

# Farm to Early Child Care Pilot

Leveraging farm-to-childcare partnerships to address childhood food insecurity

**Leadership Champlain Cohort 2025**



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## **Overview**

Leadership Champlain convenes emerging leaders in a year-long professional development training geared towards building a more informed and engaged community. Throughout the year, participants actively learn about the most significant issues facing our community and are encouraged to plug in and make change. The organizers create small pods of leaders and boldly dare them to dig into these challenges. Born out of the institute, Team Woomac, comprised of a small group of passionate and curious individuals, set off to tackle issues surrounding food security in Chittenden County.

The report synthesizes our achievements, setbacks, and most importantly, learnings from the past year and presents a compelling case study for piloting Farm to Early Child Care programs to help reduce rates of childhood food insecurity. In an attempt to create a broader impact and lasting piece of evidence for future cohorts and community members, we included a meticulously documented guidance toolkit that can be handed off to other early childcare programs.

The guide below is best suited for early childcare providers looking to begin the initial steps of implementing farm-to-early childcare programming at their schools. Vermont has a strong spirit of universal school meals and a sense of place within our agricultural roots, so connecting with already ongoing efforts is fairly seamless. The materials included in the report were compiled from months-long desk-based research, community conversations, and implementation practice, but we are not experts. We only have our experiences and hindsight to share. We wish you an enjoyable journey.

## **Key Issue**

Although the impetus behind this project was to better understand food security in Chittenden County, it became abundantly clear very quickly that dealing only with siloed issues of food access, availability, or utilization would not be sufficient to meaningfully grapple with the intricacies of the food system. Therefore, the team looked toward farm-to-school (FTS) programming and childhood food security as our main issues. FTS weaves elements of local food production with education to

address food insecurity and promote community resilience. Creating food security cannot be complete without food education as it is the foundation for an informed, engaged and food-literate community. Food education, rooted in the values of resilience and sustainability, therefore, plays a critical role in the success and viability of Vermont's food system.

When focusing on Vermont, data shows that food insecurity affects one in ten adults and one in seven children. Families with children are disproportionately impacted, with one in seven Vermont children under 19 actively facing hunger (approximately 16,670 kids). According to the Vermont Food Bank, families with children are 5.2 times more likely to experience food insecurity due to increased costs of living, childcare, food, and education. Additionally, universal school meals funding for K-12 schools does not extend to early child care centers, leaving a critical gap in food and meal access for very young children.

Developing a partnership with the YMCA Early Childcare Center was of pivotal importance to tackle the issue.

## **Project Goal**

This guide aims to assist Early Childcare sites navigate implementing a Farm to Early Childcare Pilot Programs.

- Farm-to-school programs connect local food production with education to address food insecurity and promote community resilience.
- WooMac's proposed action involves:
  - a. Connecting Farm to School experts with areas of need at our respective organizations /communities (like the YMCA, the Lund & Bristol PreK center).
  - b. Support the development of a farm to early childcare (ECC) pilot at our community sites. Actions can include but are not limited to - setting up food shelves, promoting educational training, or building cafeteria capacities.

- c. Document the process and provide a report to VT FEED that could be used to help address the programs, challenges, and success.

## **Introduction to Farm to School (The Three C's)**

### **Purpose**

It is important to assess the size of your program (students and families), the needs of your community and available resources prior to planning your Farm to Early Childhood program (see resource assessment below). This will lead to a more manageable initial program that can grow along with you.

### **The Three C's**

The Farm to Early Childhood program has “The Three C's” or areas that make a Farm to Early Childhood Program. Here are some examples below. Brainstorm a list and choose what works best for your site:

- Classroom
  - Exposure to local food through lesson plans
  - Having local food tastings for students
  - Planting a garden accessible to students (*Done at GBYMCA*)
- Cafeteria
  - Providing local food onsite (Cafeteria or food delivery service) (*Done at GBYMCA*)
  - Providing food to families (Pantry Soft) (*Done at GBYMCA*)
- Community
  - Creating a food shelf (*Done at GBYMCA*)
  - Schedule visits with local vendors or organizations (*Done at GBYMCA*)

### **Links/Documents**

- [Three C's VT Farm to Early Childhood Website](#)

## Where to Start - Asset Mapping

- Before delving into the main three C of Farm to School, we suggest building one clear asset map to help guide your implementation. This way, you can see what is already in your toolbox and what could be added.

### How we did it

- Quick word document → four buckets: social, physical, technological, financial assets
- Sent to our team, reached out to Hunger Free VT, target sites, wider community; collected more information by email + short interviews + site visits
- Logged everything in one document map; tagged by category so we could identify potential resources and spot gaps

### Example asset categories + sample items we considered

- Food sources – supermarket rescue, community food drives, VT Food Bank pallets, 20-30 farm contracts for seasonal produce
- Distribution / infrastructure – 4 food pantries, 3 food hubs that double as warehouses + fulfillment, online ordering platform (32 languages) handling ~100 home drops / week
- Community programs & sites – Head Start centers, parent-child hubs, YMCA, schools, libraries; good fronts for pop-up pantries / lockers
- Material / facilities – existing gardens, storage, meeting rooms, candidate locker sites, maker spaces,
- Transportation – org-owned vans, volunteer drivers, refills + last-mile delivery options
- People / expertise – Hunger Free VT data help, CVOEO advocates, skilled volunteers (design, build, outreach)
- Financial / leverage – small grants already in motion; in-kind farm discounts; potential corporate sponsors noted during mapping

### **What we did with the map:**

- Examples: Picked GBYMCA-site as first “little free food library”; Lund childcare as early adopter after conversations with these organizations and considering community access and delivery routes

### **Links/Documents:**

- [Food Security Concept Mapping Sept 2024 .pptx](#)
- [Farm to ECC - Service Project Recommendation.docx](#) + Assets Listed In Document

## **Classroom (Education)**

### **Classroom: Overview**

- The classroom piece helps create joyful moments around food that help kids grow into confident eaters and supports food literacy.

### **The What:**

- Connecting classrooms with garden education is one way to implement the educational goals of FTS programming.

### **The How:**

- Vermont Garden Network provided resources and suggestions for getting started.
- GBYMCA sited their garden space, purchased new raised beds, and will plant and fill the beds in June.

### **Tips:**

- Request left over plant starts from community members to help fill your garden beds and reduce costs (via Front Porch Forum or similar sites)
- Vermont Garden Network provides mobile food educational lessons via their Veggie Education Van, which can be booked via their website at: [vgn.org](http://vgn.org)

## Community

### **Community Resource Link:**

<https://www.feedingchamplainvalley.org/>

### **How we found them**

- Asset-mapping flagged a *distribution + home-delivery* gap for early-childcare families. Keely Agan (Hunger Free VT) and Megan Bridges (United Way) pointed us to Feeding Champlain Valley (FCV) as the regional food-hub leader already serving 100+ home drops/week via PantrySoft .
- Cross-checked FCV's scope during Nov-2024 site visit; confirmed they move high volume, handle perishables, and pilot innovative models (food lockers, clinician referrals) .

### **First contact**

- Initial outreach via email in October 2024, followed by an on-site visit to the facility in Burlington in November.
- Intro call with the whole team 2/14/25 with FCV execs Rob Mehan (ED), Midhat Hadzic (Ops), plus hub staff Julia MacGibeny + Pat Chojnowski; listened to what they hoped to achieve in the community regarding impact, what their pain points or bottlenecks were, and then discussed our Farm-to-ECC pilot goals and YMCA pantry concept.

### **What FCV was looking for**

- More *site ambassadors* at new locations who can handle sign-ups and receive boxes, freeing hub staff time and opening up new hubs.
- New pickup points to reduce stigma (“food at the Y beats a trip to the food shelf”) and extend reach without adding individual home stops .
- Pilot locations for refrigerated food-locker program in Chittenden County; had funding but needed partners with power + secure access, was

considering whether LC team could help site these.

### **Why it was a fit**

- Our YMCA / Head Start sites already host target families daily → zero extra travel for clients; matches FCV's "meet people where they are" ethos .
- We could supply on-site volunteers (ambassadors) and collect multilingual preference data, which FCV wants for advocacy + inventory planning .

### **Collaboration path**

- YMCA to start as an ordering site, Lund childcare next once workflow is proven.
  - [Onboarding/setup for a Pantrysoft site takes ~2 weeks.](#)
- Task split: FCV handles inventory, packing, and delivery; our team trains site ambassadors, sets up shelving, sets up locations with ambassadors to handle PantrySoft enrollment, and provides a method to gather feedback from the community (QR code to online translatable form) .
- Joint exploration of installing the first Chittenden food-locker at YMCA or nearby clinic; we draft a business case + help chase capital grants .
- Standing check-ins every two weeks with Pat (hub) to track order volumes, cold-chain issues, and client satisfaction data.

## Cafeteria

### **Cafeteria: Overview**

Whether you have no food shelf on site or a food-grade cafeteria, children need equitable access to healthy food that meets their nutritional and cultural needs. Below is a guide on how to increase food access for whatever infrastructure you may have.

### **On-site Food Delivery**

**Costs:** Minimal (Dedicated shelving/bags recommended)

**Resource:** [PantrySoft](#)

**Partner:** [Feeding Champlain Valley](#)

Becoming a Food Hub can provide your families/students access to food delivered right to your location for ease of pickup.

#### Requirements

- Eligibility: Income Based
- Staffing: Assigning a "Site Ambassador" who will work with Feeding Chittenden to implement Pantrysoft and facilitate the handing off of delivered food to families.

#### To-do List

- Assign a Site Amassador
- Contact a Food Hub Supervisor at Feeding Chittenden
  - They will provide you with a demo of Pantrysoft.
  - They will set you up with a login and an ID for your site!
  - They will deliver food on a weekly basis.
- Create a plan for communications with families around food pickup
  - Where will the deliveries be stored so families can access them?
  - How will families know their order has been delivered?
  - What to do with unclaimed food so it does not go to waste?
- Promote Pantrysoft to your families & get ready for the first delivery!

# Annex 1 - Food Shelf Feedback Form

## Purpose & Goals

- Capture real-time food requests and dietary needs from families.
- Keep it anonymous and low-barrier to reduce stigma.
- Keep it simple for ease of use and translation

## Form Design Choices

- Entry point: QR-coded Google Form for phone access.
- Single open comment field; no required demographic fields.
- Online form is formatted for ease of translation into English, Spanish, Nepali, Arabic, French via phone or laptop browser automatically.
- Plan to add icons/photos for low-literacy users.

## Translation & Spreadsheet Coding

In the back-end of the Google form, we added an extra column and translation formula to translate non-English answers into English for the administrator to understand while allowing community members to enter information in their native language.

	C	D	E	F
1	Contact Information	What foods or supplies would you like to suggest?	(Optional) Additional	TRANSLATED: What foods or supplies would you like to suggest?
2				Empty
3	@blumenthal-enterpris	Haricots noirs, Lait concentré sucré, Fruits secs, Miel	Ceci est un test	Black beans, sweetened condensed milk, dried fruits, honey
4		Baguette Fromage Croissant Saucisson Quiche	Another Test	Baguette Cheese Croissant Sausage Quiche

## Exact translation formula example:

`=IF(ISBLANK(D2), "Empty", GOOGLETRANSLATE(D2, "auto", "en"))`

- Backend implementation steps for translation

- In the Form's "Responses" Sheet, insert a new column right of the raw text (D).
- Label header: *TRANSLATED: What foods or supplies would you like to suggest?*
- Paste the formula in cell F2; it translates any new submission automatically.
- Freeze the header row so the formula doesn't shift.
- Propagate this formula down column F

### **Deployment Workflow**

- Print/laminate poster with QR code; mount on fridge and shelving.
- The ambassador can be set up to receive updates when new answers are submitted by community, then review and respond to updates as needed.
- Ambassador flags dietary/allergy requests for rapid response.

### **Future options/improvements:**

- Paper option might be useful for community members without devices, but this may be more difficult to manage and offer in multiple languages.
- Future development pictogram version for non-literate users.

### **Documentation links:**

- Participant Link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1l6nQKXkCgfgl-prUxjAdNuFHkj2pxxYqutuFo3T2WU/edit#responses>
- Editor Link (Requires access): [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdtCECjXUlvID\\_qwiTYKiWM6nVDJr7d3DzOGz8r2qx1i3wcEQ/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=111215488550761321068](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdtCECjXUlvID_qwiTYKiWM6nVDJr7d3DzOGz8r2qx1i3wcEQ/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=111215488550761321068)
- Backend Link (Requires access): <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Mych-klueaUcGnsevkx76QmE0nd6bq4DfKj-bsMGqI/edit?usp=sharing>

## Sample Form and Questions:

- Title: Food Pantry Suggestions
- Question 1: (optional) Name
- Question 2: (optional) Contact Info
- Question 3: Please help us improve our pantry selection to better serve our community. Are there are food or supplies you would like to suggest?
- Question 4: (Optional) Please share any additional notes or feedback.

### Food Pantry Suggestions

The YMCA is hosting this food pantry as a resource for all families. Your suggestions will help us stock it with items you need or feel would be helpful to our community!

**Privacy Note:**  
This survey is for YMCA staff use only to improve our services. Your name and contact info are optional.

\* Indicates required question

(Optional) Name  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

(Optional) Contact Information  
So we can follow up with you about your suggestion and make sure we're addressing your needs  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What foods or supplies would you like to suggest? \*  
To help us improve our pantry selection and better serve our community  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

(Optional) Additional Notes or Feedback:  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Submit Clear form

## Annex 2 - PantrySoft Communications Flyer

### 🌸 Welcome to Our Food Pantry Delivery Program! 🌸

At the YMCA Early Childcare Center, we believe in nurturing both minds and bodies. Our food pantry and delivery program (PantrySoft) are here to support our community by providing nutritious food to families.

#### What is Pantry Soft?:

- In partnership with Feeding Chittenden, the YMCA ECC is now listed as a drop-off site for their Pantry Soft Program. Pantry Soft is an online food ordering program developed by Feeding Chittenden that allows individuals to select specific food items they would like to receive in free biweekly food box deliveries. Shoppers have the option to order from a selection of fruits, vegetables, breads, meats, staple foods, and ready-made meals. The available items refresh weekly.

#### How It Works:

1. **Visit PantrySoft:** Use the access code provided by the center. Create an application profile. Review eligibility criteria and submit the [Statement of Eligibility](#). Select Burlington Early Childcare YMCA as your drop-off site.
2. **Place an Order:** Choose from available stock. Select items from the online pantry that best suit your family's need. The order form is open 24/7. Boxes will get delivered once weekly.
3. **No Questions Asked:** Our pantry is here to help, no strings attached.

#### Questions or feedback?

We'd love to hear from you! Please reach out to Erica Gongloff at [egongloff@gbymca.org](mailto:egongloff@gbymca.org) or leave feedback using this survey link below:



<https://forms.gle/STFUJzfKCiyWhdGy9>

## **Annex 3 - Helpful Links and Resources**

- Hunger Free VT
- Vermont Garden Network
- Feeding Champlain Valley