

TESTIMONY TO: Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs
FROM: Carrie Stahler, Vermont Foodbank
RE: FY27 Food Security Budget Requests relevant to SEDHGA
DATE: April 9, 2026

Good morning, thank you for having me. My name is Carrie Stahler, I'm the Sr. Manager of Government Affairs at Vermont Foodbank. As you begin to consider budget priorities, I'd like to ask for your support for several food security requests that support the Vermont economy, and are named in the Vermont Food Security Roadmap to 2035 as critical steps to creating full food security in our state.

We are seeking your support for the following budget requests:

- **\$2 million for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters grant program** within the Agency of Agriculture, funding so Vermont Foodbank can purchase locally grown and produced food directly from Vermont farms. Full funding would support roughly 300 farm businesses across Vermont.
- **\$2 million to support Vermont Foodbank network of food shelves and meal sites** – as organizations that keep people fed, the food support helps households use their available cash for to pay for rent, childcare, or put gas in the car.
 - I've attached two reports that Dr. Meredith Niles shared with the legislature last year.
 - [The first study](#) shows that of people surveyed who use food pantries in the past 12 months, 95% had someone in the household who is “working, seeking work, enrolled as a student, disabled, or retired.” and names that one of the causes is due to an increase of nearly 30% in the cost of groceries over the past 5 years.
 - [The second study](#) compares the experiences of households identified as “food secure” and “food insecure.” This shows that the majority of food insecurity households continue to face food access challenges closely tied to household finances.
- **\$1 million to support Ready Response** to food in disasters and emergencies to support communities in the first 3-7 days after a disaster or emergency
- **\$500k for NOFA-VT's request for Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share**, again, funds that directly support farm businesses' bottom line.
- **\$15.6 million in funding to seed the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund** – this was recently passed as S.60 and needs funding to function in the intended way, which is similar to BGAP funding in 2023 and 2024.
- **Fully fund the Land Access and Opportunity Board's operational funding at \$1.75 million and programmatic funding at \$1.43 million**, supporting a wide variety of housing and community development activities for historically

marginalized and disadvantaged communities who continue to face barriers to land and home ownership.

Additionally, there are two requests that I want to draw this committee's special attention to because they support Vermont's continued participation and access to millions of dollars in federal funding for the 3SquaresVT program.

3SquaresVT is known nationally as SNAP, but in many households it's known as a lifeline. Nearly 10% of Vermonters receive 3SquaresVT, which is a monthly boost to grocery budgets. Put simply, 3SquaresVT makes it easier for lower-income and working class folks to buy the basics: milk, bread, produce, eggs, and more. It is the most effective and efficient food security program in the country—as well as a powerful economic development program.

With an approved application, people can shop with 3SquaresVT using an EBT card which looks and works just like a debit card. A trip to the grocery store is just like any other shopper's experience, which is very much by design. There are more than 600 retailers in Vermont who accept 3SquaresVT, including 40+ farmers markets.

More than \$12 million in federal benefits are issued directly to participants each month. Estimates show that most of that is spent within 30 days. That means \$12 million per month in federal dollars is being spent at grocery stores, country stores, local markets, and farmers markets. In November 2025 when we saw a historic and devastating lapse in federal funding for SNAP benefits, not only were 64,000 Vermonters stressed and worried about how they would pay for groceries, but our local businesses were stressed about filling a \$12 million gap in their bottom lines that month. Vermont's heroic effort to use state funds to issue partial benefits was a relief to families and grocers alike, and proved to be a wise investment in the safety and health of our communities.

While 3SquaresVT effectively reaches the most low-income folks, many more qualify. There are various reasons for this discrepancy, including additional eligibility requirements, and a complex application. Accessing 3SquaresVT was made more challenging in October 2025 when federal changes to SNAP included in H.R.1 went into effect.

3SquaresVT helps people afford the basics so they can keep gas in the car to get to work, pay for childcare, pay the rent. When people lose eligibility—whether because they no longer qualify, or because of complex reporting rules, it harms the health and economic strength of our communities.

This is one of the many reasons why having trained and trusted benefits assisters at organizations across Vermont is so important—these are people who understand the complex rules and processes and help people apply for 3SquaresVT and other federal programs that not only support their families but draw down federal dollars and have a multiplier effect in our communities.

We are asking you **to support an [additional appropriation over the House budget of \\$3.973M](#) in FY27 to service-providing organizations to expand capacity for benefit assisters to keep eligible people on federal benefit programs** such as SNAP and Medicaid, and to keep the federal funding from these programs that directly supports the bottom line of food retailers and hospitals flowing into Vermont.

We have a strong network of benefit assisters, and Vermont is often lifted up as a model for other states. Benefit assisters not only ensure a unified understanding of 3SquaresVT across the state, but actually support our state agency by helping ensure applications are completed accurately—reducing administrative burden on the state, and supporting a low SNAP payment error rate, which is critical to keeping our state’s administrative cost share for SNAP as low as possible. This is a very technical change. I’m happy to explain more, but the point here is that having adequate capacity to administer SNAP is critical to continuing to keep our payment error rate low, as it currently is.

In addition to federal eligibility changes, H.R.1 made changes to the funding structure of SNAP. Vermont faces additional costs to administer 3SquaresVT beginning in October 2026 because the federal government is pulling back their share of the administration cost. **Those costs are included in the DCF section of the Governor’s recommended Y27 budget and the House version of the budget.**

I’ve included a separate document listing the food security initiatives that affect the economic well-being of our businesses, farms, and communities with my testimony documents.

Thank you for your time. I’m happy to answer any questions.