

Farm to School & Early Childhood Awareness Day Testimony

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Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is **Emily Dumont**, and I live and farm in **Chelsea, Vermont**. I am a **regenerative livestock farmer**, raising **grass-fed, grass-finished beef** and **pasture-raised eggs**, and I am also a **registered nurse**. I previously worked for two years as a **middle school nurse in the First Branch Unified School District**.

I was invited to speak today because of my involvement selling **locally raised beef** directly to **Hartland Elementary School**, a public K–8 school in the **Hartland School District**. That relationship exists because programs like **Farm to School & Early Childhood** and the **Local Food Incentive** make it possible for schools to purchase food from local farms like mine.

I am here today to respectfully ask that you **please support the Farm to School & Early Childhood program with level funding at a base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2027**, and **also support the Local Food Incentive program with level funding of \$500,000**.

The Farm to School & Early Childhood program is a critical connector. It helps schools build the systems and partnerships needed to bring local food into cafeterias consistently, and it gives farmers the confidence to invest in producing food specifically for schools.

On my farm, the beef I raise is **grass-fed, grass-finished, grain-free, and raised without antibiotics**. My cattle are rotationally grazed using regenerative practices that improve soil health, protect water quality, and build resilience to climate extremes. This isn't industrial beef — it's nutrient-dense, responsibly raised protein that reflects the values Vermont cares about: land stewardship, animal welfare, and community health.

As a farmer, being able to sell beef locally to a school like Hartland Elementary creates real stability. It allows me to plan production, manage costs, and keep food dollars circulating in the local economy. These programs don't just support farmers — they create reliable, transparent supply chains that benefit schools and students as well.

I want to speak briefly from my perspective as a **school nurse**, because I've seen the impact of food choices from the clinical side, not just the farming side. While working as a middle school nurse in the First Branch Unified School District, I saw a clear and consistent correlation

between the types of food students consumed and how they felt afterward — their energy, focus, mood, and overall ability to learn.

Most strikingly, I directly observed these effects in students with **Type 1 diabetes**. I monitored their blood glucose levels throughout the school day, and it was very clear how different meals affected their stability. Whole, balanced meals — especially those with quality protein — supported more stable blood sugars and fewer dramatic highs and lows. That stability matters not just medically, but academically and emotionally for those students.

Farm to School isn't just about where food comes from — it's about how children feel in their bodies during the school day. When schools are supported in serving fresh, local food, it directly supports student health, learning, and participation.

Programs like Farm to School & Early Childhood and the Local Food Incentive help bridge the gap between Vermont farms and Vermont classrooms. They strengthen our local food system, create stable markets for farmers, and ensure that children have access to real, nourishing food.

As we face increasing uncertainty — from climate challenges to rising costs — these programs provide stability for both schools and farms. They are smart, preventative investments in health, education, and local economies.

So once again, I respectfully ask that you **please support level funding for both the Farm to School & Early Childhood program and the Local Food Incentive at \$500,000 each for Fiscal Year 2027.**

Thank you for your time and for listening.