



Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Accelerating Sustainable Economic Development

Becka Warren, Food Security Plan Project Manager, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Testimony to Senate Committee on Agriculture | April 6, 2022

My name is Becka Warren. I am the Food Security Plan Project manager at the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund, and one of the Farm to Plate Network backbone staff. I live in Hartland. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am here with my colleagues to ask for your support of the Jobs Fund's \$150,000 request for food security planning in the budget you are currently considering, to request your help finding a home for food security in the Legislature, and to ask you to support all food security funding requests before you this session, including the Vermont Foodbank's request for \$6 million to continue to address the high, sustained need they are seeing across the state.

A year ago, we released the new Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan, and within that Strategic Plan are many strategic priorities that the Farm to Plate Network will tackle over the coming decade. One strategic priority that is being tackled NOW is the strategy to develop a Vermont Food Security roadmap, centered around a strong local food system and inspired by community responses to food insecurity. The food security roadmap for the state will outline both immediate and longer term strategies to ensure that everyone in Vermont has physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In addition, because we are Vermont, we are putting our agricultural producers and a secure food supply, at the center of this work. The roadmap will in part be the bridge between household food security and local agricultural development.

The planning for this roadmap is underway, in collaboration with my colleagues here today and others, and is partially funded. In January, Jobs Fund staff testified before the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and made a request for \$150,000 to complete the food security project. The House Committee included the request in their memo to the House appropriations committee, and it was included in the House version of the State Budget which passed recently. We would be happy to come in and give your Committee a briefing on what is involved in the project, and we hope that your Committee will also favorably support the \$150k request in the budget you are currently considering.

The planning effort already involves over 120 people from organizations across the state, and is an outgrowth of collaborative work to solve gaps in the food system and to address the issue of hunger in our towns. There is multi sector collaboration and planning, including the State Emergency Operations Center Mass Feeding Workgroup and the Vermont Everyone Eats Task Force. As we continue to grow these collaborations across Vermont, one question we continue to ask is "how will we work with the Legislature to implement this roadmap once it is developed?" It will include agricultural development,

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but also charitable feeding and emergency planning, as well as transportation, housing, climate change preparedness, racial equity and other important issues facing our community.

We came to you because historically you have been interested in issues such as food access, and because agriculture is critical to securing our food supply. You'll hear from my colleagues today specific examples of how it would help to have food security held within the jurisdiction of one legislative committee who can help guide and support Vermont's food security policies and focus for the future. We ask for your help in determining if food security should live in your committee under the banner of Agriculture, or if you can help us find the most appropriate place for our food security work to live within the legislature.

Support all the funding requests

Today we are also here to ask you to support all the food security related funding requests currently before the Legislature. Just like our request for your help with a legislative home for food security, the funding we have requested is needed to meet the complexity of food security. Some of the funding my colleagues are seeking is for immediate, ongoing needs to respond to food shortages in our towns, for example, \$6 million to help the Foodbank meet the current need for charitable food in the state. Other funding requests will make a permanent, long-term impact on food security, for example, by ensuring kids are fed every day at school, with local products as part of their menu. We are creating an action plan for food security and part of that is taking action now, on all of the complex solutions to hunger and food scarcity in Vermont.

We hope you are able to work together with this coalition of organizations to find an appropriate committee for food security in the legislature so that we can work together with all of you to address the imminent food needs of Vermonters now, and to increase the security of our food supply in the long term, as well. We appreciate your support for this work and your consideration of the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund's \$150,000 request in the FY23 budget to fund a food security roadmap for Vermont.

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