

Food Security Roadmap Testimony Talking Points – Wednesday 1/24/24

Hello, for the record, Abbey Willard, Director Ag Development Division at AAFM

AAFM is excited for this roadmap and proud of the bold and attainable goal to end hunger in VT by 2035

- The strategies make the critical link between food security and food production and elevate the important concept that **Vermont's food security depends on a viable agricultural sector.**
- We can't talk about community viability without addressing hunger
- We can't talk about supporting families without considering local food production
- We can't talk about Vermont's culture without investing in our future farmers
- And we won't have economic viability as a state if we can't feed ourselves, which requires viable and productive farms.

This important roadmap focuses on providing resilient resources to our communities, families, and to farms

The inextricable link between ending hunger and supporting viable farming resonates with the AAFM mission.

- This alignment guided our participation and support of the road map with \$150,000 of state funding in FY23 budgeted to VSJF for this project
- COVID experience and this July flood both demonstrated the fragility of our supply chain, value of local producers and food production, and importance in having reliable and accessible local food system structure to support and feed our communities

AAFM has been involved in the roadmap from the beginning, the early public engagement efforts, the first collection of voices and perspectives of VTers, and throughout the development of strategies – including assisted design of the 4 focus areas on agriculture and 12 associated strategies.

- These road map strategies are not wholly new but instead integrate approaches that were highlighted in the Climate Action Plan, recommendations from the Future of VT Agriculture Commission reports, and further detail actions that were identified in VT's Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan

Each of these efforts highlights the policy choices needed to ensure that farms have the resources to be resilient and focus on the viable solutions to ensure everyone in Vermont has the food they need

There are strategies in this roadmap that address supply chain infrastructure development like efforts AAFM is addressing through programs you supported including the Working Lands program, one-time state ADG grants to meat, maple and produce, and the federal RFSI investments for the middle of the supply chain.

There are strategies in this roadmap that address land access models that will require more focused and creative attention to conserve and access agricultural lands as pressure mounts around utilization of open land for both agriculture and food production and housing and development. The AAFM is engaged in a project to catalogue and quantify Act 250 on-site mitigation parcels to ensure they are engaged in active agricultural production.

There are strategies that highlight the appreciation for farmers and agriculture for their wise use of our NR and management of our lands. The AAFM manages the VT Farmer Ecosystem Stewardship Program ensures farmers are recognized and compensated for their whole-farm stewardship of our natural resources by supporting NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program applicants

AAFM is committed to the strategies outlined in this plan that invest in agriculture, support economic viability, and ensure our families, communities, and farms have the resources they need to be resilient.

Thank you for your time.