

Testimony by Yvonne Miceler, 11th grader at Champlain Valley Union High School
February 12, 2025
For Vermont House Education Committee

My name is Yvonne Miceler, I am an 11th grader at Champlain Valley Union High School. As the daughter of a conservationist, I've been raised in a household concerned about climate change, and the state of the planet we live on. I mean it when I say I didn't feel like anything I was doing was making any difference, or like I had a community that understood until I joined Farm to School, and dove into planning FEAST. FEAST, which stands for Food Education and Sustainable Thinking, is a program led by high school students for high school students and is truly unlike anything I've ever had the opportunity to be involved in. In FEAST you are given the option to help plan the event itself with on team of other students, lead workshops, or experience the events as an attendee. As a member of the planning committee, I can say that the feedback from 2024 was overwhelmingly positive. I was not alone in this student participants said it gave them ideas to implement into their own FTS programs, Adults who were engaged in this also said they found FEAST inspiring. What's so important about FEAST is that it's truly a student initiative. Never in any other setting, have I had my opinion listened to, and hold so much weight in the process of decision-making and planning. This really made the event unique as it felt like something my team and I co-created and all could be proud of because we all shared the final say when it came to problem-solving, and that is something I never would have been able to do without this experience.

I realized that change starts with community, and being involved with FEAST has introduced me to incredible people, both students and adults, whom I would consider genuine friends, and who have helped me reach the place I'm in today with my school's Farm to School program: Since FEAST 2024 we have started a farm stand bringing produce to real families, made connections beyond that of our school, and kickstarted a mission educating other youth across Vermont on the importance of sustainable agriculture in fighting climate change. More than anything though, FEAST has allowed me to build relationships with people I never would have known, and taught me skills I never would have learned in school, I learned leadership in student meetings, grown comfortable with speaking my mind in a Zoom room full of strangers, and navigated the logistics of managing a real event, while problem-solving obstacles in person. The reality is that FEAST is so much more than just a conference for high schoolers, it's a rare opportunity for like-minded youth to build real connections, and work together to pursue topics in the real world that they are passionate about! In closing, FEAST has brought me, and so many others, a unique community, real-world experiences in planning, hosting, and budgeting, skills in communicating with peers and adults, and that feeling that I'm making a difference for others in Vermont by providing such a unique and valuable space for the FTS initiative and community to grow.

