



Food Security Requests

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My name is Amanda Witman, I live in Brattleboro, and I'm here representing Vermont Everyone Eats.

I have 3 requests to make today:

- 1) Please find a home for Food Security in the legislature so that we can work together most effectively to address food insecurity.
- 2) Please support a forthcoming request from Vermont Everyone Eats for bridge funding to cover an anticipated 10% FEMA cost share for up to one year.
- 3) And please support the Vermont Foodbank with an appropriation of \$6 million for FY 23 to address the ongoing increase in food security needs.

As you are hearing today, a number of Food Security entities within the state have been meeting regularly, communicating and collaborating and strategizing to ensure that we're feeding as many hungry Vermonters as possible for as long as possible. And also acknowledging that we're all struggling with some of the same challenges.

Across the state, we have been doing a good job of feeding Vermonters in need. We've done impressive work over the past two years to get more food out to more Vermonters who need it than ever before. This is really encouraging, and I deeply appreciate all of your efforts in making that happen in various ways.

But hunger continues to be a crisis, always, not just during COVID but all the time. AND I know we can do even better. One way we can make this happen going forward is by providing a clearly assigned point of entry in our legislature so that requests and communications around Food Security can be received in context and considered holistically.

They need a common place to land. If Food Security isn't anyone's assigned responsibility, then a request may get passed around for a while until someone finally takes it up. Which is always appreciated. But structurally this is not sufficient to take our efforts to where they need to go long-term.

An inter-agency approach to Food Security is important and valuable, but it complicates communications around asks for funding and support.

For example, Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) engages at least three state agencies on the way to feeding people. It's built on an innovative three-legged-stool model: restaurants/farmers/eaters. Which means 1) economic support for the restaurants who make the meals, 2) strengthening the local food supply through a local ingredients mandate, and 3) providing the meals to eaters in need.

So this program necessarily depends on high-level coordination, support, and participation of the ACCD, AHS, Agency of Agriculture, and stakeholders in other agencies. But when a program doesn't live in any one agency, this complicates interactions around funding and support.

Vermont Everyone Eats has been so successful that we are actively exploring ways to bridge the current program to a future iteration fueled by ongoing federal funding.

Through July 1st, VEE will have been paid for 100% by either FEMA or CARES Act funding. Then we expect FEMA to shift to a 90/10 cost share, and we'll need some state funding to fill the gap before a more permanent solution kicks in.

We have been in contact with the Senate Pro Tem with a request, and we'll be reaching out to the Senate Appropriations Committee as well.

But this brings us back to the question I'm asking today:

Will you create a home for Food Security so that the inter-agency nature of Everyone Eats and other programs won't continue to complicate our ability to connect effectively and work together as efficiently as possible to support and address the needs of Vermonters? Food Security needs a home.

Please also support a forthcoming request from Vermont Everyone Eats for bridge funding to cover an anticipated 10% FEMA cost share for up to one year.

And please support the Vermont Foodbank with an appropriation of \$6 million for FY 23 to address the ongoing increase in food security needs.

Thank you so much for your time.