

Good afternoon, and thank you all for allowing me to speak to you today. My name is Julia Wulff, and I live in Waterbury and go to school at Harwood Union High School. I am here because I would like to ask you all to continue to support the Farm to School and Early Childhood program as well as the Local Food Incentive program with \$500,000 each for fiscal year 2027. These programs are essential to teaching young students to understand and care for the food they eat and the environment around them. As a student in my school district since preschool, I myself have been profoundly affected by these programs.

Some of my most vivid memories from Brookside Elementary School are hands-on food lessons where we cooked in our classrooms and visited local farms. I remember making butter, cheese, and ice cream and learned about how farms work. Then when I moved up to Crossett Brook Middle School, I had a sustainability class for part of each year. In fifth grade, we learned about caring for our school's chickens and greenhouse, deepening our understanding of the effort it takes to raise plants and animals for human consumption. In sixth and seventh grade, we focused on climate change and organic and sustainable farming. All of this fascinated me and was easily my favorite part of middle school. So when offered the chance to do 'inquiry projects,' student developed projects based on our interests, it seemed natural that I would do something farm-to-school related. My sustainability teacher offered me the idea of using a grant given to the school to purchase and maintain beehives at school. I spent that year studying beekeeping, purchasing beekeeping materials, and understanding what both domesticated and wild bees need from humans and what we get from them in return. There are currently two beehives at Crossett Brook that are cared for by students and used to educate them about the role bees play in our agricultural systems.

When I entered high school, I wanted to continue building on this knowledge. I considered working with the student-run Harvest of the Month taste tests, where students make and serve local food recipes. I also thought about working with the teachers and students that run the greenhouse that grows greens for our cafeteria. But then I decided to join the Harwood Sustainability Club and in turn, the Vermont Youth Lobby. Through that, I got involved with running a workshop for my peers at FEAST, a state-wide food education and sustainable thinking summit run by students. I taught a workshop on understanding the legislative process and how to effectively lobby state representatives in support of environmental issues. Through the help of the teachers and farm to school experiences that I loved at these schools, I have become more knowledgeable and engaged in the world around me, and I am incredibly grateful for it.

Also throughout my time at all these schools, I had access to school breakfast and lunch. Though lunches made of mystery meat and overcooked broccoli prevail in the media about public schools, I've never had to worry about that. Thanks to the farm to school program and the goal of using more local ingredients in our lunches, I can look forward to grilled cheese sandwiches made with Red Hen bread and mac and cheese made with Cabot cheddar. My school has been able to source close to 25% with local ingredients, helping the community environmentally, socially, and economically.

So with that, I ask you to support the continued base funding of \$500,000 each of the Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program and the Local Food Incentive Program. Thank you again for allowing me to share my story.