

Elom Essiba  
Le Bon Goût  
3SquaresVT Awareness Day  
February 6, 2025  
House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry

Hello, thank you for having me. My name is Elom Essiba and I live in Winooski. I am the owner of Le Bon Goût, a licensed home catering and takeout business specializing in authentic African cuisine, and also work as a Para Educator at CVU.

I'm here today to talk about 3SquaresVT and its impact on food security in Vermont, and I want to ask you to:

1. Pass legislation to opt into the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program, with funding of \$75,000 for start-up costs and \$75,000 for a staff position within DCF to administer the program.
2. Support NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in base funding to sustain Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share, which help families access healthy food while supporting Vermont farmers.

### **Making 3SquaresVT Benefits Stretch**

As a mother of four, I know firsthand how difficult it is to qualify for 3SquaresVT and then make the limited benefits last. Even if you're lucky enough to be approved, you might only receive \$150 per month, which barely covers groceries for a single week, let alone a month. Many families, including mine, struggle to balance the cost of nutritious food with other essential expenses.

### **Why Crop Cash & Crop Cash Plus Are Critical**

Programs like Crop Cash help families stretch their benefits while allowing us to choose fresh, healthy, local foods. This program has helped me buy produce like apples, berries, carrots, and kale at the farmers market, ensuring my kids have access to the nutrients they need. It also supports Vermont's farmers, strengthening our local food system.

I also had the opportunity to participate in Crop Cash Plus in 2023, which allowed me to use coupons for other staple foods at the farmers market, not just produce. This made a huge difference in feeding my family because I could purchase items like eggs, dairy, and bread, making balanced meals more accessible. If Crop Cash Plus were reinstated, it would provide even greater food security for families like mine.

### **Why Vermont Needs the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program**

Another major gap in our food system is for people who rely on 3SquaresVT but don't always have the ability to cook. As a caterer and a community member, I see how challenging it can be for seniors, people with disabilities, or those experiencing homelessness to prepare meals. The Restaurant Meals Program would allow eligible Vermonters to purchase affordable, prepared meals when cooking is not possible. The Restaurant Meals Program would allow them to use their benefits to purchase hot, ready-to-eat meals, giving them dignity, flexibility, and better access to nutritious food. This program could transform lives by reducing food insecurity and providing dignity and choice for those who need it most. I urge you to take action to strengthen food security in Vermont by:

1. Passing legislation to opt into the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program, with funding of \$75,000 for start-up costs and \$75,000 for a staff position within DCF to administer the program.
2. Supporting NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in base funding to sustain Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share, which help families access healthy food while supporting Vermont farmers.

These programs are not just about food—they are about equity, dignity, and resilience for our communities. I appreciate your time and your commitment to making Vermont a place where everyone has access to fresh, healthy, and prepared meals when they need them.

Thank you for listening. I'd be happy to answer any questions.