

Public Budget Hearing Testimony: February 8, 2021
Cynthia Greene, Resident: South Burlington, VT
Shelburne Farms/VT FEED

Hello,

My name is Cynthia Greene. I am a former licensed early educator, resident of South Burlington, and currently I work with Shelburne Farms and VT FEED on statewide Farm to Early Childhood efforts.

I am passionate about Farm to School and Early Childhood (FTS&EC) programming because it enhances the quality of early childhood education and school based programs by meeting multiple learning and programmatic standards. FTS&EC also engages families and communities, supports comprehensive child development, promotes healthy eating and wellness behaviors, advances racial and social equity, and helps develop the next generation of responsible food consumers contributing to sustainable, equitable and just local food systems.

Farm to School and Early Childhood encompasses a wide range of programs and activities. The goals are to:

- encourage young children to enjoy eating fresh nutritious foods while their preferences are still forming;
- encourage children, families, and staff to develop healthy life choices by offering hands on educational experiences with nutritious food, cooking, gardening, and exposure to local farms and foods systems;
- foster community resiliency and improve access to nutritious food at home and in the community by building relationships with local farms and food system partners;
- support early childhood quality programming initiatives through alignment with licensing regulations, learning standards, workforce professional development requirements, and Vermont's quality rating and improvement system, STARS and;
- advance social and racial equity.

In a poll conducted in 2018, 91% of early childhood respondents indicated they were interested in implementing Farm to School and Early Childhood programming yet only 21% of those respondents indicated they were able to access FTS&EC professional development opportunities. The demand for Farm to School funding continues to grow each year, but the state allocation is not keeping up with this demand. We have made progress, but ***we know that we need \$500,000 annually in the Farm to School and Early Childhood grants program to meet the need. For FY2022, please FULLY FUND the Farm to School and Early Childhood grants program at the \$500,000 goal.***

Thank you for this opportunity to share my passion about the Farm to School and Early Childhood program and for accepting my Public Budget Testimony.