

Farm to School Awareness Day

Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets

Testimony Notes – 2/12/2025

For the Record:

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Overview of Farm to School and Early Childhood Grants Program

- The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) Farm to School and Early Childhood (FTSEC) grant program was created in 2006 with the passage of the Roza McLaughlin Farm to School Act by the Vermont legislature.
- VAAFAM awards and administers grants to schools, early childcare providers, and non-profits through a competitive application process on an annual basis. VAAFAM also coordinates technical assistance and coaching services to support grantee success.
- The focus of these funds:
 - improve health, nutrition, and learning outcomes for students and children,
 - integrate interdisciplinary agricultural education into Vermont classrooms,
 - connect kids and families with the agricultural community, and
 - strengthen markets for Vermont-grown and produced products.
- Since 2006, 339 grants have been awarded, totaling over \$2.3 million. These grants have funded 160 early childhood programs and over 158 schools.

FY24 Highlights

- In the most recent fiscal year, 73 grants were awarded to schools and early childhood programs, funding 50 early childhood programs and 14 school districts. These grants were through the following programs:
 - **Capacity Building Grant**
 - Focuses on developing and sustaining robust farm to school programs.
 - This flagship funding opportunity pairs financial assistance with technical assistance and an assigned grant coach.
 - **Vision Grant**
 - Aims to amplify innovative projects that promote youth leadership and community engagement.
 - Supports larger projects (up to \$50,000) that can be scaled or replicated to impact multiple communities.
 - **CSA Grant**
 - Promotes child nutrition and community connection.
 - A mini-grant program that reimburses early childhood education centers and afterschool programs for up to 80% of the cost of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share.

FY25 Underway

- Each year, the Agency assesses grant programs and adjusts offerings to best meet the needs of the educational community.
- So far in FY25, eight Capacity Building Grants have been awarded, with projects starting in March. The second funding opportunity for the year is the Vision Grant, which will begin accepting applications on February 27.
- We made the difficult decision to pause the CSA grant for FY25 to streamline the state grant portfolio and create Agency staff capacity to leverage \$1.26 million in one-time federal funding from the USDA for the Local Food for Schools and Childcare program. The \$50,000 typically awarded to 40+ CSA mini-grant recipients has been reallocated to bolster the Vision Grant budget.
- The Agency is planning to launch another mini-grant in 2026, either in a similar model to the CSA grant or as a kitchen infrastructure grant.

The Farm to School and Early Childhood Program FY24 Legislative Report provides an overview of how the Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program works and its impact on Vermont youth and farmers. The last section of the report also includes a brief overview of farm to institution projects that VAAFM has implemented in the past year leveraging other funding streams, including federal funding, other state grants, and dairy marketing and promotion funding.

My contact information is on the back of the report in case you have any additional questions or would like to invite me to return for further testimony on the FTSEC grant program.

Thank you all for your time.