



A FARM TO SCHOOL PROJECT
of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms

Senate Education Committee

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- My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Project Director of Vermont FEED, a farm to school partnership of Shelburne Farms and NOFA-VT. I also coordinate the Vermont Farm to School Network.
- We believe that S.100, Farm Fresh School Meals for All, will make a substantial impact on both COVID recovery in the state and the health of Vermont kids and farmers. Its a win-win: Keeping kids from going hungry, supporting families and benefiting our agricultural economy. We invest so much in supporting the education of our kids, but a hungry student cannot bring their best to the classroom.
- Over half of a child's daily nutrition can come from school meals and school meal programs with Farm to School are an important way to improve participation and nutrition for all children.
- What we see almost all school nutrition programs have in common is the *desire* to buy Vermont products and support the local economy, when possible. We have wide support for S.100 with school nutrition directors who are squeezed to provide a nourishing meal for something close to \$1.25 per plate to cover their food costs. An incentive that increases what programs have in their budget to spend on local food, even 15 cents, makes a huge difference towards buying those local apples or local dairy or even local beef.
- To expand the ability of schools to purchase more from Vermont producers, we support passage of the local purchasing incentive. Schools have been spending \$15.5 million on food every year and we want to keep more of those dollars in the Vermont economy and with VT farmers. If 20% of all school food purchases were local, that would be over \$3 million annually going to VT producers, and almost \$5 million contributed to VT's economy. This program has been successful in numerous states (NM, MI, NY, OR) - even sustaining school's local purchasing through the disruptions of the pandemic.
- The program structure described in the bill has been worked on for over a year with the input of AOE's Child Nutrition Program. It creates an "on ramp" for schools to put the necessary systems in place and provides AOE a year to put the incentive grants in place. The Agency of Agriculture and the Farm to School Network are ready to help schools and AOE achieve success with the program.

- We are also asking you to fully fund the Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program at \$500,000 to meet our goal of farm to school in all districts. We know that 90% of our brains are developed by age 5 so it is so critical that young children have proper nutrition and are exposed to new healthy foods, especially in a time with food insecurity so high (1 in 4 Vermonters). The technical assistance provided through the grants program will support programs working towards universal school meals, improved nutrition, and increased local purchasing. The three major components of this bill; universal meals, a local purchasing incentive and fully funding the grants programs all work together.
- I'd like to end with a quote from Harley Sterling, School Nutrition Director at Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, "The impact of the <farm to school> grant was felt immediately, but what was just as important was bringing together a team of stakeholders from different positions in the district who may never have worked together under normal circumstances-- it brought us together, out of our individual silos, to start talking about what was possible...It is hard to explain the value of having this kind engagement and cooperation in our schools and how these working relationships have continued to benefit our students. It's created a real sense of partnership and community."

Thank you!