

Ian Rose
Food Service Director - Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union

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Thank you for inviting me to testify today and thank you for your support of farm to school and early childhood in Vermont. For the record, my name is Ian Rose, I am the Food Service Director for Windsor Southeast Supervisory. Our food program serves 4 schools, providing nutritious meals for 1,100 students each day.

I am here today to ask that you please support the Farm to School & Early Childhood program and the Local Food Incentive with a level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for fiscal year 2027, and also to continue funding Universal School Meals through the education fund. These two programs together ensure that all children receive high quality meals at school, and that we are supporting our agricultural families and businesses across the state.

I grew up just outside of Boston and have been working in food service for the last 30 years. My family and I moved to Vermont, to the Upper Valley, 10 years ago. I've been working in my current role for the past two years. Through my professional journey I have had the honor to work in a variety of establishments dedicated to showcasing the beauty and benefits of local food. This practice has carried over into my personal life, where prioritizing food items sourced locally has become one of my core values as an individual, partner, and parent.

The mission of our food team is to source products and craft menus that help put our student's minds and bodies in a position to learn and grow as best as possible. In each of our kitchens we emphasize scratch cooking, minimally processing, unrefined sugars, local meat, and lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. We are always looking for ways to improve the overall quality of our ingredients.

Coming into my role as Food Service Director I wanted to make sure the value of local foods, the value which I hold dearly, was not lost amidst the financial challenges and realities of a school meals program. As a parent of two school-age children I was aware of the Universal Meals Program. I was not aware, however, of the Farm to School (FTS) & Early Childhood program and the Local Food Incentive (LFI) and the benefit they bring to Vermont students. Without these programs we would not have the resources to provide the local food items which enhance our student's experience each and every day.

Currently I am taking part in the Farm to School Leadership Academy. This program was designed to bring together leaders from all over the country who are committed to transforming food systems in schools. Coming out of our recent gathering I felt a tremendous amount of gratitude for the policies, systems, and values we have here in Vermont, values which are not universal across the entirety of our country. It is one thing to have farms producing beautiful food all around you. It's a whole different thing having systems in place to help get those products find a way into our schools. The Farm to School & Early Childhood program helps

schools to create the structures and build the partnerships we need to be able to bring farm fresh food into our schools and early childhood programs and offer it to our students on a daily basis. These programs are the physical demonstration of good policy in practice.

I want to share some words which are not my own, but rather are those of our parents, staff, and community members. Their connection to The Farm to School & Early Childhood program exists on a deeply personal level and they experience the direct impact every day.

“I am so grateful that our school supports our local farms and producers. Not only is it important for our **local economy**, but it instills a value and appreciation in our students for the benefits of locally sourced food – reducing negative impacts on the environment, transparency in what is used to grow our food, not to mention freshness and a lifelong habit for seasonally based produce. **I feel a sense of pride as a community member** in this value that our school system upholds, and I can see that same sense of pride come through in the preparation of meals by our incredible food service team. My kids are happy and appreciative of the meals they get at the school, and **I have peace of mind about what they are receiving**. This is something that matters to our economy, our community, our environment, and the lifelong health and habits of our kids.” - **WSESU Parent**

“As someone who sits in clear view of our fresh fruit and veggie station I can attest that there is a steady stream of students throughout the day, of all grade levels, coming daily to take advantage of this wonderful program. It is really great to see so many of them get excited about what fresh fruits and veggies we have each day. **This is such a valuable program providing healthy snack options to so many students, some of whom don't have access to these items at home or have never been introduced to them.** We are not only providing healthy food options, we are expanding the variety of food in which students are consuming. Hopefully **these healthy habits will continue at home and as students grow** and make healthy food choices for themselves. Honestly there aren't enough positive things I can say about this program! I sincerely hope we are able to continue!” - **Windsor School Office Administrator**

“My son Truman is autistic and nonspeaking, and fresh fruits and vegetables are one of the ways he most consistently says “yes” to the world. For Truman, food is communication and connection. **When his school offers fresh local produce every day, he's not on the margins of the lunchroom—he's participating in a shared community practice, with food grown in the same Vermont soil we all call home.** Supporting Farm to School & Early Childhood and the Local Foods Incentive in FY27 is not only good nutrition and good agricultural policy; it's also **a quiet, daily form of inclusion for students** like Truman. Please keep these programs strong.” - **WSESU Parent**

Thank you so much for your time here today, and for all the work you do every day to support our families and farmers. Thank you for listening to my testimony and considering the real impacts of the Farm to School & Early Childhood program and the Local Foods Incentive. Level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2027, as well as the continuation of

Universal School Meals through the Education Fund, means that we can continue this important work of nourishing children with foods grown and made right here in their own communities. I would be happy to answer any questions and share more information with any of you, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Thank you.

Ian Rose