

My name is Doug Davis and I have spent over 30 years as a Vermont Child Nutrition Director.

During that time, I served over 10 years on the board of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, which grew into what we now know as HFVT. In my last years on the board, we began the work of Universal School Meals. That was over 15 years ago. I am humbled to see the amazing progress that has been made and how Vermont is once again leading the nation on how we care for our children.

My colleagues here today will share the day-to-day benefits that have come from USM for the children within their schools. How it has streamlined the “business” of feeding children and how barriers have been reduced or eliminated for students wanting to access meals during the school day. This has been proven through the increased meal participation that we have seen during this school year.

We all know that everyone loves Universal School Meals, and that everyone within our schools knows that we simply can't go back. I would like to talk about another amazing benefit of this program and its far-reaching positive impact throughout our state. Schools can better forecast their purchasing and staffing needs, spend more time on creating healthy meals, provide more targeted professional development, and better connect with students.

By enacting USM last year and permanently funding it this year, our communities are also seeing an increase in dollars spent locally. The Vermont Local Foods Incentive has created another benefit that makes USM a win, win, win. By looking at the Vermont Local Foods List on the NOFA website, we see dozens of manufacturers, co-ops, family businesses, and processors. Yes, Vermont continues to lead the nation in Farm to School by connecting local schools and local farmers and growers. But this local incentive takes this and adds that additional “win”. The Vermont items that are routinely coming into schools this year go well beyond the delicious apples, cheese, kale, and yogurt. They now include things like hot sauce, sausage, bagels, tofu, granola, falafel, and tortillas. This is simply amazing- our kids are seeing these amazing products on their lunch line, learning about where they come from, and in some cases, meeting the folks who raise or produce them. I remember many conversations with Secretary Tebbetts when we were working to get Farm to School embedded into our

schools and communities. We spoke of squash and carrot muffins, cheese and yogurt. I don't think either of us would have thought how far Vermont would come in that relatively short time and how once again, Vermont leads our nation in the correct direction. These purchases, school meal purchases, are supporting Vermonters in our communities, in every school, every day. Actually, two of our speakers here today, Harley and Gretchen, lead the state in local purchases with over 25% of purchases being local at their schools.

Universal School Meals is a program loved by all Vermonters, and envied by everyone else. Please wrap up the funding for this incredibly important program from the top of the Ed Fund now, so our schools, children, families, farmers and producers can begin to plan for next school year.

Thanks!