

## Patricia Ruddy

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**From:** Jeanne Montross <jmontross@hope-vt.org>  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 12, 2026 11:13 AM  
**To:** David Durfee  
**Cc:** Patricia Ruddy  
**Subject:** [External] farm donations

[External]

Good morning, Representative Durfee. I am submitting this as testimony to the Senate Agriculture Committee regarding H.323.

I have been the executive director of HOPE, a private not-for-profit poverty relief organization serving Addison County for more than twenty-five years. We operate one of the largest food shelves in Vermont, lately serving nearly 1,000 people each month.

When I began this job, I was dismayed to see that most of the food we had to offer was canned, boxed, high fat, high salt, chemically laden, and very unhealthy. I recall seeing children and adults with visible signs of poor nutrition – pale, pasty skin, dry hair, and more. It seemed unjust that, in a county where so many farms are located, producing a rich and wide variety of foods, the people who most needed the food could not afford it.

We have worked for a very long time to change this. Today, we have a large, thriving partnership with local farms, and visitors to our food shelf, as well as those who receive food deliveries from us, can select from a wide range of healthy products. Last year, we received, for free, over 50,000 pounds of locally grown and produced foods. This is a vital resource to our low-income residents and truly has helped them to have improved health and be better able to function as contributing members of our community.

Children who have insufficient nutrition have more frequent infections and illnesses, get into more conflicts, cannot sleep well, and are not prepared to learn at school. Parents have less energy for parenting, working adults are less able to function well at their jobs. The elderly are at risk of life-shortening medical conditions. Being insufficiently nourished is distressful in so many ways. But this can be remedied if they can just have access to the bounty of healthy food we grow in Addison County.

I respectfully urge the committee to work to pass a bill that maximizes the opportunity to grow our local food system and to ensure that healthy foods are available to everyone.

Respectfully,

- Jeanne Montross

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