

2024 Budget – Dean Leary

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For nearly three years I have regularly volunteered at the Vermont foodbank's Veggie Van Go fresh food distribution events in Rutland, Brandon, Bristol, and Fair Haven; and occasionally in Barre, Berlin, and Winooski. We all thought the Veggie Van distribution sites would be a temporary stop gap to get us through the pandemic. Now, nearly three years on, we have not seen a reduction in demand for these direct distributions to communities around the state. In fact the Vermont foodbank has identified and responded to the need to expand the project to new sites where Vermonters are facing challenges providing adequate food for their families. Everyone of these sites requires a sponsoring group within the local community, the hardworking and experienced Vt Foodbank staff, and a team of dedicated Veggie Van volunteers, as well as up to three trucks of food. The Vermont Foodbank pulls together all these resources into an effective operation. We can get Vermont products like Cabot Yogurt, Maple Meadows eggs, Champlain Orchards apples, Northeast Kingdom potatoes, seasonal fresh produce from 300 Vermont farms and other good foodstuffs to 10 families every minute we are in operation. When we distribute, not only is the foodbank getting necessary food to those in need, it is also expanding the market available for Vermont's farmers and food processors, reinforcing their viability.

The Veggie Van Go effort joins up the best Vermont has to offer in products and spirit. Even the recipients are pitching in. And that is just one of the many programs the Vt Foodbank offers to make Vermont a better place. Vermonters get a big bang for their buck when they invest in the Vt Foodbank.

There may be other ways to distribute food to those in need but I can't imagine they would help build a strong resilient Vermont community the way the Vt Foodbank does. From what I have seen, the Vt Foodbank and its volunteers will keep at this for far as long as it takes. We just need your help with some funding. The Vermont Foodbank model demonstrates that in Vermont we will all step up and do our part to make this a better state. Please do your part by helping fund the Vt Foodbank operations with a base appropriation of \$3 million in the FY24 state budget for the Vermont Foodbank.