

# 2021 Legislative and Appropriations Requests Regarding Food Security, School Meals, and Local Food

## **Universal School Meals (legislation - H.32 & Senate bill forthcoming):**

Ensure every student can eat at school every day with universal school meals. This bill establishes a five-year phase-in period after which all public schools in Vermont will be required to participate in a federal option to make available school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to their families. As is current practice, the cost of school meals that is not reimbursed through federal funds or other funding sources would be borne by school districts, and therefore ultimately borne by the education fund. Bill summary with more details can be found [here](#).

## **New Agency of Education Position within the Child Nutrition Program (~\$100,000 appropriations request):**

All schools in Vermont are temporarily providing universal school meals in the 2020-21 school year. Many schools have indicated that they would like to continue providing universal school meals after the temporary waivers end. They are able to do so by participating in a federal option that allows them to serve universal school meals. If many schools choose to opt in to universal school meals for the 2021-22 school year, the Agency of Education will need additional staff to support schools in enrolling in and implementing the federal option and thus, maximize the federal funding we draw down to support school meals. We request that the Legislature authorize an additional position with the Child Nutrition Program from current vacancies in the position pool, to be filled in FY22.

## **Vermont Food for Vermont Kids (legislation - bill forthcoming):**

Support child food security and nutrition, and the local agricultural economy by creating a financial incentive for school nutrition programs that spend a certain percentage of their food budget on locally produced food. The bill proposed last year also established a goal that by the year 2022 at least 20 percent of all foods purchased for school meals shall be locally produced foods. We expect something similar will be included this year. This legislation will include an appropriation; the amount depends on how the program is structured.

## **Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program (\$500,000 appropriations request):**

Farm to School and Early Childhood connects the next generation of localvores with farms and local food through a statewide grant program available to schools and early childhood providers, regional Farm to School support organizations, and the statewide Farm to School Network. Together, the grants and partner organizations work together to bring local food into the cafeteria and the classroom, to connect students and schools with local farms, and to develop systems to help more schools purchase more local food. The program has also provided essential support for outdoor learning and connecting students with local food during the pandemic. The Farm to School and Early Childhood program seeks \$500,000 annually to fully fund this work. It is currently funded at \$181,500.

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**NOFA-VT Farm Share (\$75,000 appropriations request):**

The NOFA-VT Farm Share program provides low income Vermonters with subsidized CSA shares, while ensuring the farms receive the full cost of each share. Thanks to a subgrant of \$75,000 in CARES Act funds from the Vermont Foodbank, in 2020 the program was able to expand at a time of significantly heightened food insecurity. NOFA-VT seeks an annual appropriation of \$75,000 to allow them to more than double the number of subsidized CSA shares they can offer compared to what they project they will be able to do for 2021 based on current funding. They would be able to serve 1,404 Vermonters instead of 630, and provide \$251,000 in revenue for small farmers in Vermont.

**Vermonters Feeding Vermonters (\$500,000 appropriations request):**

Vermonters Feeding Vermonters is the Vermont Foodbank's local approach to creating healthier communities where everyone has access to fresh, locally produced food. The Vermont Foodbank and partner agencies purchase local food directly from 150 Vermont farmers and food producers at market rates and distribute the food to people facing hunger at 277 community locations throughout the state. The Vermont Foodbank is seeking \$500,000 in base funding to ensure this program is able to continue to meet unprecedented levels of need while also supporting local farmers.

Funding Requests for Remaining Coronavirus Relief Funds:

**Support the Vermont Farmers to Families program (CRF\$ request of \$1.5M):**

To prevent any gaps in this critical federal program and to ensure the program benefits Vermont Farmers, the Vermont Foodbank is running a VT-specific version of this program in January and February. This allows us to bridge the gap and compliment the USDA program which will resume in February, while prioritizing food purchased from local farms.

**Support Unprecedented Levels of Food Distribution by the Vermont Foodbank (CRF\$ request of \$5.5M):**

The Vermont Foodbank has more than doubled its distribution of food since the pandemic began to keep up with community need, and continues to experience this high level of demand. The Foodbank's pandemic response efforts alone will cost \$7M in 2021 (this total includes the \$1.5M mentioned above for Farmers to Families). In order to meet the need and ensure that people in Vermont are able to access food in 2021, the Vermont Foodbank seeks \$5.5 million in new federal Coronavirus Relief Funding when and if it should become available. We are aware that more funds are not available yet, but we wanted you to be aware of this request now for planning purposes.

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