

VERMONT AWARDED \$90K GRANT FOR FARM TO EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE

Shelburne, VT (January, 2021) Vermont is one of 10 states and the District of Columbia to be awarded \$90,900 each to strengthen state-level Farm to Early Childhood (FTEC) initiatives for a one-year project period.

Similar to Farm to School, farm to early childhood programs enrich young children's health and lives through greater access to nutritious foods and a hands-on approach to learning about food, health and agriculture. 73% of children under 5 in VT (that is 22,000 kids) receive care outside of their homes every day. FTEC is shown to improve nutrition with our youngest children at a time when their brains and tastes are developing.

"Farm to early childhood initiatives shape healthy habits for life by exposing small children to the joys of fresh produce and being outdoors. This new funding opportunity will boost Vermont's ability to support more early childhood programs and our youngest Vermonters," explains Betsy Rosenbluth, Vermont FEED Project Director. *"And we know that the younger children are when they are exposed to these programs, the more significant the positive impact on them, their families and the community."*

Interest in farm to early childhood has grown in recent years thanks to its innovative and effective approach. Networking local farmers and food producers with preschools, childcare centers, and Head Start has helped stimulate local economies and an appreciation for Vermont agriculture.

"The Farm to School grants have been critical in allowing us to [address food insecurity] in our child education program. [We're] weaving the importance of food security and nutrition throughout all of our programs, especially our Early Childhood Education Center and the parents we work alongside of; which is something we don't talk about when we think about the Farm to School." Explains Mary Feldman, Parent-Child Center of Rutland County Executive Director. *"It's Farm to School to Home. We believe that a whole family approach in our Parent Child Center will incur long-term change and remove the barriers that perpetuate poverty."*

This opportunity is supported by the CDC of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). A coalition of VT organizations have long advocated for farm to early childhood, including Shelburne Farms and Vermont FEED, Vermont Department of Health, Vermont Child Development Division, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Vermont Agency of Education, and Building Bright Futures. This grant will expand the coalition and farm to early childhood programming.

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