

John Sayles, CEO of Vermont Foodbank
3SquaresVT Awareness Day
February 5, 2026
Senate Committee on Agriculture

Thank you, Chair Birong, and committee members, for your time today. My name is John Sayles. I'm CEO of Vermont Foodbank, and I live in Montpelier.

I'm here today with partners and neighbors for 3SquaresVT Awareness Day to acknowledge this essential program and to ask for your support on requests that, together, will ensure the best outcomes for people in Vermont—for our communities, our farmers, and our economy. I'm also here to ask for your support for Vermont Foodbank's FY27 request for a total of \$5 million, including \$1 million for Ready Response for disasters and emergencies; fully fund the administrative costs needed for state fiscal year 2027 to counter federal funding changes and keep 3SquaresVT available and accessible to people in Vermont; and Support NOFA-VT's request for \$500,000 in ongoing funding to Strengthen Vermont Farm Viability and Address Food Security by sustaining proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

3SquaresVT is known nationally as SNAP, but in many households it's known as a lifeline. Nearly 10% of Vermonters receive 3SquaresVT benefits, which is a monthly boost to grocery budgets – most are children, older adults, or people with disabilities who are navigating tight budgets to make ends meet. More than \$12 million in federal benefits are distributed directly to people who participate each month; that is money that goes directly into the Vermont economy through purchases at local food retailers, farm stands, and farmers markets.

3SquaresVT is our most effective anti-hunger program, and at the same time, it does not reach many Vermonters at risk of hunger. 3SquaresVT is just one part of the safety net and can't meet the need on its own—it's not designed to do that.

The other supports in this safety net come from Vermont Foodbank and our partners. And these parts of the "food safety net" are important sources of food for people year-round, but are often critical in a disaster or emergency. This committee is very familiar with Vermont's flood disasters and the need for better systematic support around food for flooded communities. The two people joining me today, Denise and Stella, are here to share with you their experiences of another kind of emergency Vermont had last November, when 3SquaresVT benefits were paused because of the government shutdown. This experience, from the charitable food system's perspective, required the same kind of mobilization and response that a large-scale natural disaster does.

I want to commend the legislature, the Emergency Board, and the Governor and his administration for their swift action to partially fund 3SquaresVT for the more than 64k people last November and for \$250,000 for Vermont Foodbank's partners to

purchase and distribute food. Those partners scrambled to purchase food to stock their shelves to help neighbors get through the first week of November without 3SquaresVT benefits – until the State could load partial benefits onto people's EBT cards.

You will hear how dramatically this “emergency” impacted people and how it stretched and stressed the emergency food system. We cannot continue to ask so much of our partners without, together, doing the work required to plan ahead, source and stage food resources, and to recognize that there are different needs, structures, and systems required for food access in emergencies.

Thank you for your time and your support for Vermont Foodbanks' FY27 request for \$5 million in funding, including \$1 million for Ready Response, \$2 million for Vermonters Feeding Vermonters, and \$2 million to support our network of partners.