

Thank you Chair Durfee and Committee members for having me here today for this important update process. My name is Carrie Stahler, I live in Lyndon and I am the Sr. Manager - Government & Public Affairs at Vermont Foodbank.

I am going to briefly outline what we have seen since we last sat in this room together in the late Spring, what we know may be coming, and what the State can do to help meet this moment.

You just heard John talk about how the State stepped up to meet the urgent moment meet the needs of Vermonters who receive 3SquaresVT benefits. This crisis showed us that many people who use 3SquaresVT do not have other financial resources to purchase food. This committee is already familiar with Dr. Meredith Niles [study shared with you last January](#), but I want to draw attention to a few key details that are very relevant at this moment.

- Food insecure households, including those who already receive 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits are more likely to rely on other food assistance programs like food shelves or meal sites.
- Households identified as Food Insecure are more likely to have experienced adverse financial impacts including missing payments on utility bills, rent, mortgage, car loans, or student loans.
- Food insecure households were also employing mitigation strategies like purchasing cheaper food, less food, or less animal products and produce when food prices are impacted by inflation, as they are now.

The big takeaway from this urgent crisis is that it is very difficult to respond to the rapid changes created by the federal government and while our partners worked heroically to support people in communities, it is a huge lift to dramatically increase visits to food shelves in a one-week period and meet people's needs. This effort was akin to the effort made in flood emergencies in 2023 and 2024 and the support required during the pandemic. All during the months that are already the busiest "food months" of the year.

Other Updates to Federal Programs

Cancellation to USDA Household Food Security Report

The USDA has cancelled their annual Household Food Security Report. This national data [classifies](#) households as either food secure or food insecure, meaning that, at some point in the previous year, a household was unable to provide adequate, nutritious food for some or all members due to limited financial resources. This is data Vermont relied on to tell us trends in food security, helps target outreach, allocate resources, and mobilize our

efforts to reduce food insecurity. Without this data, we will be challenged to know what impact efforts are having on people in our state. For example, during the Great Recession in 2008, food insecurity surged and peaked at about 14% in our state. That was a large increase over the previous year. We worked hard for about 10 years and in 2019, food insecurity rates were back to 2007 levels. During the pandemic, the rate increased, then decreased again in 2021 in response to economic stimulus measures taken during that time. This told us a lot about what works to help achieve food security and informed the Map the Meal Gap analysis that Feeding America has done annually. The end of this report will leave a gap in measurement of food security for our state.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program reduced caseload

Due to an increase in the eligibility level put in place last winter and a reduction in Vermont's caseload that went effect in the summer (due to flat funding from the federal government) the Commodity Supplemental Food Program now has a waiting list for the first time. This program serves about 1500-1600 older adults each month with a box of food delivered to a local location where the boxes are picked up. In 2025 the caseload number was reduced to 1522 individuals from about 1624, which is a fairly significant cut for a small state like ours. At the time, more people were using the program, and we had to enact requirements that missing pickups 2 months in a row would result in removal from the program. People can reapply and be placed on the waiting list, but this pickup rule is often difficult for our older neighbors. One woman who missed two months in a row told me she was sick one month and her car was in the shop the next. We have requested the USDA increase Vermont's caseload for FY27 (October 2026) but will not know until next year.

State Update

Impact of Vermonters Feeding Vermonters funding

We have a signed contract with Vermont Agency of Ag, Food and Markets, huge gratitude to Abby Willard for working with us through that process. To date, we have spent \$200,000 of the \$500,000 allocation for Vermonters Feeding Vermonters. This funding has gone to direct purchasing from larger scale farms and has been distributed through our network partners and our own direct distribution events. We anticipate drawing down the remaining funding over the next few months. This is a particularly critical source of food for our partners in this urgent moment as the demand for fresh food increases when people can't afford to purchase it.

Foodbank Requests

We will be back this winter with two requests. I'd like to preview those so we can also share how this funding would have supported the statewide need in the urgent moment we all just went through.

We will be **requesting \$1.5 million through the FY26 Budget Adjustment Act for Vermonters Feeding Vermonters**. This would fully fund the program at the \$2 million we initially requested last session. This food goes directly to our partners and neighbors while supporting farmers who are struggling for the many reasons you heard this morning. We recognize this is a win-win that this committee already understands and supports and we are grateful for your continued partnership to make full funding a reality.

For FY2027, we will again be requesting **\$5 million dollars**. The breakdown is similar to last year:

- **Fully fund the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters Program (\$2 million)**
- **Support Vermont Foodbank network food shelves and meal sites (\$2 million)**
- **Support for Responsive Readiness for food access in emergencies (\$1 million)**

While this request is for the FY27 budget year, I want to talk about how this funding, had it been in place in FY26, would have contributed to Vermont Foodbank meeting neighbors' needs during the pause in federally funded SNAP benefits.

This federally-initiated pause functioned just like a disaster or emergency. The urgency of the moment was critical, the speed of the response was critical, and we all had to wait for the Emergency Board to act in an urgent and responsive way. Still, even with that urgency and the swift response from the Emergency Board, it took more than a week for people to see benefits on their cards. During that time many people were reliant on food shelves to replace 3Squares purchasing power. If Vermont Foodbank had received the full FY26 request we could have:

- Had emergency boxes staged at strategic locations across the state that could have been used for this urgent need
- Have had more food on our shelves and available to partners
- Had local purchases on order and ready to distribute or taken other creative and urgent actions like increased VFV grant amounts in response to the urgent need

While these actions would not have solved the urgency of this most recent crisis, they would have given more flexibility and more resilience to the charitable and supplemental food system to deal with the shocks created by a disruption in benefits.

We anticipate more disruptions to come with the ongoing implementation of HR.1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, and changes to eligibility, reporting requirements, and health care subsidies, to name a few. This will be a challenge that continues to put pressure on our system of food distribution because many neighbors will be forced to choose between food

and other financial obligations. As you have heard us say before, food is the only flexible place in a family's budget. We encourage you to think creatively with us so we can all work together to ensure everyone in Vermont is food secure.

Thank you for your time today and for your attention to so many intersection issues facing our neighbors.