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Vermont Retail & Grocers Association

Importance of 3SquaresVT to Vermont's Food Retail Sector

Testimony to the Vermont House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

Chair Marcotte and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mark Bouchett, and I serve as the Board Chair of the Vermont Retail & Grocers Association (VRGA). VRGA's membership includes over 200 food retailers: grocery stores, independent grocers, country stores, convenience stores, and specialty food retailers operating in communities in every county of Vermont. Many of these businesses serve as the primary or only food retailer in their town. From the perspective of Vermont grocers, 3SquaresVT is a core component of how the food retail system functions in this state.

Participation in the program within our membership spans every type of food operation, from large chain stores and supermarkets to small independent stores, village markets, and convenience stores. In many rural parts of Vermont, residents rely on their local grocers or country store for day to day food needs. The ability to use 3SquaresVT benefits at those stores is often the difference between a store staying open or closing its doors.

Each month, approximately \$13 million in federal food benefits is spent at Vermont food retailers through 3SquaresVT. For grocers these transactions that move through the register, support payroll, allow stores to pay distributors and farmers, and help keep shelves stocked. Grocery stores operate on extremely thin margins, and consistent monthly sales volume is critical to maintaining basic operations.

One of the reasons 3SquaresVT works well for retailers is that it integrates seamlessly into existing grocery systems. There are no special stocking requirements, no separate product labeling, and no parallel inventory systems. Staff are not asked to treat these transactions differently from any other sale. That operational simplicity matters in food retail, where labor shortages are ongoing, turnover is high, and checkout efficiency directly affects both customer experience and store costs.

3SquaresVT also helps stabilize purchasing patterns throughout the month. When families have reliable access to grocery benefits, they can shop more consistently rather than in crisis cycles. For retailers, that steadier flow of customers allows better staffing decisions, more accurate

ordering, and more efficient use of labor. These operational details may seem small, but across hundreds of stores they add up to meaningful stability.

The importance of this program is most visible in rural communities. In many towns, the local grocery or country store is not only a place to buy food but also a key employer and a critical piece of local infrastructure. Losing that store can mean longer drives for food, higher costs for families, and fewer jobs in the community. 3SquaresVT plays a direct role in keeping those stores viable by ensuring that food dollars are spent locally.

From the retail perspective, 3SquaresVT is a program that works because it aligns with how grocery stores actually operate. It supports customer choice, keeps checkout efficient, avoids unnecessary administrative burden, and provides a dependable stream of revenue that helps stores plan and survive in a challenging economic environment. For Vermont grocers and food retailers, this program is not optional or marginal. It is part of the foundation that allows food retail to function across the state, particularly outside major population centers.

On behalf of the Vermont Retail and Grocers Association, we urge continued recognition of the role 3SquaresVT plays in sustaining Vermont's grocery stores, protecting access to food in rural communities, and keeping federal food dollars circulating in Vermont's local economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and to share the on the ground perspective of Vermont's food retailers.