

Food Security in Vermont Amid Federal Changes

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Thank you Chair Durfee and committee members for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Johanna Doren, and I am the Local Food Access Director with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). I am grateful to be here today to talk about the impacts of federal changes in food benefits programs on food security and our vital farming community.

3SquaresVT/SNAP is a program that helps over 63,000 Vermonters buy groceries each month. At NOFA-VT, we work to maximize the amount of SNAP benefits that flow directly to our local farmers and support their bottom line. NOFA-VT's food security programs, like Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share, help extend this impact by providing an additional incentive for people to spend their 3SquaresVT benefits at farmers markets and CSAs. Vermont's food security depends on a viable agricultural sector, and these programs provide vital income to the people growing the food we all need.

Crop Cash (Plus) & Farm Share Program Impacts

As a refresher, Crop Cash is a federal program that doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits, dollar for dollar, for fruits and vegetables purchased at over 40 Vermont summer farmers markets and over 20 winter farmers markets. When a customer uses their food benefits at a participating farmers market, they can get a matching dollar amount of Crop Cash coupons to spend on fruits, vegetables, herbs, and seeds or seedlings at the market. Thanks to this committee's support and the State of Vermont's FY26 appropriation, we were able to bring back the Crop Cash Plus program to expand this benefit to eggs, meat, dairy, bread, and more. This means 3SVT recipients have been able to access more local foods this summer and fall, and most agricultural vendors have benefited economically from Crop Cash Plus income. We have heard from meat, dairy, and other livestock producers that 10%, and sometimes 20%, of their farmers market income has come from these coupons, an incredible boost to their bottom line.

Over the summer and fall seasons, customers have spent around \$200,000 in Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus, and over \$160,000 in SNAP dollars, at their local farmers markets. This is another \$360,000 in federal and state funds that have been directly re-invested in our local agricultural communities so far this year.

The Farm Share program has subsidized CSA shares for low-income Vermonters for 30 years, paying for 25-75% of the CSA cost. In 2025, this program has supported over 560 families in purchasing a consistent supply of locally grown food. With the help of state funding, community contributions, and philanthropy, the Farm Share program has leveraged over \$328,000 in CSA purchases at local farms in 2025.

Impact of SNAP Delays and Restrictions on Local Food Access

The restricted eligibility for SNAP benefits outlined in H.R.1 and the delay in November SNAP benefits distribution during the government shutdown have had immediate impacts on local food security that will continue to ripple out. Farmers market managers reported that during the first two weeks of November, their winter markets were much slower than usual, as customers navigated misinformation and uncertainty about whether their EBT cards would work or whether their benefits would go away. One market manager shared that their November 2nd market was a “rough day.” SNAP customers arrived early, spending the bare minimum and buying cheaper food.

We are also hearing from participants in the Farm Share program that they can no longer afford their 25% or 50% cost-share, because they had planned to use 3SVT benefits to pay for it. The delay and uncertainty around SNAP benefits has compounded the existing challenging economic conditions low-income Vermonters and farmers alike are facing. A delay in food benefits, or losing them altogether, means Vermonters face impossible choices between affording heat, rent, drastically increasing healthcare costs, and feeding their families, often making it more difficult to find the funds for fresh, locally grown food. This, in turn, means a hit to income for Vermont farmers.

As you will hear more about throughout this afternoon, changes made to SNAP in H.R. 1 reduce the benefit amount or entirely exclude thousands of Vermont households from this food assistance program. This means that, even beyond the impact of the shutdown, more Vermonters will struggle to put food on their table, hitting our most vulnerable community members the hardest.

Pivoting to Support Food Security & Farm Viability

We are deeply grateful for the Emergency Board’s decision to use state contingency funds to ensure that low-income Vermonters had food benefits on their EBT cards last Friday. Given that these funds were delayed in reaching EBT cards, however, the Crop Cash program was inaccessible to folks because spending SNAP dollars is a prerequisite to receiving those coupons. At NOFA-VT, we felt it important to ensure that the state-funded Crop Cash Plus program continued in the interim to support vulnerable Vermonters during this challenging time, when many were going without SNAP benefits for the first time in the program’s 60-year history.

To do this, we were able to slightly pivot how Crop Cash Plus worked temporarily. During the month of November, customers who need help buying food can receive a flat \$20 in Crop Cash Plus to spend on any eligible food item at the farmers market, even if they do not have any SNAP benefits to spend. Not only has this helped 3SVT recipients continue to access locally produced food during the delays in receiving benefits on their EBT cards, but it has also been an opportunity to offer critical support to individuals who have been excluded from SNAP program eligibility due to the provisions in H.R.1, including asylees and refugees. This pivot has also helped ensure that farmers continue receiving Crop Cash Plus income in the midst of fluctuations and pauses in federal programs.

Looking Ahead & Fiscal Year 2027

These programs reflect our shared values of keeping people fed and supporting our farmers. Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share are critical baseline programs that we must continue, especially in light of ongoing uncertainty. The State of Vermont has shown it can be a leader in investing in vital food security

programs, which have been pivotal during these critical moments to meet the needs of our community members. **NOFA-VT will be requesting \$500,000 in ongoing funds for Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share in the FY2027 state budget**, and we look forward to sharing more about the impact of these programs in the coming months.

You will hear next from Sherry Maher about how changes in SNAP benefits have been impacting the Brattleboro community, and what their winter market has done to fill in the gaps.

Thank you for your time.