

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 4, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing in support of Green Mountain Farm to School's proposal, "*Vermont Harvest: A coupon program to increase local fruit and vegetable consumption among SNAP participants through retail stores*" for the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant program (CFDA 10.331). This project will increase local fruit and vegetable consumption among SNAP participants in some of the most rural and food insecure areas of Vermont, while also providing new market opportunities for local farmers. We are pleased to bring this proposal to your attention.

Vermont has the highest per capita direct-to-consumer sales in the nation, yet food insecurity rates are still much too high, and healthy, affordable, fresh local food is often out-of-reach for many Vermonters. Green Mountain Farm to School operates in Orleans and Essex County, rural counties that have the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the state, with several communities deemed food deserts by the USDA. Despite these challenges, the "Northeast Kingdom" has a strong agricultural heritage and a vibrant local food system that, with the right support systems, can be a catalyst for healthier, more food secure communities.

Green Mountain Farm to School (GMFTS) operates a nationally recognized food hub that supports retailers and producers in Orleans and Essex County through their Harvest of the Month program. This strong network will be critical to the success of the Vermont Harvest pilot program, as GMFTS works with stores to provide direct incentive coupons to SNAP participants to purchase local, fresh fruits and vegetables. To maximize the number of eligible participants, GMFTS will conduct outreach in consultation with the Department of Children and Families (Vermont's SNAP administrator) to disseminate information widely about the program.

This effort to improve access to fresh, healthy, local food for Vermonters reinforces the priority that, regardless of economic status, no Vermonter should go hungry. Vermont's emphasis on supporting food system programs centered on strengthening local producers, providing healthy food for kids and families, and promoting vibrant communities is a winning strategy. We plan to support these priorities as we work to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act next year.

Thank you for giving this request the consideration it deserves. If we can provide further evidence of our support for this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States Representative