



VERMONT  
FARM TO SCHOOL &  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
NETWORK

**Farm to School & Universal School Meals:**

**A WIN-WIN!**

# School meal programs THRIVE.

Universal School Meals and Farm to School programs like the Vermont Local Foods Incentive work together to increase participation in school meals, so more students are nourished and ready to learn. When paired, these programs increase meal participation, which gives school food programs more dollars to buy more local food, sending more money back into the local economy.

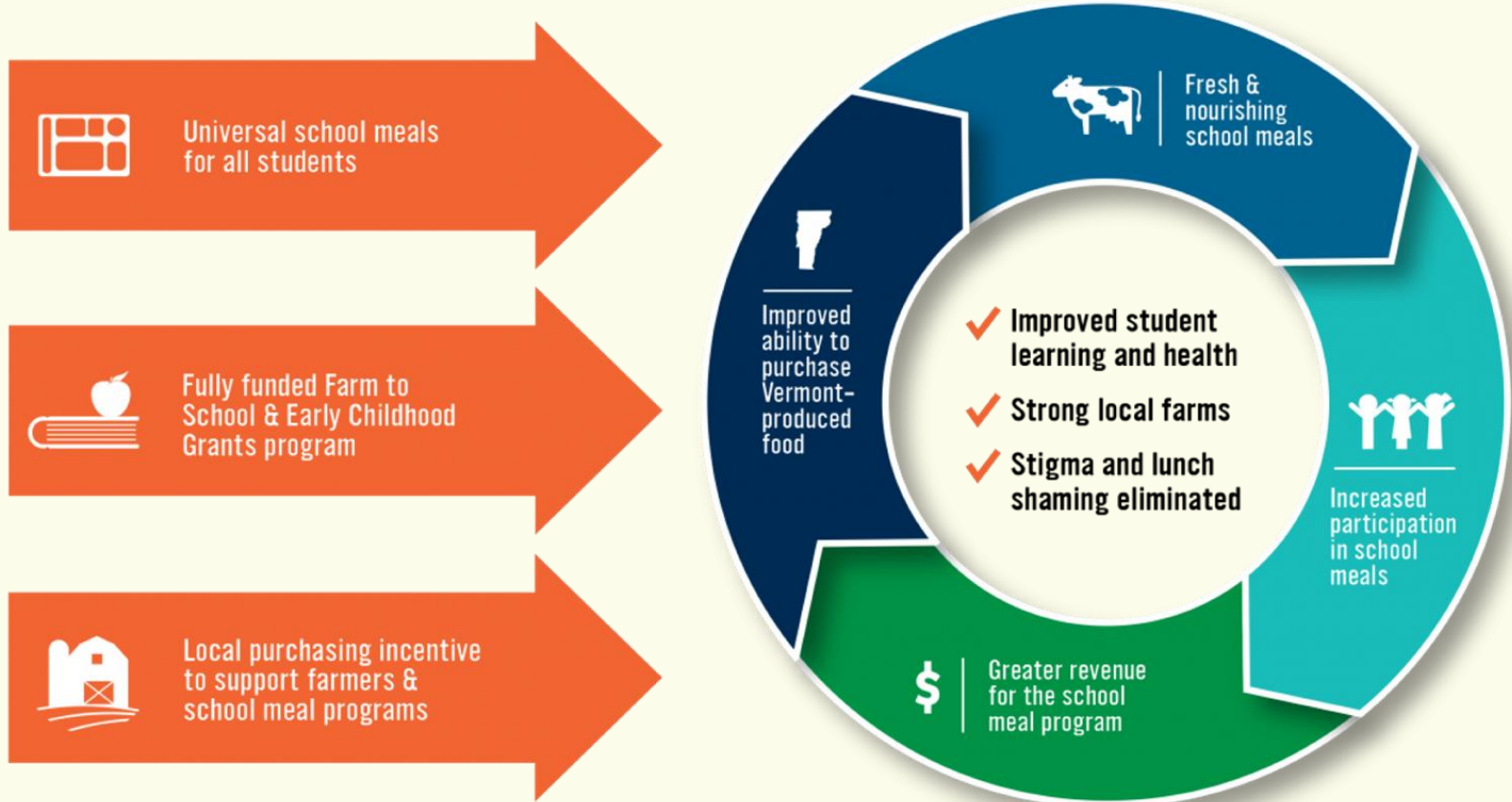
## Increased access to high quality foods for Vermont school kids.

Every Vermonter should grow up with local food on their lunch tray. By giving schools the resources they need to buy from Vermont farmers, we are ensuring equitable access to high quality, local food for all Vermont school children.



Windham Northeast Supervisory Union  
photo credit: Kimberly Kaufman 2024

# The Virtuous Cycle of Farm to School



# More money for Vermont's agricultural economy

Every \$1.00 spent on local food for school meals contributes \$1.60 to Vermont's economy. Schools spend over \$20 million on food every year and we want more of those dollars going to Vermont farmers.

# Expanded markets for Vermont farmers & producers.

Over 100 Vermont farms sell food to Vermont schools and early childhood programs. Let's grow that number!



Donegan Family Dairy

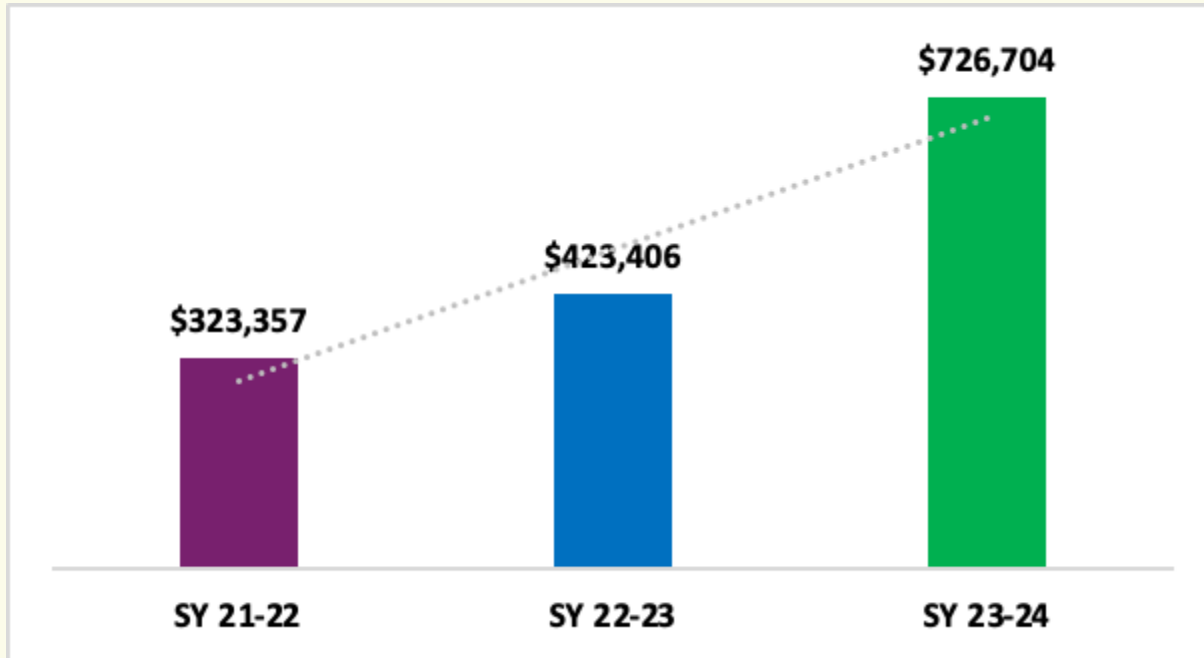
“The amount of time that we were spending on free and reduced applications and various other administrative tasks that we no longer have to do has allowed us to focus more on the core of our program, which is making tasty, nutritious food for kids. And when meals weren’t universal, there was this moral dilemma—knowing that some kids couldn’t afford the food, but weren’t eligible for free meals. That moral injury was real. Now, our focus is exactly where it should be—on making the best food possible for all students.”

**-Harley Sterling, Food Service Director at Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU)**



Left: Pete Miller of Miller Farm.  
Right: Harley Sterling of WNESU  
photo credit: Kimberly Kaufman 2024

# Annual Sales Data from Food Hubs to Vermont K-12 Schools



Sales data submitted by:  
Green Mountain Farm Direct, Food Connects, Addison County  
Relocalization Network (ACORN), & Vermont Farmers Food Center



“The fact that we have consistent high participation because of Universal School Meals means that I can do all this cool stuff—have hydroponic units, do Harvest of the Month events, and bring in fresh, local ingredients. I get to spend my time on what really benefits students—getting them excited about healthy food—instead of processing paperwork to determine which kids get to eat for free and which don’t. That shift has been everything.”

“When we highlighted eggs, we worked with a local farm, and the kids were mesmerized by all the different colored eggs...”



But when we told them, ‘This is from your buddy’s farm, right here in town,’ their faces just lit up. That connection, that magic, is what makes local food so powerful.”

**-Jen Hutchinson, Food Service Director at Barre Unified Union School District**



“Universal meals have allowed our budget to grow, and we’re able to think more about supporting local producers now than we were a few years ago.”

“I have seen my program turned on its head, for the better. More kids are eating, we are scratch-cooking with whole foods. We’re processing local foods - we are actually processing local beef into meatballs for all EWSD students each month. We’re purchasing better foods - more fresh fruit and vegetables. The stigma around school meals is gone. We are focusing entirely on high quality meals.”

**-Scott Fay, Food Service Director at  
Essex Westford School District**



Left: Scott Fay (Essex Westford).  
Right: Angus Baldwin (West Farm)





