

# Farm Fresh School Meals for All Bill Summary

The Farm Fresh School Meals for All bill would ensure that no child has to learn what hunger feels like while at school, our children get critical nutrition, and our farmers get direct support through school purchasing by:

- Mandating that within five years of bill enactment, all public schools participate in federal options that allow them to provide school breakfast and lunch at no charge to students or their families.
- Supporting school purchasing of Vermont food by establishing a state-funded local purchasing incentive program.
- Fully funding the Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood program to ensure schools receive the assistance they need in developing robust and sustainable local purchasing and Farm to School programs, while also supporting early childhood providers across the state in strengthening nutrition and community partnerships.

## Specifically, the bill would:

### *Universal School Meals:*

- Provide a five-year transition period after which all public schools in Vermont would be required to make available school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to the individual student or family.
- Increase federal dollars supporting the school meals programs by requiring schools to maximize reimbursement for meals at all schools by participating in one of the federal options for providing universal school meals and also by incorporating best practices in serving meals.
- Require that costs of providing school meals that are not reimbursed through federal funds, current state funding, and other revenue sources continue to be born by the school districts, and therefore ultimately borne by the Education Fund - as they are now.
- Provide \$1 million in one-time funding, available over the five year transition period, to provide grants for schools who might need equipment or training to successfully provide universal school meals. The grants may also help with the initial expenses of implementing a meal program or the process of getting into the federal options for providing universal school meals.
  - These grants would be administered through the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program, but the funding would be kept separate and used only

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*Last updated: February 12, 2021*

for this purpose. After the five year transition period, any unused funds would revert to the regular Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program.

- Require the Agency of Education (AOE), in collaboration with Hunger Free Vermont and the Vermont Association of School Business Officials, to update the Household Income Form right away and to review it annually to ensure it is up to date with best practices, supporting schools in collecting important student data when school meal applications are no longer required.
- Ensure that AOE Child Nutrition Programs has the capacity needed to support schools transitioning to provide universal school meals by creating one full-time, classified position specializing in the administration of school meal programs. The position shall be transferred and converted from an existing vacant position in the Executive Branch of State Government.

*Local Purchasing Incentive Program:*

- Set the following goal for Vermont: *By 2023, at least 20% of all foods purchased by supervisory unions and supervisory districts will be locally produced foods.*
- Create an incentive for Vermont schools to purchase locally produced food for use in their school meal programs, based on the percentage of local food purchased:
  - 15¢/reimbursable school lunch if the supervisory union purchases at least 15% locally produced food through the school meal program.
  - 20¢/reimbursable school lunch if the supervisory union purchases at least 20% locally produced food
  - 25¢/reimbursable school lunch if the supervisory union purchases at least 25% locally produced food
    - If the school grows its own food for use in the school meals program, it could assess the fair market value of the food used and count it toward the above percentages.
- In order to qualify for the incentive, the supervisory union must:
  - Develop a locally produced foods purchasing plan
  - Designate a person to be the food coordinator for locally produced foods
  - Develop a process for tracking the purchase of locally produced food
  - Comply with the annual reporting requirement (below)
- Require an annual report from each school board estimating the percentage of locally produced food purchased for its school meal program.
- Require the Agency of Education to report to the legislature each year on the results of the incentive.
- “Locally produced foods” is defined by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFAM) in [Act 129](#), excluding the Unique Food Product category and fluid milk, in order to incentivize new local purchasing by schools.

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### *Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program:*

- Bring the base funding for the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program to \$500,000 in annual appropriations. This is the amount identified by the Vermont Farm to School Network as needed to meet demand and reach its goal of a robust Farm to School program in 75% of Vermont schools by 2025, establishing Farm to Early Childhood programs with more providers across the state, and supporting schools in their efforts to increase local purchasing from Vermont farms.

### **Funding for Farm Fresh School Meals for All:**

- Appropriate \$1 million in one-time funding to VAAFM to be available as grants to schools over the five year universal school meals transition period to support their transition. These grants would be administered through the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program, but the funding would be kept separate and used only for this purpose. After the five year transition period, any unused funds would revert to the regular Farm to School and Early Childhood Grant Program.
- Appropriate \$100,000 in base funding to AOE for an additional position within the Child Nutrition Program staff to support schools transitioning into universal school meals.
- The costs of providing school meals that are not reimbursed through federal funds, current state funding in the General Fund, and other sources of revenue will be borne by school districts, and therefore ultimately borne by the Education Fund. This is how school meals are currently funded; Hunger Free Vermont estimates that providing universal school meals will increase the investment through the Education Fund by an estimated \$20-25 million annual after the five year transition period.
- Appropriate \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2022 to AOE for the local purchasing incentive, with up to \$60,000 of this total being available for AOE to hire a contractor to help with setting up the program. The bill also states an intention for an annual base appropriation of \$500k for this local incentive program.
  - If more schools qualify for the incentive than the funds appropriated, AOE will prorate the reimbursements to match the amount available.
- Bring the base funding of the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program within VAAFM to a \$500,000 annual appropriation (currently \$171,000).



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