

To: House Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry Committee

From: Mark Montalban, Green Acres Homestead

Date: 3SquaresVT Awareness Day, Feb. 5, 2026

Hello, Thank you for having me. My name is Mark Montalban, I live in South Duxbury.

I'm here to talk about 3SquaresVT and Crop Cash and to ask you to please support NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in ongoing funding to Strengthen Vermont Farm Viability and Address Food Security by sustaining proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

And I'm here in the unique situation of being both an agricultural vendor and business owner, registered as Green Acres Homestead, who sells at Farmer's Markets and events in Vermont, including to those who pay, with their 3SquaresVT benefits, Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus

I'm also a parent of a young adult with special health needs, and receiving 3SquaresVT; the same 3SquaresVT benefits that we accept at the farmers market.

The importance of 3SquareVT and other food access programs that support farms and people who have lower incomes – like the Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus programs – is that they are essential in helping not only food security, but also socialization, information, and empowerment that improves the lives of both farmers and customers.

Green Acres Homestead is my primary income to make a living here. But it also allows me to help employ 2-3 people, mostly in the spring through fall months. Those employees help grow, forage, raise, harvest, and produce the items I bring to market. And when I say market, I mean we work an average of 132 "market" days annually, and we go all over the state from Middlebury to Montgomery, Winooski to Northfield, and along the way from past to present, South Hero, Milton, St. Albans, Vergennes, Bristol, Jericho, Essex, Westford, Brandon, & Shelburne.

At all these markets, there are two common bonds

- One: vendors care and work their hardest to bring quality Vermont products to those living close by and those passing through.
- Two: our markets work hard to bring the connection between vendors and all customers, to help ensure all food needs are met. They do this through the collective effort of market managers, board members, and volunteers.

Being in the unique position of both selling food that is being purchased by people in Vermont communities using 3SquaresVT and Crop Cash, as well as purchasing food

with 3SquaresVT and Crop Cash to feed my own family, I am able to help feed families and individuals with everything from our poultry, eggs, to fruits, veggies, berries, lacto-fermented & canned items. And, when I use my 3SquaresVT and Crop Cash, I can purchase items from other vendors like beef, pork, and other veggies & fruits, and canned products we don't produce ourselves.

And not only are the money used as these markets, staying local, including of course the tokens and crop cash, but for those of us established as vendors, we see the same customers come back each year, and after 9 years of vending, we understand the up and downs of life, including when someone needs to go on benefits, often new parents with very young children, older people, and those with disabilities, trying to feed themselves and their loved ones well.

Lastly, I should add that through a variety of state and local funded programs, like POP (the Power of Produce program for children), etc. everyone coming to the market gets valuable information around food access and the value our farmers markets share. To know that Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus can turn \$20 of benefits into \$60 is a bargain to all of us in a state which has historically put a premium on agriculture and access.

Please support NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in ongoing funding to Strengthen Vermont Farm Viability and Address Food Security by sustaining proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

Thank you for your time.

Mark Montalban, Proprietor

Green Acres Homestead

South Duxbury, Vermont