

Dear Members of the House Agriculture Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Charter House Coalition in Middlebury to share how critical farm food donations are to our work and to the people we serve.

Charter House provides more than 32,000 meals annually through our shelter and community meal programs, with a total food program budget of less than \$30,000 per year. Farm donations are essential to making this possible. In addition to serving three meals a day to guests in our emergency shelter, donations allow us to supplement food supplies to households living on the edge of losing their homes or that are choosing between food and medications. The impact is real.

While we partner with Feeding America and the Vermont Foodbank's Food Rescue program, a significant portion of our fresh produce, dairy, and protein comes from Vermont farmers and local growers. Through gleaning programs and direct donations, we can incorporate fresh, high-quality foods into our meals and supplement weekly meal boxes for individuals and families in need. This same network of farm donations supports many of our partner agencies as well, and in a rural community like ours, we are often serving the same individuals and families who rely on multiple local resources to meet their basic needs.

These donations have both a financial and nutritional impact. Without them, we would not be able to maintain the volume or quality of meals we currently provide without taking from essential and necessary other program budget needs. Access to fresh, locally produced food significantly improves the nutritional value of our meals, which is especially important for individuals experiencing housing instability and chronic health challenges.

Just as importantly, this system depends on the continued participation of local farmers. Policies that recognize and support on-farm donations would help sustain and potentially expand this network, directly benefiting organizations like ours and the communities we serve.

We respectfully ask the Committee to recognize both the value of these donations and the contributions of Vermont farmers who make them possible. Ensuring that farm donations are counted and supported within state programs is a meaningful way to place value where it directly impacts Vermonters—especially those living on the edge who rely on this network to meet basic needs. Strengthening this connection between local agriculture and community food access is a practical and important step in addressing food insecurity across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Heidi Lacey
Heidi Lacey
Executive Director
Charter House Coalition
27 N. Pleasant St