



**House Education Committee
May 12, 2021**

My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Project Director of Vermont FEED at Shelburne Farms. I am also the coordinator of the Vermont Farm to School Network.

The Vermont Farm to School Network is very strongly in support of passing S.100 and H.106 this year. The bills would provide universal school breakfast to all students (after federal waivers expire) while supporting schools to spend more of their food purchasing dollars with VT farmers and producers through a local purchasing incentive.

The two programs work together to increase participation in school meals, so more students are nourished and ready to learn. Fresh VT products and universal meals increases meal participation, which gives school food programs more dollars to buy more local food, sending more money back into the local economy.

We believe these bills will make a substantial impact on both COVID recovery and the long term health of Vermont kids and farmers.

Schools have been spending \$15.5 million on food every year and we want to keep more of those dollars in the Vermont economy and with VT farmers. If 20% of all school food purchases were local, which is the state goal, that would be over \$3 million annually going to VT producers, and almost \$5 million contributed to VT's economy. This very program has been successful in numerous states, OR, MI, NM, NY.

Now is the time to pass S100 and ensure that every student has access to nourishing breakfast without stigma or shame. Public education in this country is not a pay as you go proposition - higher income parents do not pay for their child's Chrome Books, bus rides to school, textbooks or soccer balls. It should be no different for school meals which provides the nutrition that is foundational to student success. For many students about half their daily nutrition comes from school meals

VT already has 74 schools with Universal Meals and what research at UVM found with these programs is a decline in nurse visits, absenteeism, behavior interventions and better academic performance. With all the money we invest in our student's education, it is wasted if a child is hungry.

We have heard many stories from many different districts about the change that has happened this year w universal meals in all schools. Meal Participation rates are up,

classroom culture has changed, and the stress of individual students that rely on school meals has been reduced.

S100 helps VT families and helps students succeed. And we can do this in VT while benefiting our rural economy.

