Memorandum

To: Vermont State House Health and Welfare Committee
Fr: Dana Hudson, Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network
Da: January, 13, 2026

Hello. My name is Dana Hudson and I am the Coordinator of the Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network. My employer is Shelburne Farms, but I really work for the hundreds of educators, farmers, school food professionals, organizations, and businesses that make up our robust network. And most importantly, I am really working for the 1,000's of young Vermont students that are participating in Farm to School (FTS) and Farm to Early Childhood (FTEC) programs.

First, I want to thank you for having us here today to share about the impact that FTS and FTEC has on Vermonters. It supports our schools, our farmers, our local food economy, and our communities!

We are asking you to support the VT Farm to School and Early Childhood grant program and the Local Food Incentive program for schools with level funding, base appropriations of $500,000 each.

The Vermont FTS&EC Network was created in 2008 to address the growing movement of schools that wanted to serve local products in their cafeterias while using food and farming as an integrative education tool to address student learning and engagement.

You can see this addressed in our 3 C's Model of Change, - that for long term staying power, you need to be connecting the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community creating a win-win-win for our students, farmers, families, and communities.

I have seen the impact of FTS first hand. The school that my own children go to has a chicken coop, fruit trees, and a prolific garden. Their farm to school program is woven into the school curriculum and every child in that building gets to experience these activities every

year that they are in that school. They come home with stories and memories, but more importantly they feel a deep connection to their food, their community, and the world they live in.

Vermont has invested in 3 key programs to improve student health and learning that is benefitting our farmers: There are 3 cornerstone programs that we ask you to support:

- 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.The program provides capacity building and technical assistance to schools and early childhood programs to develop and strengthen their farm to school activities.
- Second, The Local Food Incentive program that supports increased local purchasing, so that more of the $25M schools spend each year on food stays here in the VT economy and with VT farmers. In the past 10 years, we have seen an increase of local food purchase in school from 5% to 14% statewide. And over 150 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, in every zipcode in our state. 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 nourishing meals.

I am pleased that the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Hildebrandt, is joining us today for a few words. I would be honored to come back and share more and bring along students, early childhood educators, K-12 teachers, farmers, food service, and health professionals if you would like to hear from them on this work.

We are looking for your support of level, base funding for both the Local Food Incentive at $500K, and the FTS & EC grants program at $500K. These programs make a huge difference in the ability of schools to buy their food from VT farmers and engage our students in understanding where our food comes from and the programs work together to support VT families, VT farmers and VT children.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I also want to remind you of the handout submitted to the Committee staff that can give you more information, but please reach out anytime if you have further questions of any of us.