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Public Hearing on the Governor's Recommended Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Re: Support \$500,000 in base funding for NOFA Vermont's Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share programs

My name is Sondi Freeborn, I live in Fairfax, and I am a participant in the Farm Share Program. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

Please support \$500,000 in base funding to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining two proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

I really do believe access to fresh, local, high-quality food is a basic human right and not something that should only be available to those with wealth and privilege. Supporting local farms is not just important—it's essential to the survival and thriving of our communities, our health, and our planet. Programs like the Farm Share Program are revolutionary because they empower real people by providing access to food that heals, strengthens, and builds resilience.

I have a chronic health condition that is deeply supported by whole, seasonal foods. My body simply cannot tolerate the lifeless, over-processed, corporate-controlled "food" that dominates most grocery stores. Even organic produce, by the time it's shipped across the country or globe, has lost much of its nutrient value. On top of that, it's wrapped in layers of plastic, contributing to environmental damages and the toxification of our bodies. Eating real food that is grown with care in our own communities is a radical act of self-preservation, health sovereignty, and ecological stewardship.

It's disappointing that federal programs like EBT limit access to real food by primarily restricting benefits to grocery stores, which are stocked by large industrial food suppliers. A lot of communities in Vermont don't have access to health food stores, and they too can be cost prohibitive. Small, local farms are where the true nourishment is found—nutrient-dense, sustainably grown food that deeply supports our health. These farms should be the foundation of food access programs, not an afterthought. Programs like the Farm Share Program are doing what the government has largely failed to do: making real food available to people who need it. I am incredibly grateful that my children have access to real local food during such critical stages of their development- and myself and my partner as well, to support our wellness and healing so that we can show up for our kiddos and our lives feeling enlivened, nourished, and supported. Every child and every family should have this opportunity.

We need local food systems to thrive if we want true security. Health and safety don't come from industrial supply chains or corporate monopolies. They come from regenerative farms, from soil that is cared for, from farmers who know their land, and from communities where people nourish one another. Programs like this are a lifeline, helping families like mine access life-giving, fresh food that we would otherwise not be able to source easily or afford.

Once again, please support \$500,000 in base funding to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining two proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share. Thank you for listening.