

Macie Whalen

Dear Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations,

My name is Macie Whalen. I am from Waterbury, Vermont, and I attend Harwood Union High School. I am writing on behalf of the Harwood Farm to School Program. Six years ago, Harwood received the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grant. This grant gave the school an opportunity to start the now-thriving Farm to School Club. Without this grant, the Farm to School program at Harwood wouldn't be as successful as it is today. Currently, the club has around 15 active members, but at least 40 students have expressed interest in our work. In addition to the club, we also now have a Farm to School class where students learn about garden design, basic gardening skills, and food systems. In the past, we regularly ran Harvest of the Month taste tests as a way to introduce students to the importance of supporting local agriculture. Because of COVID regulations, we have had to take a step back from taste tests, but these last few months, we have been working hard to roll out a new "Mooving Milk" project, an idea that came from one of our club members and a school chef. They came up with a solution to the large amounts of milk that is wasted after students collect their breakfast. Many students do not drink their milk in the morning and end up throwing it away. The Farm to School Club has set up milk crates where students can drop off their unused milk. We then sort the milk and deliver it to three food shelves in our district. Any expired milk that can't go to food shelves, is sent to a Gaylord Farm, in Waitsfield, for their pigs. This program allows us to reduce school waste and, more importantly, give back to our community.

Please support the governor's recommendation to fund the Local Purchasing Incentive Program at \$500,000. This program will allow schools like Harwood to purchase more locally sourced food while decreasing the financial burden on our district's food service team as they try to support local businesses. As a participating school in this year's incentive program, Harwood is excited to hopefully purchase more locally-sourced food next year. The pandemic has made it especially hard for schools around the state to afford healthy and nourishing food. With this incentive program, schools will be able to not only provide healthy meals but also instill values in today's youth about supporting locally grown foods. Also, please fully fund the FTSEC grant program at \$500,000. This grant program will help more Farm to School programs thrive like Harwoods and will allow all students to have the ability to participate in programs like ours.

The pandemic has taken away many opportunities for students; please don't let Farm to School be another one!!

Sincerely,

Macie Whalen