

Randy George

Red Hen Bakery

Middlesex, Vermont

Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to share the impact that Farm to School and Early Childhood programming has on Vermonters. We are here today to ask for your support for level funding of two critical programs in Fiscal Year 2027: the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants Program, and the Local Foods Incentive, both at \$500,000.

One of the unexpected joys in our business over the last twenty years has been the opportunity to bake bread for some of our local schools. We see this work as much more than just selling bread to another customer. We all know how important good nutrition is to learning. Good food feeds the mind as well as the body.

But what has been most inspiring to me are the ways in which VT Farm to School's mission extends well beyond simply getting local food into the foodservice programs at schools throughout the State. Farm to School views their work as integral to the education that our schools offer. I have observed the transformations that can happen when students of all ages learn about where their food comes from. Frankly, issues relating to food and agriculture can be explored through the lens of any academic subject. For many students who attend schools where Farm to School has been present from elementary through high school, an interest in food has become central to their high school experience and beyond. We are now seeing the effect of having a generation of students who have grown up with a better understanding of where their food comes from. Many of these young people will be going on to work in food-related work. To borrow a phrase from Wendell Berry, all of them, no matter what their career path, will forever view eating as an agricultural act.

We are proud that, for nearly two decades, a few hundred servings of Red Hen's special school bread has been on the weekly menu at Harwood's school district. Not only does this round out a great meal, but the students also learn that more than half the wheat in this bread was grown in Vermont. We have had the opportunity to explain to kids of all ages what it takes to grow wheat in this state and how that wheat makes it from the farmer's field to the bread that their sandwich is made on.

In 2026 we look forward to expanding our offerings of school bread. Through a grant that Farm to School received, we will be purchasing new equipment that will allow us to make more varieties of bread specifically formulated for school food service. It is through this kind of support, as well as the continual funding at the State level, that Vermont will

continue to lead the way in educating our future generations of eaters. Thank you for your support.