



# VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL & EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK

## Growing Healthy Vermont Schools, Farms & Communities

Vermont increased its investment in farm to school and early childhood to a base allocation of \$500K in order to reach more students and farmers.

With the FY 2023 investments, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets has already awarded twice as many Farm to School and Early Childhood grants over last year, with more awards coming this spring!

“Within weeks [of eating school-grown produce], it was getting easier for me to walk up the hill, my mental health skyrocketed, I was happy, and I enjoyed what I was doing every day. I know exactly where my food comes from, and it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I’m involved in it: I’ve touched it, planted it, and I know where it’s going.”

—Student, Green Mountain Technical & Career Center, Lamoille North School District



Empowering youth through food

## The Return on Investment

- 2 in 5 Vermonters are food insecure. For many students, about half their daily calories come from school meals. Farm to school programs improve nutrition for all children and support farmers across the state as we recover from the pandemic.
- Every dollar schools spend on local food contributes \$1.60 to Vermont’s economy, and schools spend \$15.5M on food every year. Let’s send more of those dollars to Vermont farmers!
- Over 100 Vermont farms feed our youth across the state through early childhood programs and school nutrition programs. Let’s grow that number even higher!



Fresh, local food for all Vermont kids!

“When we serve local food in our schools, all students, regardless of their home economic situation, are getting fresh, wholesome, nutritious food in the regular meals.”

– Jen Kravitz, Cornwall School Principal

“The pandemic brought food and schools back into focus. Now more than ever, it’s important we all remain committed to a strong, vibrant food system.”

– Anson Tebbets, VT Secretary of Agriculture



# VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL & EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK

## Farm to Early Childhood is Taking Root in Vermont!

### Farm to early childhood supports high-quality childcare.

201 Vermont farm to school and early childhood grants have been awarded since 2007, with 117 early childhood programs impacted. Demand is growing!

In 2021-22, 55 early childhood educators and after school programs received VAAFM Community Supported Agriculture grants to purchase and utilize local, nutritious food directly from farmers.

Building relationships with local farmers



“Farmer Christine loves to interact with the kids, and makes them feel included and want to try the food more. And since Christine brings extras, I can share with the families so the parents are trying new foods, too.”

—Laura Butler, Educator & Owner, Imagination Island Family Child Care. A former CSA grantee, Laura continues to purchase from Christine Bourque of Blue Heron Farm (Milton)

“The Essex Westford School District supported our long-term partners at Little One’s University, a local childcare center, to install learning gardens and a composting program. They engage students in the gardens to encourage them to eat healthier, increase their self-regulation techniques through the tactile and sensory experiences of gardening, and help them work independently as they learn to plant seeds and pick produce.”

—Scott Fay, School Nutrition Association of VT President & Essex Westford School District Child Nutrition Program Senior Manager



Hands-on learning for healthy lifelong habits

### Programs encourage children and families to develop lifelong, healthy habits through hands-on experiences with nutritious food and exposure to local farms.

90% of our brain is developed by age five. Nutritious food is vital to healthy brain development in young children. Farm to early childhood encourages trying new foods, family engagement with meals, farm visits, and hands-on learning with fresh foods. All this helps to build healthy eating habits while a child’s food preferences are forming.

“Really, when you enroll a child, you enroll the whole family.”

—Director Betsy Rathbun-Gunn, Bennington County Head Start & Early Start