



**Our mission is to empower and partner with individuals and communities to alleviate the hardships of poverty, provide opportunities to thrive, and eliminate root causes of poverty in southeastern Vermont.**

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***Pandemic Recovery Food Assistance Program to Wind Down***

*3.5 million meals strong, the Vermont Everyone Eats program will end March 31.*

Westminster, Vt. — The Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) program is a federally funded, short-term pandemic recovery initiative created to help restaurants, farmers, and eaters through the acute economic challenges of the COVID pandemic. The program, which began on August 1, 2020, will end on March 31, 2023. VEE Hubs have distributed approximately 3.5 million meals throughout all 14 counties, generating more than \$34M in revenue for participating restaurants.

“This extraordinary program has shown us firsthand how well the multiplier effect can work to stretch federal dollars to benefit many more people when a program spans multiple sectors. Addressing food security, economic development, and agricultural resilience with a single federal dollar is unprecedented. We need to see more programs like this,” said SEVCA Interim Executive Director Kathleen Devlin.

With collaborative support from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Agency of Human Services, Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets, Vermont Emergency Management, and over \$42 million in federal FEMA funding supplemented with a \$1.3 million allocation from the state legislature, this program has provided free restaurant-prepared meals to Vermonters in need of food assistance across the state while also providing a stabilizing source of income for Vermont restaurants negatively impacted by the pandemic and conveying economic support to Vermont farmers and food producers.

“This emergency program played a key role in providing meals to households while providing stable income for Vermont restaurants, farmers, and food producers during the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Department of Housing and Community Development Commissioner Josh Hanford. “As this federally funded emergency COVID-19 response tool winds down, the hard work of developing sustainable solutions to end food insecurity in Vermont will continue.”

VEE has raised awareness of gaps in the existing systems addressing food insecurity in the state as well as the ongoing business challenges faced by Vermont restaurants and farmers in our seasonally driven state economy. Using this program as a model, partners will continue to work together to identify sustainable long-term solutions to address ongoing food security and economic needs.

“Vermont Everyone Eats did a remarkable job rallying communities of restaurants, eaters, and farmers during the pandemic. It was not designed to end hunger in the state of Vermont,” said

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Vermont Foodbank CEO and VEE Statewide Task Force member John Sayles. "Hunger, a solvable problem, still exists. While VEE is coming to a close, collaborative action will continue across Vermont to ensure the dignity of enough nourishing food for all."

An average of 35% of meal ingredients, far exceeding the program's 10% local ingredient minimum, have been purchased from Vermont farmers and food producers, providing over \$3.5 million in revenue. This program has benefited over 700 restaurants, farms, food producers, hubs, and distribution partners throughout the state's fourteen counties since its inception and will continue to distribute an average of 25,000 meals per week to food insecure individuals across Vermont until the program ends on March 31, 2023.

For more information on the program or how to receive a meal, visit the Vermont Everyone Eats website at <https://vteveryoneeats.org/>.

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*Vermont Everyone Eats provides nutritious meals to Vermonters in need of food assistance as well as a stabilizing source of income for Vermont restaurants, farmers, and food producers. Vermont Everyone Eats is funded through a contract provided by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development to Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) and is advised by a Statewide Task Force including perspectives from restaurants, economic development, and hunger relief advocates.*