

Press Release

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Farm to School Awareness Day Celebrated at Statehouse

Twenty-four Vermont schools receive nearly \$70,000 in Farm to School Grants

Montpelier, VT – The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, in partnership with the Vermont Farm to School Network, announced the recipients of the 2016 Vermont Farm to School grant awards at a special ceremony in the Statehouse cafeteria last Wednesday.

The Vermont Farm to School Grant Program, now in its tenth year, works to improve nutrition among Vermont's children by connecting food producers to their local schools, as well as providing enriched educational experiences and curricula. The grant program was established through the 2006 Roza McLaughlin Act. Farm to School grant funding, allocated by the Vermont legislature, enables Vermont schools to engage students in their local food system by incorporating local food and farm education into their cafeterias, classrooms and communities. As of January 2016, the Vermont Farm to School Program has reached 120 schools, impacting more than 30,000 Vermont students.

This year, 7 implementation grants and 6 planning grants were awarded to 11 schools and 3 school districts and supervisory unions, impacting a total of 24 Vermont schools and more than 5,000 students. The 2016 Farm to School Grant Recipients include:

Implementation Grants

- o Battenkill Supervisory Union
- o Franklin Central School
- o Newport City and Derby Elementary Schools
- o Putney Central School
- o Twinfield Union and Maplehill Schools
- o Two Rivers Supervisory Union
- o Vermont School for Girls

Planning Grants

- o Bellows Free Academy Fairfax

- o Champlain Valley Union High School
- o Essex School District
- o Flood Brook School
- o Lund New Horizons Education Program
- o Proctor Elementary School

Agency of Agriculture Secretary, Chuck Ross and Agency of Education Secretary, Rebecca Holcombe, spoke at the event, along with State Senator Michael Sirotkin, who has introduced two new Farm to School-related bills to the statehouse this session.

“Farm to School programs are a vital tool we can use to promote agricultural literacy in schools so that, from an early age, students understand the value of nutrition, develop healthy eating habits, and appreciate where their food comes from,” said Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Chuck Ross. “My congratulations to this year's Farm to School grant recipients. We, at the Agency of Agriculture, look forward to supporting your planning and implementation efforts over the coming year, and working together to foster healthier and more resilient children, communities, and farms throughout Vermont.”

Senator Michael Sirotkin, who serves on the Senate Agriculture Committee and is a dedicated supporter of farm to school, explained, “Farm to School is one of those rare win-win investments in the future of Vermont’s children and our farming communities. Vermont policy makers should be striving for 100% participation by our schools in our growing Farm to School programs.”

The Vermont Farm to School grant program was able to allocate more funding to more schools this year than any previous year thanks to the generous financial support of Leigh Merinoff, of Meadows Bee Farm in Windham, Vermont. Merinoff, inspired by the positive impacts of farm to school programming on students, has invested in the program in hopes of further increasing positive impacts and inspiring other investors.

Addressing her support, Merinoff said, "I am hopeful that we will be able to expand public support for Vermont’s Farm to School Program so that it may continue to support healthy children and communities, and remain a model for farm to school initiatives across the country. Thanks to all of the legislatures, state agencies, teachers, and others for supporting this unique and immensely valuable program.”

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About the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets: VAAFM facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment.

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