

For the record, My name is Alyssa Pratt and I am a student support specialist at Spaulding Education Alternatives in Barre, Vermont.

Please support the Farm to School and Early Childhood program with level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for fiscal year 2025. Also, support the local Food incentive program for schools at \$500,000 level funding base appropriation.

The Farm to School and Early Childhood program is a critical connector, bringing farms and educators together so that children and youth can experience local food, have nutritious meals, and learn about where food comes from.

The reason I am asking for support for the Farm to School and Early Childhood program as well as the Local Food Incentive is because of the value they have in connecting youth with farmers and local businesses and ultimately allowing youth to create relationships within our community as well as increasing food security, that they likely would not have the chance to do otherwise.

At Spaulding Education Alternatives we have been able to work with local business owners and farms to give students the opportunity to learn about where their food comes from and how to make it! One example of this is when our students worked with Stefano Coppola (Owner of Pearl Street Pizza and Morse Block Deli in Barre, Vermont) to make mozzarella cheese from fresh milk purchased at Buttercup Mountain Farm in Orange, Vermont. Students also made bread from scratch and these items were served along with items from our school gardens at the Farm to School Showcase event on our property in October 2023.

Some of the other ways Farm to School learning has positively impacted our students and program are as follows; We have created relationships with Vermont farms such as Honeyfield Pepper farm (Norwich, VT), Vermont Blueberry Farm (Randolph, VT), Green Mountain Harvest (Waitsfield, VT) and will be working on aspects of gardening and running a business in the coming months with Khelcom farm in Barre, VT. Our students have also worked hard on building our own school garden spaces, soil health, plant health and cooking with what we grow. We have incorporated 'Food Connects' Harvest of the Month foods into our learning by cooking with the highlighted local food of the month and diving further into the in's and out's of the food. We have also been able to take field trips to certain farms around Vermont to learn even more.

Most recently we were able to purchase an in-classroom hydroponic unit and students are learning the science behind this process. We have dove into seed starting and saving and the possibilities that come from this. Our students have created and will continue to create a garden space, entirely built by them- garden beds and all- which allows them to see from beginning to end where their food comes from and how to maintain it. We are able to incorporate science, math, english and social studies curriculum into all of the above.

Our students have greatly benefited from the lessons, hands-on learning and opportunities Farm to School has brought to them. They have been provided knowledge of local food systems, gardening skills, community engagement, and nutrition that will stay with them for a

lifetime. The pride and excitement students exude in my time working with them regarding Farm to School is also something that will forever stick with me. In my opinion local farms we have connected with are excited and are grateful to aid in the experience and teaching of today's youth.

To help us continue this amazing learning, Please support the Farm to School and Early Childhood program and the Local Foods incentive each with a level funded base appropriation of \$500,000 for fiscal year 2025.

Thank you for listening!