



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



-Memorandum-

To: House Committee on Agriculture
Fr: Kayla Strom: Farm to School Manager, NOFA-VT
Re: Termination of Local Food for Schools and Child Care
Da: March 20, 2025

Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. For the record, my name is Kayla Strom, and I'm a resident of Richmond, Vermont. I serve as the Farm to School Program Manager at the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, or NOFA-VT. I work directly with schools, farmers, and distributors to strengthen Vermont's local food system.

I'm here today to discuss the significant impact of the recent cuts to the Local Food for Schools and Child Care (LFSCC) funding and why continued investment in programs like this is critical for Vermont's food security, our agricultural economy, and the health of our students.

Background Information about LFS & LSFCC

The first round of LFS began in December 2021, when the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service ([AMS](#)) **launched** the Local Food for Schools (LFS) program to help states address supply chain disruptions and boost local and regional food systems. The first round of LFS provided \$200 million nationwide in Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) in non-competitive funding to state agencies through cooperative agreements. 42 states and the District of Columbia benefitted from this round. The funding was solely for purchases of local, unprocessed or minimally processed foods from farmers, ranchers, and small businesses, for distribution to schools participating in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. While states had flexibility in program design, LFS funds could not be spent on administration costs.

In September 2022, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) received a \$333,763 cooperative agreement from the USDA to purchase local food and distribute it to Vermont schools. This funding supported Vermont's schools by providing them with free, locally sourced food through four non-profit food hubs: Green Mountain Farm Direct, Food Connects, ACORN, and Vermont Farmers Food Center.

In the 2023-2024 school year, every School Food Authority (SFA) in Vermont received a credit with which to purchase local food through their assigned food hub. This program helped 147 local farms (90 from Vermont and 57 from neighboring states) access school markets. Additionally, 66 of these farms made their first-ever sales to schools. This initiative not only supported local producers but also created valuable, long-term purchasing relationships between schools and local food hubs.



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



This program was a huge success, and Vermont's implementation model was **recognized at the national level** for its innovative use of funds and its farmer focused model, one that directly subsidizes local farmers, food hubs, and other producers.

In October 2024, the **USDA announced** a second round of funding for the Local Food for Schools (LFS) program, now called LFSCC, with an expanded scope to include childcare sites participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). In this second round, Vermont was awarded \$1,222,076 in LFSCC funding through a cooperative agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM), including:

- \$944,226 designated for Vermont schools, planned to be distributed through local food hubs, similar to the previous Local Food for Schools (LFS) grant.
- \$277,850 designated for early childhood programs.

Vermont was actively developing its implementation plan, convening dozens of partners and stakeholders to ensure the most effective use of these funds. The funding was poised to strengthen supply chains, improve food access, and create lasting farm to school and farm to early childhood connections, all while generating meaningful revenue for Vermont farms and food producers.

However, on March 7, 2025, the USDA abruptly announced the termination of the program, putting these vital connections and revenue at risk. This decision threatens not only food access for schools and childcare sites but also the economic stability of Vermont farmers and food hubs that had been preparing for this next round of investment.

The impact of the first round of LFS was undeniable. This funding created a powerful multiplier effect, supporting multiple farms, local processors, and distributors far beyond our initial investment. For example, thanks to the first round of LFS funding, **Just Cut, a vegetable processing program of the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE)** quadrupled its K-12 sales through Green Mountain Farm Direct, from 11 K-12 buyers to 40.

- **Becca Perrin, Green Mountain Farm Direct Food Hub Director shared:** "This is an example of the multiplier effect of this increase in local spending. Just Cut sources from multiple farms, who are all losing out on this increase *through the termination of LFSCC*. Another example is Pitchfork Pickle, whose sales increased through GMFD 1000% due to the first round of LFS."

The termination of LFSCC funding means that 100% of the \$1.2M that would have gone directly into the hands of Vermont farmers and producers is now lost. The economic impact of this decision is significant. Research shows that for every dollar spent on local food generates an additional \$1.60 in economic



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



activity for Vermont; in the case of LFSCC, that includes the innovation and industry growth in local food processing that this financial investment was poised to continue fostering.

The ripple effects of this funding cut will be felt across Vermont's food system, from farms and processors to schools and early childhood centers. This is a critical moment to advocate for continued investment in farm to school programs that support Vermont's farmers, strengthen local food economies, and ensure that every child, regardless of age and income has access to fresh, nutritious, locally sourced food.

What the Termination of LFSCC Does Not Affect in Vermont

The cancellation of LFSCC funds does not impact Vermont's Local Foods Incentive (LFI), which provides additional per-meal funds for schools meeting 15%, 20%, and 25% local purchasing targets. LFI is state funded and unaffected by USDA's decision.

This cancellation also does not affect:

- Per-meal reimbursement rates for school meals & CACFP (set federally, adjusted annually).
- USDA Foods & DoD Fresh purchases, which cover ~20% of school food costs.
- Cash-in-lieu of USDA Foods for childcares.
- And the Vermont Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants Program.

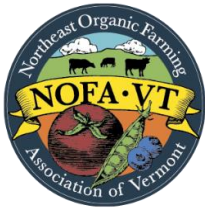
What the FTSEC Network is doing about this:

I can't believe it's been just over a week since we learned that LFSCC was canceled. In that short time, I've been blown away by the outpouring of support and the collective call to action from the Vermont Farm to School & Early Childhood Network, as well as from similar efforts in other states facing the same challenge and a national campaign.

Here in Vermont, I've received calls and emails from our members making it clear, they will not stand for this. As a network, we quickly announced an open call to provide space for people to share how this cut is impacting them, their families, and their businesses, and to brainstorm solutions together. That call took place yesterday at noon, and within just 48 hours of promoting it, 70 people registered, and 60 attended. That is a powerful demonstration of how deeply this issue resonates across our community.

The termination of LFSCC funding is more than just a budgetary decision. It directly affects Vermont's children, farmers, and food system. We've been collecting stories from those impacted, highlighting the consequences of this loss.

- **Emily Ruff, Executive Director, [Afterschool in Nature at Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary](#), which is a program serving youth 4th-8th grade, located in Orange, VT shared:**



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



“I run a DCF-licensed after school program in a rural, disadvantaged area that serves low-income youth and families. We were preparing to launch our first year of contract through this program which would serve not only food insecure families but also rural, disadvantaged farmers. Both kids and farmers are losing with the closure of this funding program.”

- **Steve Davis, Director of Nutrition & Food Services, Colchester School District**, emphasized the impact on school meals:

“We were given \$8,000 last school year thanks to the [LFS]. We were able to purchase some local meats & vegetables to add to our district menus with a lot of success. We purchased these foods through Food Connects. The students loved these local items and since our program struggles to break even, I think the loss of this grant will be a big disappointment to our students. This is a great loss to our district. I implore our legislators to fight to keep this grant.”

- **Annie Paradee, [Long Winter Farm](#), Stowe, VT** described the uncertainty small farms now face:

“We’re a small farm, mostly CSA and retail, which is essential income to us, including selling to our children’s school in town. Without LFSCC funding, this purchasing relationship is jeopardized.”

- **Kevin Hildreth of Boyden Beef** explained the financial hit to Vermont’s local meat industry:

“This termination has a significant impact on our business, a 10% decrease on average for weekly throughput, which equates to about two animals per week. We were beyond thrilled to be selling our beef into local schools and feeding Vermont kids. Now, our school buyers are turning to broadline distributors for beef sourced from large feedlots out west. If you need anything from us to underscore the value of LFSCC & the impact its termination is having on Vermont farmers, please let us know.”

Other federal program cuts affecting farmers and producers in Vermont:

The cut to LFSCC is part of a larger pattern of federal funding losses that directly harm Vermont farmers and food access programs. Another critical loss is the [Local Food Purchase Assistance \(LFPA\) Program](#), a sister program to LFSCC.

Like LFSCC, LFPA was administered by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) and was designed to purchase food exclusively from Vermont farmers, ensuring that local food was distributed at no cost to limited-income Vermonters through food shelves and other community food security efforts. The loss of LFPA funding means fewer markets for Vermont farmers, fewer fresh food options for food-insecure families, and a weakened local food economy. These cuts jeopardize the



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



resilience of Vermont's food system, impacting not only those who grow the food but also the children, families, and institutions that rely on it.

Our Ask:

We urge the committee to stand with Vermont's farmers, schools, and families by advocating for continued funding in local food programs, such as the LFSCC, which directly benefit our agricultural economy and ensure nutritious, locally sourced food for our youth. We are working on putting a dollar figure to the need and hope to begin advocating for it on the Senate side soon for the state to invest in these programs.

Together, we can continue to build a more resilient, equitable food system for Vermont. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions and look forward to working with you to ensure the future of Vermont's farm to school efforts.

Thank you,

Kayla Strom
Farm to School Program Manager, [NOFA-VT](#)
kayla@nofavt.org | 802-419-0062