

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

Thank you, Chair Ingalls, and committee members, for your time today. My name is John Sayles, I'm CEO of Vermont Foodbank, and I live in Montpelier. As you've heard, there are many ways 3SquaresVT meets the needs of neighbors and supports farmers across the state.

I'm here today to celebrate the incredible 3SquaresVT program and how it supports nearly 10% of neighbors in Vermont. In spite of recent changes by the federal government, 3SquaresVT remains our most efficient and effective anti-hunger program.

I'm also here to celebrate the work of Vermont Foodbank and our partners, who make sure about 70,000 neighbors, including those on 3SquaresVT, have food each month.

And in order to continue that support, I ask that you support the Vermont Foodbank's request for a \$5 million total appropriation in FY27, including \$2 million to support our network of partners, \$2 million for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters local food purchasing program, and \$1 million for Ready Response to ensure food access in disasters and emergencies.

In particular, the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters program, which you passed into law last year, ensures that people coming to food shelves or direct distributions, who may have run out of 3SquaresVT benefits for the month, or who carefully budget their available benefits and dollars to stretch them each month, have fresh, local produce available at food shelves and direct distribution events across the state year-round. As you'll hear, this program not only supports people who need food assistance, but it also supports farm businesses, and viable farm businesses support farmers.

Joining me today is Bob Chappelle from Chappelle's Vermont Potatoes. Bob is one of Vermont Foodbank's potato suppliers through Vermonters Feeding Vermonters purchasing program, supported by state dollars. We purchase Bob's potatoes through the direct purchasing part of the program. We forward contract with farms like Bob's now, in the winter, so farmers have guaranteed customer before they even plant. This helps Vermont Foodbank count on this food, and farmers count on this income. We then use our existing infrastructure and the infrastructure of our network partner organizations to distribute fresh produce, like Bob's potatoes, across Vermont.

Also joining me is Emmet Moseley from CVOEO's Feeding Champlain Valley - they are some of our largest partners in the state and distribute hundreds of thousands of pounds of produce, alone, much of it locally grown. Not only do they receive local

food from Vermont Foodbank's direct purchases, but they have also received grant funds through Vermonters Feeding Vermonters to work with smaller farms in their region to purchase food that the people who use their food shelf need and want. You'll hear how funding through Vermonters Feeding Vermonters maximizes existing distribution channels, builds local relationships, and uses existing systems that people who need food assistance are already using – much in the same way Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus builds on the way people are already using their 3SquaresVT benefits.

By funding the Foodbank's request for \$5 million in FY27, including \$2 million for Vermonters Feeding Vermonters, you are building on an existing foundation to create opportunities for local farms to feed their neighbors whether they shop at the farmers market, the grocery store, or at the food shelf. These programs are integral to creating the best possible outcomes for farmers and neighbors across Vermont.

Thank you for your time and your thoughtful consideration of our request.