



Memorandum

To: Vermont State Senate and House Committees

Fr: Dana Hudson, Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network

Da: February 12, 2025

My name is Dana Hudson and I am the Coordinator of the Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network. My employer is Shelburne Farms, but I work for the hundreds of educators, administrators, farmers, school food professionals, organizations, and businesses that make up our robust network. And most importantly, I am really working for the 1,000's of young Vermont students that are participating in FTS and FTEC programs.

First, I want to thank you for having us here today to share about the impact that FTS and FTEC has on Vermonters. It supports our schools, our farmers, our local food economy, and our communities!

We are asking you to support the Governor's budget proposal for both the VT Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program and the Local Food Incentive program with level funding, base appropriations of \$500,000 each.

The Vermont FTS&EC Network was created in 2008 to address the growing movement of schools that wanted to serve local products in their cafeterias while using food and farming as an integrative education tool to address student learning and engagement.

You can see this addressed in our 3 C's Model of Change, - that for long term staying power, you need to be connecting the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community. (reference slide 3, 4, 5, 6). creating a win-win-win for our students, farmers, families, and communities.

I have seen the impact of FTS first hand. The school that my own children go to has a chicken coop, a beehive, fruit trees, and a prolific garden. Their farm to school program is weaved into the school curriculum and every child in that building gets to experience these activities every year that they are in that school. They come home with stories and memories, but more importantly they feel a deep connection to their food, their community, and the world they live in.

Vermont has invested in 3 key programs to improve student health and learning that is benefitting our farmers: There are 3 cornerstone programs that we ask you to support:

- First, The Rozo McLaughlin Farm to School grant program that started in 2006 and has since served over 300 schools and early childhood programs in every county of the state. The program provides capacity building and technical assistance to schools and early childhood programs to develop and strengthen their farm to school activities.
- Second, The Local Food Incentive program that supports increased local purchasing, so that more of the \$25M schools spend each year on food stays here in the VT economy and with VT farmers. We know from a UVM study that for every dollar schools spend on local food, an additional 60 cents is contributed to the VT economy. And over 100 farms across the state now sell to schools and early childhood programs.
- Third, Universal School Meals ensures equitable access to school meals for every student, in every zipcode in our state,. Since for many students, around half their daily calories come from school meals. We know it's essential for our student's health, their learning and their success to access nourishing meals.

Show Slide 8 - We call this graphic the “Virtuous cycle” of farm to school: Farm to School and Universal Meals increases participation in school meals, which improves revenues in the program which allows more local purchasing and fresh nourishing meals, leading to more participation.

Today you will hear directly from teachers, students, farmers, school food professionals, food hubs and technical assistance providers, on how farm to school has made a difference.

We can take some questions after each speaker, and we should have time at the end for discussion. I also want to remind you of the handouts submitted to the Committee staff that can give you more information, but please reach out anytime if you have further questions of any of us.

We are looking for your support of full funding for both the Local Food Incentive at \$500K level base funding, and the FTS & EC grants program at level base funding of \$500K. These programs make a huge difference in the ability of schools to buy their food from VT farmers and engage our students in understanding where our food comes from and the programs work together to support VT families, VT farmers and VT children.