



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



-Memorandum-

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NOFA-VT | VT FEED
Farm to School Awareness Day
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Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you so much for having us today. For the record, my name is Kayla Strom, and I'm a resident of Richmond, Vermont. I serve as the Farm to School Program Manager at NOFA-VT, where I work directly with schools, farmers, and distributors to strengthen Vermont's local food system. Thank you for taking the time to listen to the many perspectives shared today in support of farm to school.

I am here to ask for your support in level funding for two critical programs: the Farm to School & Early Childhood (FTSEC) program and the Local Foods Incentive (LFI), both at \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2026. These programs are essential for connecting youth with food systems education and our agricultural community, while simultaneously supporting Vermont's farmers and food producers.

While you've heard from others about the importance of these programs, I want to focus on local purchasing goals and the impact of the state's investments. As a network, we have a goal to reach 30% local purchasing in schools by 2030. To achieve this, we must continue investing in farm to school initiatives that help schools access, afford, and integrate local foods into their menus.

The Local Foods Incentive (LFI) is a key driver in this effort, incentivizing school meal programs to prioritize Vermont-grown and produced foods. In my role, I provide technical assistance to schools applying for the Local Foods Incentive and strategize with school nutrition professionals around ways to incorporate more Vermont products into their programs. Now in its third year, the data shows that this program is working. According to the Vermont Agency of Education's 2025 Legislative Report, in the 2023-2024 school year:

- **Twelve School Food Authorities (SFAs) reported purchasing at least 15% of their food locally**, collectively contributing over \$1.2 million to the Vermont economy through food purchases.
- **The number of Subsequent Year grantees doubled** from the previous year, demonstrating growing commitment and capacity among schools to prioritize local procurement.
- So far, **over two-thirds of SFAs in the state have participated in the grant program.**

As you've heard from our other speakers today, the investments the state is making in these programs matter. And it is critical that these meals be available to all of Vermont's school children. The Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants Program, The Local Foods Incentive and Universal School Meals work hand in hand. We need all three of these programs working together to provide schools the resources they need to buy from Vermont producers – ensuring that high quality, local food is accessible to all.

We cannot afford to move backward; we must continue investing in a future where every child and our agricultural communities thrive. In my work with school nutrition programs, I've heard again and again that the connections they're making with local farms, local bakeries, and local businesses is made possible because of these programs. They are proud to be supporting their neighbors. Kids are growing up understanding what it means to be nourished by their communities. These programs are not just feeding students— they are shaping a generation that values local food, supports Vermont farmers and strengthens our rural economy. We must continue this investment to ensure that every child has access to fresh, nourishing meals and that our agricultural communities remain vibrant for generations to come.

Before we close, I also want to highlight today's lunch - a taco bar! This is a common school lunch, which was selected to showcase what's possible when we invest in farm to school. We worked with Bob Hildebrand to develop the menu, featuring VT producers that are feeding our kids:

- All Souls Tortillas
- Boyden Farms beef
- Vermont Bean Crafters' black bean crumble
- House-made garden salsa
- Cabot sour cream
- Bard & Bellom seasonings
- Spanish rice and Vermont Bean Crafters' black bean salad

I hope you had the chance to taste firsthand the impact of your investments in school meals.

I urge you to continue supporting these programs with level funding of \$500,000 for the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants Program and \$500,000 for the Local Foods Incentive. Thank you for your time, and I appreciate your commitment to strengthening farm to school and early childhood efforts in Vermont.

Thank you,
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