers by bringing federal funds into the state. **The most efficient way we can address the hunger crisis taking place is to increase access to this program through funds to support outreach and assistance to get more people signed up and funds to increase benefits by 15%.** This will shorten the lines at food distribution sites, take pressure off food shelves and meal sites, and provide a more dignified experience for people struggling. We estimate that \$20million would be needed to achieve this goal through December 2020, for all current beneficiaries and any newly eligible individuals or families that enroll during that time.

We know that an immediate and increasing need is to make sure that our children are getting the meals they normally receive at school or at their summer programs. As mentioned above, many, many people and organizations contributed to the effort to ensure that every Vermont child and youth had access to school meals throughout the past several months. As we head into summer, we must continue this program. We have recently gotten word that we can utilize a waiver from USDA to allow for the universal meals to continue for all Vermont children and youth (0-18) throughout the summer. We also know that more children than ever before will need access to these meals, and the majority of meals will need to be delivered to the children as summer programs are reduced in weeks or closed altogether. In addition, as childcare programs reopen, they will need help to provide meals for the children in their care, as the COVID protocols add many new layers of work to their staff.

Funding universal summer meals access for children will ease burdens on the charitable food system and help collect more school meal applications. If families have a stable, easy to access system for receiving two healthy meals a day for their children until schools reopen in the fall, many will be much less likely to need their local food shelf this summer, easing the strain on Vermont's charitable food system during a time when it is pushed to the brink. As we look forward to the future, a way to ensure an ongoing ability to respond when future emergencies happen is to bring universal breakfast and lunch to all Vermont schools as a matter of public policy. Related to this policy is the need for a major effort to enroll every family that is eligible for 3SquaresVT - both so that they can get the support they need and to bring more schools into eligibility for the

federal CEP program that increases meal reimbursement rates for universal school meals. This effort will maximize both our federal drawdown of funds and our ability to feed our children every day.

School meal applications can be delivered along with summer meals, helping make more Vermont schools eligible to continue providing universal summer and afterschool meals for the next 4 years--the period of time the Federal Reserve has predicted it will take before unemployment rates fully decline. Funding summer meals now will allow Vermont communities to leverage federal funding to keep children food secure through the recovery and beyond.

Each of these solutions fits together to create a strong ecosystem of different efforts that meet people with the food they need and want, where they are, in ways that work for them. This pandemic has made it clear that the private charitable food system alone is not positioned or designed to bear the burden alone of responding to such a vast increase in need, and yet it will continue to be a key part of the safety net so that people have a place to turn when their 3SquaresVT benefits run out or when they do not qualify for that program. Schools will continue to be one of the most critical ways that we can get food to children and the efforts to get meals to kids must be sustained through the summer. Each of these efforts also must prioritize local food, helping our economy recover. The systems change that is needed to end hunger in our state must begin with funding for these current innovations and systems so that we do not allow these systems to collapse and leave people without access to food when more people than ever are looking for help.

And as this all goes on, there needs to be a parallel process where we collaboratively envision a bold new future for food access in our state that more effectively connects local food with people who need it. **To achieve this, we call upon the State to step up into a leadership role and be a part of this visioning process. We are recommending that a specific person in the Agency of Human Services be designated to work with the Food Security Coalition and other stakeholders to develop a cross-agency, cross-department, public-private partnership to move the needle on this issue and move the levers in the system to address food insecurity for the long haul.**



Budget Details for Our Request

Additional details below.

3SquaresVT additional outreach needed due to COVID surge in eligibility	\$200,000
Vermont Foodbank – statewide charitable food distribution through all partners	\$4,600,000
Summer Meals – additional costs due to COVID	\$11,400,000
Crop Cash & Farm Share programs to increase 3SquaresVT recipients’ access to local food	\$75,000
Local Purchasing for School Meals September-December 2020 – direct reimbursement	\$930,000
Total	\$17,205,000
Increasing 3SquaresVT benefits to maximum +15% for current and newly enrolled recipients, through December 2020 (estimated)	\$20,000,000

ADDITIONAL 3SQUARESVT & WIC OUTREACH & APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

Request: \$200,000

In May, 54,500 people were unemployed in Vermont, yet only 4,741 people (2,426 households) had been added as new recipients of 3SquaresVT. Many Vermonters who have never had to worry about facing hunger are suddenly finding themselves experiencing food insecurity. Many have no idea what 3SquaresVT is or how they can apply. Many know only the stigma surrounding federal food programs and need to receive different and accurate messages about the value of 3SquaresVT and WIC for their families and for their communities.

The consequences of this lack of accurate knowledge and understanding of these federal nutrition programs is evident in the dramatic increase in food insecurity since March, the long lines of Vermonters at food box distributions around the state, and the challenges faced by food shelves in needing to acquire, store, and distribute many more pounds of food than they are equipped to handle.

At the same time, Vermont communities are missing out on the local economic stimulus generated by 3SquaresVT. During economic downturns, every dollar of federal 3SquaresVT spent in Vermont generates up to \$1.80 in local economic activity.

The following nonprofit organizations are currently contracted with the Department for Children and Families to engage in 3SquaresVT outreach and application assistance, and would be able to increase their efforts with additional funding:

- Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging: \$20,000 for increasing staff capacity; printing; translation; mailing supplies
- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity: \$6,000 for technology to deliver virtual application assistance; translation and interpretation; printing; mailing supplies
- Vermont Foodbank: \$13,000 for 20 hours/week additional staff time through September; translation and interpretation services; mailing costs
- Hunger Free Vermont: \$161,000 to identify, train, and support new outreach and application assistance workers embedded in marginalized and rural communities where use of 3SquaresVT is not keeping pace with unemployment due to COVID-19.
 - Hunger Free Vermont will partner with nonprofit organizations that have not been involved in federal nutrition program outreach efforts, but that could become key conduits of outreach to many Vermonters who have never before been touched by 3SquaresVT outreach efforts.
 - Hunger Free Vermont will also use these outreach funds to develop, print, and distribute accurate information about 3SquaresVT and WIC statewide, and to work with the new outreach partners to develop and distribute targeted materials that speak appropriately to different groups of Vermonters—in their first languages and respecting their unique perspectives and needs.
 - One example of this approach is a new Nutrition Resources Guide for older Vermonters, developed by the Older Vermonter Nutrition Coalition. This guide is ready to print and distribute, and only requires the funding to do so. Older Vermonters are particularly at risk in the COVID-19 pandemic, and only about 40% of eligible older Vermonters are currently accessing 3SquaresVT.

We recommend that the Economic Services Division of the Department for Children and Families within the Agency of Human Services oversee these special COVID-19 related outreach funds, and that these named organizations enter into new MOUs/contracts with DCF to provide these additional services in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic through December, 2020.

Providing this increased outreach and application assistance funding now will help reduce immediate food insecurity and hunger, but it will also lay a strong foundation to keep food insecurity at bay during the next

several years, when the Federal Reserve predicts that unemployment will remain elevated. If, working together, State agencies and nonprofits can break through the current stigma and lack of knowledge keeping Vermonters from accessing 3SquaresVT and WIC, we can permanently transform the use of these critical nutrition programs in our state, and permanently reduce food insecurity and the shame that too often goes with it. As mentioned above, making sure that every Vermont family that is eligible gets enrolled in 3SquaresVT will also make it more possible to provide Universal School Meals at every school in our state.

VERMONT FOODBANK - SUPPORTING THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM STATEWIDE
Request: \$4.6million

Since mid-March, the Foodbank’s operating costs have gone up significantly as they work to address the dramatic increase in need and the shifting nature of food distribution due to the pandemic. In order to continue to operate at this level and meet the needs of the 46% more people facing food insecurity, the Foodbank will need additional funds to purchase more food (including produce from local farmers and prepared meals in partnership with local restaurants), to provide subgrants to partner food shelves and meal sites, and for additional personnel, materials, and supplies. This budget is still evolving and as with everything in this time of crisis, the details will likely continue to shift slightly as plans and external factors evolve. But the total should stay fairly consistent even as the details shift. Budget detail below.

Item	Detail	Amount	
C Y 2 0 E X P E N S E S	Personnel w/fringe		
		Two (2) drivers @ 1 FTE each to deliver CFAP	\$124,166
		Two (2) Warehouse Selectors @ 1 FTE each (to account for loss in volunteer hours)	\$102,322
		Director of Operations @ 0.10 FTE	\$10,350
		Director of Food Resources @ 0.15 FTE	\$10,948
		Warehouse Selector @ 1 FTE (Rutland)	\$68,437
		Rutland Branch Manager @ 0.25 FTE	\$21,018
		Project Manager @ 1 FTE	\$60,766
		Emergency & Hazard pay, all staff	\$74,000
		Contractors (Additional grant writer, Res Tech, PR firm)	\$26,000
		subtotal	\$498,007
		Food	
		Coop food purchases	\$1,500,000
		Skinny Pancake frozen meals partnership	\$180,000
		Other restaurant partnerships	\$300,000
	Vermont grown produce purchases via VFV program	\$500,000	
	Making foods currently in-stock free to network partner food shelves (coop inventory, coop on order, turkey purchase costs), waived delivery fees	\$373,687	
	Water for distribution events	\$2,000	
	subtotal	\$2,855,687	
	Materials and Supplies		
	Bags, non food boxes, containers	\$150,000	
	Pop up tents (6)	\$8,400	
	Pallet blankets (10)	\$2,500	
	Sanitation and cleaning supplies (hand sanitizer, disinfectants)	\$10,000	
	Cardboard boxes for food delivery (1 truckload)	\$9,600	
	subtotal	\$180,500	
	Warehouse/Occupancy Costs		
	Forklift	\$33,000	
	Electric pallet jacks (3)	\$9,000	
	At Barre facility -building repairs & maintenance	\$11,500	
	subtotal	\$53,500	
	Delivery Costs		
	tractor trailer truck lease and operating costs seven months	\$55,825	
	refrigerated truck lease and operating costs nine months	\$65,250	
	subtotal	\$121,075	
	Cash Grants to Network Partners		
	for network partner food shelves and meal site expenses	\$390,000	
	subtotal	\$390,000	
	Equipment Rentals		
	to meet the surge in need (storage containers, heated tent, port-a-potty, dumpster)	\$61,912	
	subtotal	\$61,912	
	Municipal Support Costs		
	Law enforcement contracts for traffic direction	\$6,000	
	subtotal	\$6,000	
	Communications and Public Relations		
	Direct mail -COVID mailing	\$16,041	
	printed materials, radio and online advertisements, other media, PR	\$30,000	
	subtotal	\$46,041	
	Direct costs subtotal	\$4,212,722	
	Administrative costs @ 9%	\$379,145	
	TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES	\$4,591,867	

UNIVERSAL SUMMER MEALS FOR VERMONT CHILDREN

Request: \$11,400,000 to implement an innovative system for providing summer meals for all Vermont children in need, ages 0-18, during July and August.

Vermont has a child hunger crisis right now. Food insecurity among Vermont children has increased 60% since March. School is ending this week in most of Vermont, and with it is ending the delivery of breakfasts and lunches to thousands of children. Without a commitment from State government to cover the costs of meal delivery, PPE for meal program staff, safe packaging for the meals, and increased labor -- all necessary as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic -- 65% of school districts and supervisory unions say they will not provide summer meals for children. If this funding **is** approved, then the majority of school districts will step up and continue to provide meals. The Vermont Agency of Education and nonprofit partners are ready to get into action quickly to help get summer meal sponsors up and running so that we limit the meal gap for Vermont kids, but it cannot happen without fully funding this request.

Additional Funding to Solve the Immediate Transportation & Lack of Sponsors Problems in Summer Meals Provision Moves Vermont Toward a Better System for the Future Last summer, Vermont ranked 2nd in the nation for the percentage of low-income children we reached with summer meals. Even so, Vermont summer meals sponsors reached only about 30% of low-income children who receive free school meals. Reaching 30% of children in need is not nearly enough, yet it takes incredible work on the part of schools, nonprofit organizations, and the Vermont Agency of Education to make even this happen in a typical summer. A lack of transportation funding and flexible options in the federal Summer Food Service Program, combined with our spread out rural communities, are two key challenges we need to address.

According to the AOE survey of school districts, we estimate that it will cost each summer meals sponsor (either a school district or a community nonprofit) on average \$5,000 per week to deliver summer meals to all children whose families request them. Sponsors covering large geographic areas will need more:

- **90 summer sponsors x \$5,000 in weekly meal delivery costs x 8 weeks = \$3,600,000**
- **35 summer sponsors x \$10,000 in weekly meal delivery costs x 8 weeks = \$2,800,000**

TRANSPORTATION/DELIVERY TOTAL: \$6,400,000

- There were 61 summer meal program sponsors in 2019. We expect that a larger number of sponsors will be needed to significantly increase the number of children reached by meals this summer.

According to AOE survey of school districts, the additional costs summer meal sponsors will incur in order to safely provide meals to Vermont children this summer are:

- PPE for meal program and delivery staff
- Packaging materials to safely package meals for delivery
- Extra labor costs due to need for increased staff to pack meals

\$2,000,000 to reimburse sponsors for actual costs they incur in these areas that will exceed the federal per-meal reimbursement payments they will receive.

- This works out to an average of \$2,000 per week of summer meal service per sponsor to cover all additional costs.

Some school districts are not able to sponsor meal programs this summer. In these cases, it is essential that new and creative partnerships are created in Vermont communities to fill in these gaps and ensure that no children go hungry this summer. Local nonprofits could partner with local restaurants to provide summer meals.

\$3,000,000 to cover the additional training, labor, and production costs above and beyond the federal per-meal reimbursement rates required to get these new partnerships up and running for both nonprofit sponsors and local restaurant meal vendors.

We recommend that these funds be managed and disbursed by the Agency of Education, which administers the federal Summer Food Service Program. The Food Security Coalition commits to working with AOE to recruit summer meal sponsors where school districts will not be providing this service and to engaging in a broad outreach campaign to make sure all Vermont families know where and how to access these meals for their children. Hunger Free Vermont has raised private funds to engage in outreach and promotion of summer meals that we will leverage in support of this state effort.

This summer, the waivers approved by USDA provide a great deal of flexibility in terms of delivery models and allow any child in Vermont, ages 0-18, to receive up to two free meals per day, up to 7 days per week. The funding we are requesting from state government will provide for transportation and experimentation with new partnerships and models of how to sponsor and distribute summer meals. While we work to retain some of the new flexibilities necessitated by COVID-19 at the federal level for future years, we can be using this extraordinary summer to test new approaches to providing summer meals that can help us expand summer meal service in future years, and involve more local businesses in this effort. There are always gaps in summer meal service, and the additional funding and heightened need this summer will make it possible for communities to create lasting innovative strategies to be used for years to come.

LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING DIRECT FROM VERMONT PRODUCERS:

Crop Cash (request: \$50,000):

- 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 \$50,000 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 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 as a result of COVID-19.
- 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.

Farm Share (request: \$25,000):

- Farm Share is a program that provides subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares through participating farms. Participation in Farm Share is based on the same eligibility requirements as 3SquaresVT.
- In 2020, we have seen a 26% increase in Farm Share applications over a normal year. Based on increasing demand for CSAs, we expect this increase may have been even greater, but we were forced to close applications in May because funding had run out.
- Of the households applying to Farm Share this year, 45% had not received a CSA share before, demonstrating that the program is reaching food insecure Vermonters specifically seeking out local food right now.
- Although we have closed applications for summer shares, an allocation of \$25,000 would help us meet the increased demand we anticipate will continue into the fall and winter, while still ensuring funds are spent prior to the December deadline.

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 September-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.
- \$930,000 is calculated by all 54 SUs receiving the maximum payment. This investment in food from VT producers will contribute \$1,488,000 to the VT economy, based upon the multiplier economic effect of schools purchasing local food detailed in the 2016 report by UVM, *Economic Contribution and Potential Impact of Local Food Purchases Made by Vermont Schools*
- We recommend that VAAFM administer the funds with existing staff.



Additional Info in Response to the Question - WHAT HAS THE FOODBANK ALREADY DONE?

The Vermont Foodbank has had to transform our systems to address the shifting and increasing need. As of May 31st, we have spent an estimated \$1,663,000 on COVID-19 response. This is above and beyond our typical expenses. The Foodbank anticipates that significant additional expenses will continue to be necessary to meet the increased need and we are asking for \$4,591,867 to help fund our network's effort to deliver food between now and the end of the calendar year. We can provide a comprehensive budget upon request. It has supported food purchases, subgrants to partner food shelves, increased operations, temporary staff, and new partnerships and programs. Here are few of the many new things we've been doing to respond to COVID-19:

- We're distributing more food than ever before (we distributed 83% more food than usual in April).
- We transformed our business model on the fly, from one focused on a "client choice" experience to prepackaged food parcels that can be more safely distributed. This requires more labor and resources to accomplish.
- We've spent roughly **\$1 million** on food that we've provided for free and delivered for free to food shelves and meal sites across the state.
- To support our partner food shelves and meal sites, we provided a total of **\$195,000 in cash grants** to 128 food shelves and 42 meal sites in our network. They can use these funds for emergency food and supply purchases, or whatever else they need to keep their doors open.
- The Vermont Foodbank is deemed an essential workplace. Even with the "stay home, stay safe order," our work has continued non-stop. In recognition of the increased risk of the type of direct service we provide, the increased hours our staff are working, and a drop in volunteer assistance, the Foodbank committed to a short-term **emergency pay** increase for staff.
- As soon as the pandemic hit in mid-March, the Foodbank committed **\$275,000 above budget to purchase food from local Vermont growers through Vermonters Feeding Vermonters**. This helped support both farmers who were losing their markets and people in need of food. This includes \$100,000 we gave out in mini-grants to 47 of our partner food shelves so they can buy directly from their local farm, as well as \$175,000 we've spent forward-contracting with our larger farm partners in Vermont. Sustained efforts to prioritize the purchase of more local food will serve as a valuable tool for our state's agricultural economy and food security. Additional funding will help us build upon these critical efforts.
- The Foodbank spent **\$125,000 on a** one-month trial of frozen meal production and delivery with **Skinny Pancake**. Skinny Pancake made 20,000 frozen, single serve meals featuring locally produced ingredients when available, and delivered them to our partner food shelves, meal sites and Parent

Child Centers in Franklin, Chittenden and Washington County. Thanks to this Foodbank contract, Skinny Pancake has been able re-employ more of their staff who had been laid off in late March.

- In partnership with the State and the National Guard, we've supported the distribution of more than **64,000 cases of nonperishable food from FEMA** (each including roughly 16 meals) in locations throughout the state.
- In partnership with the State, National Guard, and the Abbey Group, we have been distributing 1000+ shares of **Farmers to Families food boxes** daily of produce, dairy, and meat in locations throughout the state since May 15th. This is bringing federal money into the state to purchase local food (where possible) for distribution to people in need. The operations that will be required to sustain these efforts will become increasingly challenging as we lose the support of the National Guard.
- We've leased **additional trucks**.
- We've hired additional **operations staff**.
- We placed a **\$22,000** order for a truck load of pre-boxed food, which can be instantly distributed without the need for additional handling.
- We rented a large tent for our headquarters in Barre for **\$8,000 a month**. It was erected in the back parking lot, and will give staff and volunteers the space they need to safely pack boxes.
- Our **3SquaresVT outreach** staff is working hard to help people sign up for 3SquaresVT, and several different staff members who don't normally do that have shifted to assist with the uptick in need for application assistance. For the three-week period from March 16 to April 8, we saw a 300% increase in our application assistance compared to the same period last year.