

Thank you for the time to testify. For the record, I am Rep. Melanie Carpenter, representing the Lamoille-2 district. I'm here to ask you to please support NOFA-VT's request for \$478,500 in base funding to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining these two proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

Crop Cash doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits for *fruits and vegetables* purchased at Vermont farmers markets.

Crop Cash Plus provides additional funds for Crop Cash to *all SNAP-eligible foods* (meat, eggs, dairy, bread).

Farm Share subsidizes CSA shares for limited-income Vermonters by *paying for 25-75% of the CSA cost*. A CSA is basically a pre-paid subscription to a share of the farm's harvest for the entire season.

These three programs provide an important opportunity for our vulnerable neighbors to have access to our nutritious local foods, and also to participate in our local economy by purchasing food directly from farmers at the farmer's market price. It's a huge win for all involved.

Crop Cash is a federally funded program, but it requires a match to draw down the funds. Allocating state funds to support the program will allow NOFA-VT to expand the program to meet increased demand and draw down as many federal dollars as possible.

Crop Cash Plus was a 2023 pilot funded by a one-time appropriation in the FY23 state budget. It expanded Crop Cash to all SNAP-eligible foods, extending the program's impact to most agricultural products sold at farmers markets, and further expanding local food access for 3SquaresVT recipients. This program was so popular that NOFA's projected 12 months of funding was expended in just 5 months. With the appropriation request before you from NOFA, this program can continue, and address increased demand.

Farm Share is a program that provides subsidized CSA shares for limited-income Vermonters and has done so for nearly 30 years. The program has grown from serving a dozen individual families and three farms in 1995 to over 500 Vermont families and more than 60 farms in 2023. If the state can support this program, NOFA will be able to support this increased demand while ensuring farmers receive the full cost of the share.

These programs are not only critical to food security, but also provide meaningful sources of revenue for Vermont farmers. Farm viability is more than economics. Farmers are integral to their communities, the health of the land, and our collective food security. By directly connecting limited income Vermonters with their local

farmers, these programs actively work to strengthen community investment in both viable farms and food security.

Thanks again for your consideration of this request for \$478,500 to support NOFA-VT's administration of Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.



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Lamoille-2 | Committee on Health Care

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