



A project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms

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To: Senate Education Committee

Fr: Betsy Rosenbluth, Farm to School Director, Shelburne Farms

Da: February 12, 2025

Re: Farm to School and Early Childhood

My name is Betsy Rosenbluth and I am the Farm to School Director at Shelburne Farms.

We are here today to ask you to support the VT Farm to School & Early Childhood grant program and the Local Foods Incentive for schools with level funded, base appropriations of \$500,000 each, which are both in the Governor's proposed budget.

Every Vermonter should have access to the nourishing food we produce in this state, and every student should have that nourishing food on their lunch tray so that while we address readiness to learn and food insecurity we are also building lifelong skills for better health and helping our VT farmers and the agricultural economy. That is the win-win of Farm to School.

Thank you for having us here today to share the impact that investing in farm to school and early childhood is having here in Vermont on our students, our communities and our farmers. What makes Vermont's farm to school program unique is the integration of food access with local food purchasing, and agriculture and food education. We do this by connecting classrooms, with the cafeteria, and with the community and local farms. It is a 3C model of change: Classrooms, Cafeterias and Communities. The grant funds to schools strengthens their farm to school activities and includes technical assistance and support.

Vermont has invested in 3 key programs to improve student health and learning while benefitting our farmers:

First, The Rozo McLaughlin Farm to School grant program that started in 2006 and has since served over 300 schools and early childhood programs, in every county of the state.

Second, The Local Food Incentive program that supports local purchasing, so that more of the \$25M schools spend each year on food stays here in the VT economy and with VT farmers. Over 60% of School Food Authorities are engaging with the Incentive and last year's grantees alone reported spending about \$1.2M on local foods in the 2023-24 school year. We know from a UVM study that for every dollar schools spend on local food, an additional 60 cents is contributed to the VT economy. And over 100 farms across the state now sell to schools and early childhood programs.

Third, Universal School Meals ensures equitable access to school meals for every student. Since for many students, around half their daily calories come from school meals, we know it's essential for our student's health, their learning and their success to access these nourishing meals.

The 3 programs work together as a "Virtuous cycle" of farm to school: Farm to School and Universal Meals increases participation in school meals, which improves revenues in the meal program, which allows for more local purchasing and fresh scratch cooked meals, leading to more participation and more revenue, continuing the cycle.

By integrating food access, food education and local purchasing in schools, we are providing our children critical nutrition and they are understanding what that food does for the health of their bodies and their communities, benefiting our local farmers and building healthy habits and a connection to VT foods, for a lifetime.

We are looking for your support of level, base funding for both the Local Food Incentive at \$500K, and for the farm to school and early childhood grants program at \$500K. These programs work together to support VT families, VT farmers and VT children.

Thank you

