

I am John Gorton from Fairfield, and I am here to express support for state funding for the Vermont foodbank for their “Vermonters Feeding Vermonters” initiative. I am a US Naval Academy graduate, retired from active duty in nuclear submarines, retired from providing engineering ship design support to the navy as a Dept of Defense contractor, and semi retired as a farmer. We no longer milk cows but have a diversified beef, hay, hemp, custom field work, and maple sugaring operation. I am currently very active in social service work including the FGI Community Partnership, FGI Hunger Council, Franklin County Food Shelf Alliance, and FGI Building Bright Futures Council. I am a certified lay servant in the United Methodist Church and along with several other volunteers, I run the Sheldon Methodist Church Food Shelf. In 2020 we served 2131 families with 6070 people, distributing approximately 225,000 lbs of food (about 70,000 lbs of which was fresh produce). We are open 2 hours a day, six days a week. The Vermonters Feeding Vermonters initiative is important for several reasons:

1. Even though I give it away, the food I distribute is not free. This is a total volunteer effort, no paid staff. The Sheldon Methodist Church provides me rent free space and covers utilities. But, it costs money to produce, harvest, package, and transport the food to me for distribution. Those costs have to be covered and the producers need to be paid sufficient to cover their production costs or they can't keep growing the food I need. This program helps producers get paid for their products even though I give it away for nothing.
2. I strive to provide my clients with high quality, nutritious food and the local fresh produce that our farmers can produce in abundance is an excellent way to do that.
3. Keeping those food dollars in our state, supporting our local agriculture, and circulating in our communities benefits our communities and the state.
4. In 2020 I received a \$2400 grant thru the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters program. I used that to buy fresh produce from three different local producers. Being able to buy small quantity lots of produce when ever I started to run out helped me ensure high quality fresh produce availability for my clients all the times. In addition, at the end of the season each of those producers donated unsold left over produce to my food shelf in part as appreciation for the added business I provided by buying from them during the season. This program helped me support local farmers and in the end was multiplied in value to my food shelf.
5. My clients are not “some stranger in a crowd”. They are real people in my community. I know their names, I see their faces, I meet them on the streets and in places of business around town. I talk and interact with them almost daily. There are people in the same situation in each of your communities. We take pride in treating each client in a friendly, respectful, and dignified manner. Similarly, the three producers I purchase from are friends and neighbors in my community. This program benefits everyone whom it touches - the families I serve, the farmers who produce the food I distribute, the communities we all live in, and our state.

I encourage you to include this funding in the budget.

Thank You,

John Gorton