

## Faces of Vermont Foodbank's Farmers to Families Food Box Program

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**Melissa Disorda,  
Josh, Logan and  
Zoe Potter | Brandon**



The pandemic forced their family down to one income. The vital resource of the Farmers to Families program provided critically needed food for their family to be able to stretch their food budget. A partnership of support between the State of Vermont and Vermont Foodbank is essential to the success of this program and for families like the Disorda-Potters.



Good day! My name is Melissa Disorda. I am a resident of Brandon, which is located in northern Rutland County.

First I want to thank you all having us here today to share with you our experiences, and more importantly for your service to our state.

Before I begin my official testimony I need to be transparent and share that I am currently employed as a temporary, part-time employee of Vermont Foodbank supporting a different program than the one that we are speaking on today. I am **not** here today in an official work capacity. What I am about to share with all of you is of a personal nature.

***“I am a face of hunger in Vermont!”***

Due to the pandemic, this past summer my husband and I were faced with an inevitable decision to ensure the safety of our two young children (Zoe, 5, and Logan, 11

and differently-abled), one of us was going to have “quit” our job. The pandemic had closed daycares, summer camps, and the school wasn’t going to be functioning in a traditional model, yet both of our employers needed us to return to work full-time (we had been splitting the week between the two of us). In July 2020 I left my amazingly rewarding career as an affordable housing developer for a non-profit in Rutland County.

This decision, although vital for the safety of our children, created a **huge** financial hole. As time went on we had to make ongoing difficult choices about how to spend our limited funds. Unbeknownst to our children, my husband and I began to skip meals to make what food we did have stretch a little further. Fresh fruits and vegetables became a luxury in the fridge rather than the staples on the grocery list.

The Farmers to Families distributions have allowed me to supplement my family's food budget in a healthy, dignified, and meaningful way. There is no "walk of shame." This program is not intended to be the final solution to address food insecurity, but it is absolutely a vital resource for Vermonters who are hungry and falling through the cracks.

In a moment I have an ask of you, but before I make my ask there is another side to this story that I want to be sure to highlight. My family has been accessing the Farmers to Families food boxes since the summer of 2020. We've experienced a few different vendors. I will share with you that ***not all vendors are equal***. Previous boxes contained damaged and/or rotten food. Not all of the food, but every month there was something unusable. Please do not mistake this as ungratefulness, as that is far from how we feel. If it wasn't for the Farmers to

Families boxes my husband and I would still be skipping meals or filling our stomachs with empty calories. I can't even begin to quantify the decrease in stress within all of my family members now that we are not having to ration food.

What I want to highlight is that recently we made homemade macaroni and cheese from 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Creamery's Cheddar out of West Glover and last week my kids had an after school snack that included carrots from Harlow Farm located in Westminister. These fantastic ingredients were sources from the January Farmers to Families box.

At a time when I am not financially able to purchase a CSA share or even shop at my local farmers market, I am deeply grateful for the locally sourced food in the boxes. In some small, yet meaningful way the farmers and the families are helping each other survive the pandemic.

The irony of my family's situation is that I went from developing affordable housing to financially qualifying to live in it. I went from volunteering with Vermont Foodbank to utilizing their services. The important part of all of this is that those vital resources (affordable housing and food access) exist in our state for those that are in need.

With all of that being said, Zoe, Logan, myself, and my husband, Josh, implore you to allocate \$1.5 million to support Vermont Foodbank's Farmers to Families food box program.

I thank you for your time today and again for your continued commitment to Vermont.