

A blurred background image showing three children in a classroom. One child on the left is holding a blue object, possibly a book or paper. The children are out of focus, and the background includes a window and a fluorescent light fixture.

Creating a Food Secure Future for All Vermont's Children by 2035

ECDL 2026

Keely Agan (she/her)

Child Nutrition Policy Lead

Email : kagan@hungerfreevt.org

Phone : (802)448-4396



Agenda



- **Introduction of Report**
- **Pathways to Creating a Food Secure Future for All Vermont's Children by 2035**
- **Understanding Child Hunger & Food Security in Vermont**
- **Strategies Focused on Food Security in Early Childhood**
- **Strategic Plan in Action**
 - Strategy 2.2 – > CACFP Policy



Nutrition in Early Childhood

Adequate intake of nutrients is particularly important in the early years of life, when body growth and brain development are more rapid than during any other period.

From birth to age 5 the brain more than triples in size, **from 25% to 90% of full size**, meaning that proper nutrition is especially critical in these beginning years.

Creating a Food Secure Future for All Vermont's Children by 2035



Creating a food secure future for ALL VERMONT'S CHILDREN BY 2035.

Strategies for Government, Communities, and Funders

A detailing of Objectives G1, G2, G5, G7, G8, C2 & C3 of the Vermont Food Security Roadmap to 2035



Prepared by Hunger Free Vermont in collaboration with Vermont Foodbank and Feeding Champlain Valley

January 2025

Strategies that Support Food Security in Early Childhood



I. Strategies for ensuring food security for children at home

- 1. Expand efforts to reach Vermont's lowest-income families with dignified and convenient access to food through the charitable food system.**
- 2. Connect more low-income families with 3SquaresVT by ensuring every eligible family in Vermont has the information and support they need to enroll.**
- 3. Pass legislation to improve the adequacy of Reach Up payments to the lowest income single parent households.**
- 4. Expand Non-congregate Summer Meals.**
- 5. Build a successful, permanent Summer EBT program.**
- 6. Leverage Healthcare to Recognize and Alleviate Food Insecurity.**

Strategies that Support Food Security in Early Childhood



II. Strategies for ensuring food security for children in education and care settings

1. Continue and expand Vermont's Universal School Meals Program.
2. Make CACFP fully functional for Early Childhood Education programs.
3. Expand afterschool and summer meals.
4. Build robust training and education for Child Nutrition Programs.
5. Invest in the Child Nutrition Program workforce.
6. Eliminate structural barriers to school meal programs.
7. Provide accessible, culturally, and religiously responsive meals in Child Nutrition Programs.
8. Invest in Farm to School & Early Childhood.



[Mitchell et al., 2025](#)

Hunger in Vermont

Updated 2024 survey data from UVM researchers shows that in Vermont, households at risk of hunger are more likely to be headed by younger people and women, have lower incomes, **include children**, include someone with a disability, be LGBTQ+, and/or lack a car



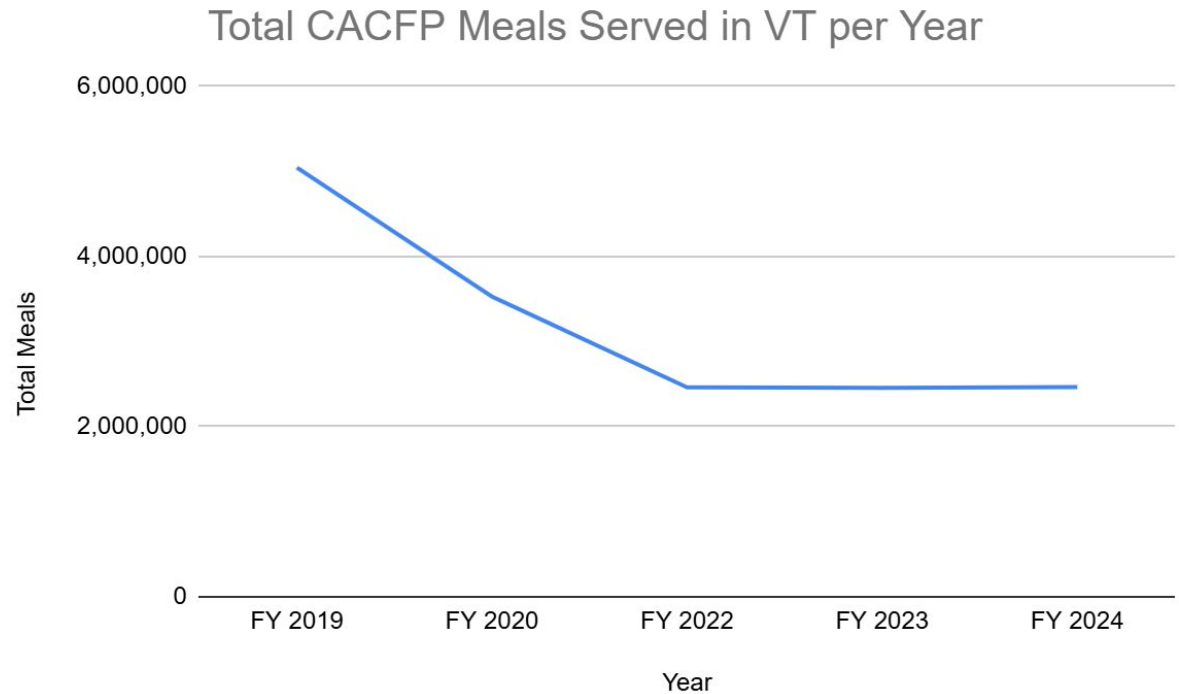
Feeding Kids Where They Learn & Play

There are four federal Child Nutrition programs that feed kids in the settings where they learn and play. The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (NSLP and SBP, respectively) feed kids at school, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) feeds kids in early childhood programs and afterschool programs, and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) feeds kids over the summer. Collectively, these programs provided 18 million meals to children in the state in the 2024 federal fiscal year.

Program	Meals Served	Average Daily Participation
School Lunch (NSLP)	8.91 million	51,784
School Breakfast (SBP)	5.65 million	32,423
Summer Meals (SFSP)	1.06 million	10,747
Early Childhood Meals (CACFP)	2.20 million	3,116
Afterschool Meals (CACFP)	264,000	1,509

A Decline in CACFP Participation

The Child and Adult Care Food Program has seen declines in participation in Vermont and Nationwide. The number of meals served with CACFP in Vermont has also decreased significantly since 2019. In 2024, less than half of the total number of meals were served compared to 2019. There are a variety of reasons for this decline, including program closures, reimbursements not adequately covering meal program costs, and administrative/paperwork barriers.



Strategic Plan in Action

Strategy 2.2. Make CACFP fully functional for Early Childhood Education programs

Action step

- **Enact state supplemental payments to the organizations that serve as sponsors for Family Child Care Homes to use the CACFP to provide free meals**

2025 wins, & 2026 efforts

- **Secured \$150K in one-time funding for FY26**
- **Returning to this session to once again ask for \$182K in base funding FY27**

Improve CACFP & Food Access in ECE Settings

Under federal program guidelines, a family child care home can only participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) if they have an agreement with an eligible sponsoring organization. Due to financial restraints, many sponsoring organizations have been forced to drop the program. The three remaining organizations are facing critical financial challenges that limit their ability to continue operating as CACFP sponsors. The Alliance supports Hunger Free Vermont's request for \$182,000 in base funding in the FY27 Budget for Vermont's CACFP sponsor organizations so that they can continue to operate, more child care providers can participate in CACFP, and more young children can have access to nutritious meals.

Only

50%

of family child care homes
in Vermont participate in
CACFP.



What's Next?



2026 Priorities



- ❖ **Achieve \$182K in base funding to support CACFP sponsor organizations**
- ❖ **Publish two child nutrition toolkits of best practices**
 - Connecting UPKs with USM
 - Halal food in school meals
- ❖ **Expand Afterschool & Summer meal programming**
- ❖ **Align child care state agency onboarding and licensing systems to better support meal program onboarding**

Important Links & Resources



- [*Creating a Food Secure Future for All Vermont's Children* \(2025\) webpage](#)
- [*Providing Meals in Early Childhood Settings* \(2024\) Report & Infographic](#)
- [2024 CACFP Mapping Tool](#)
- [*Experiences and Ongoing Challenges of Food Insecure Households in Vermont and Maine*, University of Vermont Study](#)
- vermontfoodhelp.com
- [Food Security Roadmap Report](#)

Support child food security at home

- Learn about food access programs like 3SquaresVT & WIC and how you can help families get benefits they might be eligible for
- Know where to direct families to for more information and application assistance
 - Reference our vermontfoodhelp.com website for up-to-date information & resources!
- Get printed outreach materials and resources to share
 - For example, our [Food Resources for All Flyer!](#)

FOOD RESOURCES FOR ALL

No one should worry about having enough food!

Winter/
Early Spring
Edition

Here is a list of current food programs and resources:

FOR EVERYONE:

3SquaresVT provides money every month to buy food. Benefits can be multiplied at winter farmer markets when combined with **Crop Cash**. Also, **Farm Share** offers a discount to purchase a portion of the season's harvest at local farms.

Learn more:

3SquaresVT: vermontfoodhelp.com
or text VFBSNAP to 85511.

Crop Cash: nofavt.org/cropcash or call 802-434-7162 or check at the manager's booth of your local farmers market

Farm Share: nofavt.org/farmshare
or call 802-419-0049

There are local food shelves, pantries and meal sites at churches and community centers that offer free food and hot meals, all across Vermont! Visit www.vtfoodbank.org/gethelp or dial 2-1-1 from your cell phone to learn more.



These programs are designed to help us AND our entire community!

FOR KIDS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Students in public schools enjoy free breakfast and lunch thanks to the Universal School Meals law.

FOR PREGNANT PEOPLE AND/OR CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN UNDER 5:

WIC offers food, nutrition education, breastfeeding/childfeeding support, and community referrals. To find out more, visit HealthVermont.gov/ApplyToWIC, call 2-1-1, or text **APPLY** to 1-844-839-8942.

FOR OLDER VERMONTERS:

For individuals 60+, the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program** provides free monthly food boxes. Learn more at vtfoodbank.org/share-food/csfp or call 1-800-214-4648. (As of January 2026, there is a waitlist for CSFP.)

Meals on Wheels offers home-delivered meals and grocery shopping assistance. Call the **Vermont Older Adults Helpline** at 1-800-642-5119 to learn more and get personalized assistance applying to **3SquaresVT**.

FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES:

Meals on Wheels offers free home-delivered meals to individuals living with short and/or long-term disabilities. For more information, call Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) at 1-800-639-1522. To receive personalized assistance with applying for **3SquaresVT** call 1-800-479-6151. All relay calls accepted.



This message is funded in part by the USDA. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Updated 1/13/26

Contacts!

For questions about the *Creating a Food Secure Future for Vermont's Children* Strategic Plan:

Keely Agan
Child Nutrition Policy Lead
Hunger Free Vermont
kagan@hungerfreevt.org
802.448.4396



Thank You!

For questions about Hunger Free Vermont's Policy Agenda:

Autumn Moen
Legislative Policy Lead
Hunger Free Vermont
amoen@hungerfreevt.org
802.341.5715

