

Kayla Henry (Start)

My name is Kayla Henry and I am the sustainability teacher at Crossett Brook Middle School, in Duxbury, Vermont.

- I am requesting that you please continue to support the Farm to School & Early Childhood grant program with level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2025.
- And also support the Local Food Incentive program for schools at \$500,000 level funding base appropriation.

I am hopeful for your support of the Farm to School and Early childhood programming because it helps to get every child engaged in their local food system and gives them the opportunity to support their community from a young age.

Farm to School education is so important. I work with every 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grader at Crossett Brook Middle School through all four years of their middle school experience. I have a unique program that uses the old Home Economics classroom and kitchen. My program plays a huge role in teaching students the importance of having local robust food systems and supporting community agriculture. We are able to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to tend chickens and sell their eggs. We also cook with local foods, grow our own microgreens, learn how to garden, and experience new foods students might not get to experience otherwise. My sustainability program also focuses on the science behind our food. We learn how our pollinators connect to our food systems using our on campus beehives. We also look at the difference between sustainable and factory farming systems and research the impacts each system may have on the environment, animals, and the workers.

The Sustainability program fosters students who have found their passion for tending to chickens, those who have tried new vegetables, and those who have learned that they can make salad dressing that tastes better than store bought. One of the best parts of this program is that it reaches students who tend to struggle in traditional classrooms. The hands-on, experiential learning that takes place in this classroom gives them the space to thrive and learn to be compassionate by caring for living creatures and finding value in the real-world applications. Local food is key to understanding and caring for our community and I enjoy sharing that with students.

The most apparent value of Farm to School education is the practical skill set students gain for life beyond middle school, but there are other benefits that aren't as obvious. We are trying to change the narrative that the value that is added is not just hands-on experience. Furthermore it is an opportunity for students to experience the positive impacts that farming can provide and shift their perception that food comes only from the grocery store. We are trying to change this narrative so that students understand where each ingredient comes

from and where it will go when it is composted. Last spring, some of my students and I had the privilege of working in partnership with a local Waterbury farmer to raise and slaughter meat birds. This was a student led choice project. We ended up taking 3 students to participate in butchering 14 chickens and learn from the process. Each of the students had such compassion for the birds, saying thank you for their life and giving them a hug before the slaughter. It was amazing to see students so connected with how their food was raised, how it was treated, and truly understanding a start to finish system for meat. We could not have made this happen without the support of the farmer, the use of their farm, and their wealth of knowledge to share with the students. In this instance, the Farm to School program truly helped these students to understand the importance of farm to table eating and why local, sustainable food is beneficial to our environment and our community.

I hope you will keep in mind these stories of the many unique learning experiences that my program provides students at Crossett Brook Middle School. Imagine if this same program could be implemented at other schools throughout the state of Vermont in old home economics rooms.

Consider funding the Farm to School & Early Childhood program and the Local Foods Incentive, each with a level funded base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2025. With your \$500,000 appropriation, we can transform public schools in Vermont to places where students are better prepared for the future, and be on the forefront of educational offerings.

Thank you for your time today. I will now turn it over to two of my students who are joining me.

Kate Smith (Student)

Thank you for allowing us to be heard. I am Katherine Smith. I live in Waterbury, and am a 5th grader at Crossett Brook Middle School in Duxbury, Vermont. When I moved here from North Carolina last year I had never had a sustainability class or really ever had an opportunity to learn what we are learning now. When I realized that they had sustainability as a class I was psyched and ready to learn more about helping our environment.

In class we learned about composting and how to tend to composting worms. At the beginning of class I have now been digging my fingers in the black gold made by the red wigglers and it helps me be calm and feel zen, as it squishes through my fingers. We feed the food scraps from the kitchen to reduce our food waste, and add newspaper to absorb liquids. The composting worm bins are productive and are not smelly, it smells like fresh dirt.

I have had zero experience with chickens in my life, until coming to Crossett Brook. We, as 5th graders, help take care of the chickens every day. I am not super comfortable with all of the chickens but, I really love the Rock, who is a large australorp rooster. At first, my experience with the chickens made me feel nervous, but the Rock makes me feel welcome.

Experiencing the composting of worms and chickens at school has made me more interested in helping the environment thrive and learn more about gardening in the future.

This is a great way for kids to be motivated and have hands-on experience to help our planet, starting with Vermont. Now it is one of my two favorite classes at Crossett Brook and brings me so much joy. That is why we believe you should continue to fund the farm to school program. Thank you so much for listening.

Tristan Martin (Student)

I am Tristain Martin. I live in Waterbury, and am a 6th grader at Crossett Brook Middle School in Duxbury, Vermont. Learning about farming in school is important. In class we learn how to cook and use local ingredients. Recently we made beet brownies in class and they were pretty good. I always thought that brownies had to be simple, I didn't realize beets could be put in brownies. Not only is cooking fun but it is important that middle schools learn how to do it. Supporting local farming allows us to make sure animals are treated right, local is better. We have made applesauce from local orchards and are currently

making french toast using the eggs from our chickens at school. Before this class I never knew how to take care of chickens.
Thank you for your time.

Franki Beto (student)

Hi my name is Franki and I am an 8th grader at CBMS. I really enjoy doing Jr. iron chef afterschool. Last year we won the most local ingredients in our dish. I love to cook with my family. Local food is really important to us.