

Johanna Doren
NOFA-VT
3SquaresVT Awareness Day
February 5, 2026
Senate Committee on Government Operations

Thank you Chair Collamore and Committee members. My name is Johanna Doren, I live in Winooski, and I am the Local Food Access Director with the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am here to ask you to support \$500,000 in ongoing funding to strengthen Vermont farm viability and address food security by sustaining proven programs: Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share.

At NOFA-VT, we work to maximize the amount of SNAP benefits that flow directly to our local farmers and support their bottom line. NOFA-VT's food security programs, like Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share, help extend this impact by providing an additional incentive for people to spend their 3SquaresVT benefits at farmers markets, farm stands, and CSAs. Vermont's food security depends on a viable agricultural sector, and these programs provide vital income to the people growing the food we all need.

Crop Cash is a federal program that doubles 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits, dollar for dollar, for fruits and vegetables purchased at over 40 Vermont summer farmers markets and over 20 winter farmers markets. When a customer uses their food benefits at a participating farmers market, they can get a matching dollar amount of Crop Cash coupons to spend on fruits, vegetables, herbs, and seeds or seedlings at the market. Thanks to the State of Vermont's FY26 appropriation, we were able to bring back the Crop Cash Plus program to expand this benefit to eggs, meat, dairy, bread, and more. This means 3SVT recipients have been able to access more local foods this summer and fall, and most agricultural vendors have benefited economically from Crop Cash Plus income. We have heard from meat, dairy, and other livestock producers that 10%, and sometimes 20%, of their farmers market income has come from these coupons, an incredible boost to their bottom line.

Over the summer and fall seasons, customers have spent around \$200,000 in Crop Cash and Crop Cash Plus, and over \$160,000 in SNAP dollars, at their local farmers markets. This is another \$360,000 in federal and state funds that have been directly re-invested in our local agricultural communities so far this year.

The restricted eligibility for SNAP benefits outlined in H.R.1 and the delay in November SNAP benefits distribution during the government shutdown have had immediate impacts on local food security that continue to ripple out. Farmers market managers reported that during the first two weeks of November, their winter markets were much slower than usual, as customers navigated misinformation and uncertainty about whether their EBT cards would work or whether their benefits would go away. One market manager shared that their November 2nd market was a "rough day." SNAP customers arrived early, spending the bare minimum and buying cheaper food.

The delay and uncertainty around SNAP benefits has compounded the existing challenging economic conditions low-income Vermonters and farmers alike are facing. A delay in food benefits, or losing them altogether, means Vermonters face impossible choices between affording heat, rent, drastically increasing healthcare costs, and feeding their families, often making it more difficult to find the funds for fresh, locally grown food. This, in turn, means a hit to income for Vermont farmers.

As you have heard, changes made to SNAP in H.R. 1 reduce the benefit amount or entirely exclude thousands of Vermont households from this food assistance program. This means that, even beyond the impact of the shutdown, more Vermonters will struggle to put food on their table, hitting our most vulnerable community members the hardest.

When the federal government shutdown delayed the distribution of November SNAP benefits, state funding allowed us to be nimble and responsive to Vermonters' needs. We felt it important to ensure that the Crop Cash Plus program continued in the interim to support vulnerable Vermonters during this challenging time, when many were going without SNAP benefits for the first time in the program's 60-year history. Because of the federal rules limiting the Crop Cash benefit only to be available when a SNAP transaction occurs, the Crop Cash Plus program allowed us greater flexibility to pivot. During the month of November, customers who needed help buying food could receive \$20 in Crop Cash Plus to spend on any eligible food item at the farmers market, even if they did not have any SNAP benefits to spend at the time.

Not only did this help 3SVT recipients continue to access locally produced food during the delays in receiving benefits on their EBT cards, but it was also an opportunity to offer critical support to individuals who have been excluded from SNAP program eligibility due to the provisions in H.R.1, including asylees and refugees. This pivot also helped ensure that farmers could continue receiving Crop Cash Plus income in the midst of fluctuations and pauses in federal programs. And, importantly, showed how the State's investment in these programs supports greater resiliency in our communities.

These programs reflect our shared values of keeping people fed and supporting our farmers. Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share are critical baseline programs that we must continue, especially in light of ongoing uncertainty. The State of Vermont has shown it can be a leader in investing in vital food security programs, which have been pivotal during these critical moments to meet the needs of our community members. **Please support \$500,000 in ongoing funds for Crop Cash (Plus) and Farm Share in the FY2027 state budget**, an integral component of ensuring the best possible outcomes for Vermonters. Thank you for your time.