

February 12, 2025 – Farm to School & Early Childhood Testimony
Beth Traver Adolphus, Executive Director of Oak Hill Children’s Center

Good Morning. My name is Beth Traver Adolphus, and I am the Executive Director of Oak Hill Children’s Center in Pownal, a high-quality Early Childhood Education program serving children ages 6 weeks to 12 years year-round in our rural, low-income community. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you today about the importance of Farm to School & Early Childhood and to ask that you please support the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants program with level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2026, as well as the Local Food Incentive Program for schools at \$500,000 level funding base appropriation.

To provide a little background about our center, we participate in the federal Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Almost 80% of the children in our community are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and every Vermont family at our center receives child care subsidy. Food and nutrition insecurity is not uncommon, and a number of our children have experienced trauma. The nutritious, homecooked breakfasts, lunches and snacks we provide our children daily are critical to combat these challenges and support optimal health and brain development. We know that good nutrition has a direct effect on child outcomes. Our Farm to School & Early Childhood Program is a cornerstone of our work, and the grant funding we have received has allowed us to create a many-layered program that supports children, families, local farms and the community.

The children at our center are living proof that children are far more likely to try new healthy foods if they have a hand in growing and/or preparing it. With grant funding, last year we were able to build 288 square feet of new raised bed gardens. Children and families were involved in preparing the beds, planting, maintaining the garden and harvesting. One of the items we grew was broccoli, and over one very warm weekend the heads got a little “leggy.” Since our broccoli did not look like store broccoli with beautiful domes, we did not think the children would eat it. We decided to send it out to the classrooms anyway so they could dissect it and learn about plant parts. Not long after that, our School Age Educators contacted me to say that the children had eaten the entire head and were looking for more. Our Preschool/Pre-K children regularly make hummus, which they refused to try before they made it themselves (beet is their favorite – it’s pink!). They also make fruit smoothies which do not contain added sugar. The first time they made it, our educators were surprised by how sour it was, and they were sure the children would reject it. The children drank glass after glass. Along with more “traditional” vegetables, our children grew and enjoyed many foods that were new to them - spaghetti squash, delicata squash, pickled onions and pesto pizza (made with fresh basil from our garden).

They also share their excitement with their families. We were able to grow enough produce that we could share with our families, and you could often hear a parent and child discussing how they wanted to prepare their zucchini (if it didn’t get eaten on the way home). Funding also helped us hold fun, educational events like Pumpkin Palooza and Farm Day where families could learn from farmers about their animals (like cows, goats, chickens and bees), try seed planting, make quick pickles, play plant parts matching games and more. Our Harvest Dinner provides families and staff an opportunity to prepare and eat a meal together using the Harvest of the Month. Our monthly Breakfast Buddies Program, which frequently features local food, gives families the opportunity to share a meal with their child in the classroom. All these initiatives create important social connections between families, exposes them to local farms and local food and are supported by Farm to School & Early Childhood funding.

A Community Supported Agriculture grant has allowed us to purchase all of our honey, maple syrup and nearly all of our meat from farms less than 2 miles away. A Farm to School & Early Childhood Infrastructure Grant provided funds for a new freezer which allows us to preserve our harvest or safely store a few months’ supply of local meat.

There are few investments that can create such broad and lasting impact – not just for each of our children, but for their families, our farmers and our communities. The results are lifelong. Again, I respectfully ask for your support of the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grants program with level funding base appropriation of \$500,000 for Fiscal Year 2026, as well as the Local Food Incentive Program for schools at \$500,000 level funding base appropriation. Farm to School & Early Childhood dollars go a long way. Thank you so much for listening.



First-ever pesto pizza!



A toddler's first gardening experience



Toddlers meet chickens at Farm Day



Preschoolers learn about transplanting starts



Homegrown tomatoes