

## **FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **Farm to School and Early Childhood**

#### **Testimony from Tom Brewton, Institutional Sales Associate at Food Connects:**

Hello, my name is Tom Brewton. I live in Brattleboro, VT and work at Food Connects, a nonprofit that specializes in local food distribution to more than 40 schools as well as farm to school coaching services.

I ask that you please support the Governor's recommendation to fully fund both the Local Purchasing Incentive Program at \$500,000 and the Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program at \$500,000.

The Farm to School & Early Childhood grant program has helped schools in Southeastern Vermont grow robust farm to school programs. The coaching and professional development this program offers is vital to supporting schools with action planning and achievable goal setting. In recent years, grant funds have been used to:

- expand the school garden at Westminster Center School
- build staff capacity to deliver farm, food, and nutrition education to all students at Newbrook Elementary School
- and increase the ability of school nutrition professionals to serve more local food to students at Bellows Falls Middle School.

Looking ahead to 2022, Food Connects is honored to coach both Winston Prouty's Early Learning Center and Dummerston Elementary School with this grant.

At Food Connects, we see firsthand the budgetary constraints that the food service directors in our public schools are faced with that often limit access to local foods their students receive. Since the passage of Act 67 in July 2021, we have been actively engaged with several VT public school districts to increase their local sourcing including, but not limited to Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, and Essex Westford School District.

With funding from the Local Purchasing Incentive Program, our children will have access to a diversified range of local, nutritious foods while providing a sustainable market for our VT farmers. From our farmers to our children, this policy is a win-win.

Again, I ask that you please support the Governor's recommendation to fully fund both the Local Purchasing Incentive Program at \$500,000 and the Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program at \$500,000.

Thank you for listening.