



HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE
Monday, November 9, 2020 | 9 – 10 a.m.
Online Meeting

Commissioners present: Mary Daly (Presiding), Lisa Senecal, Lisa Carlson

Guest: Betsy Rosenbluth, Vermont FEED Project Director, supporting the Vermont Farm to School Network and the Northeast Farm to School Collaborative

Staff: Lilly Talbert (Recording)

Meeting called to order 9:03 a.m.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2020 | MINUTES

Welcome and introductions

Nutrition in schools discussion and with guest Betsy Rosenbluth. The Vermont Farm to School Network VFSN (established in 2009) is a statewide network that provides leadership, coordination, and advocacy to advance new and existing farm to school efforts in Vermont classrooms, cafeterias, and communities. Network members include farm to school advocates, practitioners, and educators across the state. These programs support women and families, our state economy and schools by feeding food insecure children in PreK – 12th grade, including licensed or regulated childhood providers. The programs improve the quality of snacks and meals.

Betsy spoke about challenges for families during COVID-19: food costs have increased, farms are going out of business, and rural families experience transportation and access issues. She addressed the concept of “Food apartheid” where access to fresh food depends on your zip code, and the ways these programs can foster a more just food system by teaching children about growing, cooking, food waste, energy, poverty, community and water use. These programs can reshape how kids eat in the future, and what families buy and eat.

Programs connect classroom, cafeteria and community for staying power and offer professional development to teachers, school nutrition staff and administrators, as well as technical assistance to schools. It’s a national model with a dozen states replicating their Farm to Schools Institute.

Other program offerings include a cookbook with recipes for school meals; a Jr. Iron Chef competition a team cooking competition with 5,000 kids participating over the years - this year pivoting to a club, and advocacy of public policies, including the cultivation of children as advocates.

The network goal is: By 2025, 75% of the Vermont Schools will lead the cultural shift to a value-based food system that engages 75% of our students in integrated food system education; community-based learning; nourishing universal meals; and the experience of self-efficacy; purchasing at least 50% from a socially just and environmentally and financially sustainable regional food system. Overall, the goal is reducing childhood hunger.

COVID 19 has increased public awareness of how important school meals are in sustaining families. There is a virtual cycle where more money means more participation and then more funding.

Outcomes were highlighted in the [2018 Vermont Farm to School Data Harvest](#) survey with VT Department of

Health. They include 2X the veggie consumption for these children, and improved test scores, attendance and behavior. For every \$1 spent, \$1.60 flows to the Vt economy. In addition to hands on learning, kids experience career development as entrepreneurs, chefs and farmers. Plus the exercise of gardening and harvesting.

Betsy had a few ideas for how VCW might engage in this work:

- FTS (Farm To School) Awareness Day in Feb at Legislature
- Join school leaders campaign
- Sponsor Jr. Iron Chef VT
- Spread the word, including editorials
- Advocate for FTS policy initiatives
- FTS grants program is \$191K in current budget
- Universal school meals – VT leading the US in free for all, help continue momentum
- Local Purchasing Incentive – Senators Ruth Hardy and Chris Pearson’s legislation for school meal purchasing from local farmers
- Write letters
- Testify
- Be a conduit for information

Lisa C asked about AOE involvement. Betsy reported they were not engaged in curriculum but Secretary French supports Farm to School, and they had a contract to develop teacher education. In pandemic they are working on incorporating this material into whatever curriculum (science, history for ex.) teachers are already doing. VDH and ADS Child Development Division are invested in this program’s success.

Lisa S asked about primary hurdles to adoption. Betsy reported that communication and leadership is crucial and must include administrators. They’ve found best combination is when Admin/Teacher/School Chef attend together – a cross-school team that can spread it and infuse it. That takes time; and there is lots of turn over.

Lisa S asked about approaching school board association. Betsy reported contact but at present, there are tons of competing priorities. The Principal’s Association are big supporters.

Lisa C requested sample letters to the editor and talking points thinking parents would support this initiative. Betsy spoke about a colleague, Dana’s work.

Betsy reported that the federal school meals allocation hasn’t changed in years - around \$1.20/meal. The purchasing incentive might help. FTS offers technical assistance around what to buy and when. They suggest strategies, like a central kitchen that can process in-season produce – shredding and freezing, or creative solutions like blending local and government supplied beef. More participation.

Betsy reported collecting data about school meals in this time of universal free meals because of COVID-19. There is variation: in some schools participation is up, some are down.

Mary spoke about the value of nutritional education for parents when grocery shopping. Betsy spoke about a partnership with the food bank. Parents need to know kids will eat the product before they buy it and this program introduces those foods to families.

VOTE: Review, discuss and vote to approve [draft minutes from October meeting](#)
Mary motions to approve, Lisa S seconds; October minutes approved.

Meeting adjourned at 9:57