

Senate Agriculture Committee
House Agriculture and Forestry Committee
April 6, 2022 Testimony

Cynthia Greene, Farm to Early Childhood Partnership Coordinator
Shelburne Farms

Good morning and thank you for your time.

My name is Cynthia Greene. I live in South Burlington and I am the Farm to Early Childhood Partnership Coordinator with Shelburne Farms and VT FEED. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

First I would like to thank this committee for requesting full funding for the Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program. This program has become the catalyst for Vermont's farm to early childhood movement and is one of the only statewide programs fully accessible to early educators seeking to address food education and nutrition services in early childhood settings. I deeply appreciate your commitment to this program.

Additionally, I have two requests of the committee this morning:

1. Please identify a legislative committee home for the food security issue. As you have been hearing from my colleagues, food security is both an imminent and long term issue for Vermonters. Our collaborative of community based and state-wide partners is working to coordinate food security efforts and build a deeper understanding of the issues impacting food security across settings, age groups, and systems. In order to focus our energy for solutions, we need a committee to turn to within our legislature.
2. Please support the Vermont Foodbank with a \$6M appropriation for FY23. We have many hungry Vermonters which we must feed.

My work as the Farm to Early Childhood Partnership Coordinator touches the food security issue in a variety of ways and at several tables. Currently, through the Vermont Farm to Early Childhood Coalition, I am working with cross sector colleagues to improve data on food access and nutrition services within the early childhood context.

There are two primary data efforts underway which the coalition is supporting:

- The "*Cost of Meals in Early Childhood Study*" undertaken by Hunger Free Vermont and;
- a geographic information mapping project for the Child and Adult Care Food Program in collaboration with the Agency of Education, Nemours, and Child Care Aware of America.

Both of these projects anticipate releasing final reports at the end of the summer (2022). The *Cost of Meals* study is intended to inform Act 45 efforts on financing quality child care by ensuring nutrition services are a component within the funding construct. The mapping project will be used to build a deeper understanding of food access supports, gaps and opportunities across the state which impact our youngest citizens.

Another table where my work and the coalition plugs into is the Farm to Plate food security strategic planning effort. Coalition membership is eager to ensure the early childhood perspective is represented in this work and several members have volunteered to join this process. Finally, the coalition is watching Vermont's Universal School Meals and Local Purchasing Incentive efforts. We are tracking other state

and national initiatives along these lines which currently include early childhood programs. Long term, the coalition has interest in understanding how the Vermont initiatives can extend into early childhood.

The ultimate goal of these efforts and coordination is to ensure young children are well fed, no matter where they are, on any given day. Through these efforts I am learning to better understand the context of hunger and food security. I'm learning where partnerships can leverage and elevate excellent work. I'm focusing on both the immediate and long term food security needs of Vermonters.

In order to actualize this goal, I need your assistance. I ask you to support:

- feeding our hungry citizens by supporting an allocation of \$6M to the Vermont Foodbank for FY23 and;
- identify a legislative committee home for the food security issue.

Thank you for your attention and time this morning. If you have any questions, please reach out to me.

Warm Regards,
Cynthia Greene