

## NOFA-VT

Testimony provided to the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry re: NOFA-VT's FY27 Local Food Security Request

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Thank you Chair Durfee and committee members for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Johanna Doren, and I am the Local Food Access Director with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). Thank you for having me here today.

I am here to ask that you include in your budget memo to the Appropriations Committee NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in ongoing funding in FY27 to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

- **Crop Cash** doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits for *fruits and vegetables* purchased at Vermont farmers markets. The program is federally funded, but a local match is required. State funds will allow us to continue to meet increased demand and maximize federal funding. The state's investment in Crop Cash is matched 1:1 with federal dollars.
- **Crop Cash Plus** expands Crop Cash to meat, dairy, eggs, bread, and more, extending the program's impact to all agricultural vendors. **State funding is necessary to continue this critical program so that hundreds more farmers will benefit, and thousands of low-income Vermonters can purchase more local, fresh food.**
- **The Farm Share Program** has subsidized CSA shares for limited-income Vermonters for over 30 years. The Farm Share Program pays for 25-75% of the CSA cost. **State funding would allow us to support up to 700 families in purchasing a consistent supply of locally grown food.**

With significant support from this committee we were grateful to receive \$450,000 in one-time funding in FY26 to maintain increased food security through Crop Cash and Farm Share, and to bring back Crop Cash Plus. Thank you so much for your support. With this funding, we have successfully been able to grow program levels of Crop Cash and Farm Share to help meet the demand. State funding is helping us shorten our program waitlists, bring more funds to local farms, and ensure more households can afford a consistent supply of local food. More specifically, here is the impact this funding has had this year:

- Through the **Farm Share program** this past year we have supported over 530 households - more than 1450 individuals.
- In the 2025 season, **Crop Cash** is on track to invest \$200,000 in over 40 summer and 20 winter farmers markets and farmstands, and to draw over 10,500 SNAP transactions at farmers markets.
- **Crop Cash Plus** has also provided an economic boost to farmers. By expanding Crop Cash beyond produce, we doubled the number of farmers that can receive income through the program and provided an additional \$77,000 spent at markets between July and December - these dollars have contributed directly to farmer revenue, and to greater food security for low-income

Vermonters. For Vermonters with incredibly limited food budgets, the addition of Crop Cash Plus is key for them to fulfill their nutritional needs while supporting their local farmers.

- Over the last two years of receiving the State's support (\$300,000 in FY25 and \$450,000 in FY26), these programs have leveraged around \$1.6 million in local food purchases via additional community and participant contributions, and SNAP dollars spent at farmers markets. This season alone, we are on track to direct over \$850,000 in revenue to Vermont farms through the Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share programs.

As you know, we work in concert with other organizations in the Food Security Coalition, like the Vermont Foodbank, to ensure that everyone in Vermont can access the food they need. Because the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters and NOFA-VT's food security programs share some similarities, I want to take a moment to touch on how these programs differ and why they are all necessary puzzle pieces to support farmers and eaters.

- Vermonters Feeding Vermonters is a food purchasing program using Foodbank distribution channels. In other words, the Foodbank purchases food from farmers in bulk. The eater then accesses the food at distribution sites (e.g., food shelves, meal sites, Veggie Van Go).
- Crop Cash (Plus) incentivizes customers to use their SNAP benefits on local food at farmers markets and farm stands, and Farm Share is a cost sharing program to make local food more accessible through CSAs.

All of these programs together form a food security package that benefits local farmers through market expansion, and benefits the eater so they can get the food they need where they need it. Buying direct from farmers and paying market price for Vermont-produced food supports our local food economy. NOFA-VT's Local Food Security programs and Vermonters Feeding Vermonters work together to ensure that people can get local food in the place that works best for them – whether that be direct from their farmer at a market, or at their local food pantry.

Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share are programs people count on every week. The State of Vermont has shown it can be a leader in investing in vital food security programs, which have been pivotal during critical moments to meet the needs of our community members. The State can count on this investment to be used for the best possible outcome for Vermonters.

Food security can and should be achieved for everyone who lives in Vermont. At the same time, we can support our farmers and ensure they can profit from growing the food we all need and want. Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share are proven programs that help Vermont achieve both of these goals.

Please include NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in ongoing funding for the Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share programs in your budget memo to the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for your time.