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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northeast Farm to School Institute advances Farm to School programs region-wide

Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT — A flagship Vermont Farm to School initiative will convene twelve school teams from the six New England states and New York, from Tuesday to Thursday, June 27 to 29, 2017 at its kickoff at Shelburne Farms. [Vermont FEED](#)'s year-long [Northeast Farm to School Institute](#) advances food, farm, and nutrition education and expands local products served in cafeterias.

Vermont has long championed Farm to School efforts, and as federal nutrition standards are being rolled back, this small state is stepping into the breach, and modelling success for others. The Institute is part of that model.

During the three-day retreat, teams of food service staff, teachers, administrators, and community partners will meet with peers and experts to expand their understanding and practices of FTS. Teams will develop an action plan for the coming school year in collaboration with an experienced FTS coach and continue working with their coach throughout the 2017-18 school year to implement their Farm to School programs and integrate best practices (farm visits, gardening and cooking activities, serving seasonal foods in school cafeterias, and offering food-based, hands-on science, math, and literacy lessons).

Over its ten years, the Institute has supported FTS programs at 62 schools and districts, reaching over 38,000 Northeast students.

This year, the Institute is building on momentum set earlier in June when the Vermont House and Senate unanimously passed S.33, the Roza McLaughlin Farm to School bill. S.33 increases funding of [Vermont's Farm to School Grant Program](#) to expand school participation, support school nutrition programs, and extend the program to early childhood education. It also sets an ambitious statewide goal for growth: By 2025, 75 percent of schools will engage in integrated Farm to School programming, and 50 percent of school food will be purchased from local or regional sources.

"FTS programs have proven incredibly useful in forging ways to connect our food, our communities and our own health," says Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT). Successful, too. According to the [2016 Vermont School Health Profiles](#), 92% of Vermont schools now serve at least some locally grown foods; while three out of four have school gardens. That number has risen 10% since 2012. These trends hope to chip away at a more sobering statistic: one in four Vermont teens is now obese or overweight. Beyond the classroom, a [recent report](#) commissioned by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets found that every dollar spent by schools to purchase local food contributes an additional 60¢ to the local economy.

The success of Vermont FTS has attracted national attention. This year's Institute will host groups from Georgia, Massachusetts, and New York, all looking to adapt the Institute model to their own states. "It takes significant commitment and planning from the entire school community to sustain a FTS program and consistently increase purchasing locally grown foods," said Glenda Neff, [Farm to Institution of NY State](#) Coordinator for American Farmland Trust. "Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) is excited to be attending the Northeast Farm to School Institute, along with two New York school districts, Johnson City and Saranac Lake to take these lessons back to New York."

Highlight accomplishments from last year's Institute teams include: increasing procurement of local seafood (Seabrook School District, NH); building hydroponic gardens in the school cafeteria (New London, CT); creating a fresh fruit and vegetable grab-n-go snack option (Vernon-Verona-Sherril Schools, NY); and construction of a school sugarhouse (Lyndon Institute, VT). It comes as no surprise that Northeast states are in the top 15 % of FTS participation efforts nationally, according to the recently released [USDA Farm to School survey](#).

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Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED) is a partnership program of Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). VT FEED works to engage every student and community in a local food and farm culture that nurtures child health, cultivates viable farms, and builds vibrant communities. Visit www.vtfeed.org to learn more.

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And those dollars are a positive impact on the Vermont economy, too. Healthy food access and education has an equally poignant effect: increased nutrition education is one way to help can influence the 26% of Vermont teens considered overweight or obese, and Vermont has seen childhood hunger decrease by 37% from 2010 to 2015, largely considered to be the result of successful childhood nutrition programs. FTS is proving impactful.

This past January, the [Vermont Farm to School Network](#) launched [a campaign](#) to expand [Vermont's Farm to School Grant Program](#) in order to serve more schools, extend programming to early care and education, and support school nutrition programs. Through these efforts

Not only does Farm to School help feed and educate the next generation of Vermonters, it plays a significant role in Vermont's economy. Statewide, our schools purchase nearly \$1 million in local food, which is 5.6 percent of all school food spending. With the signing of this bill, the economic impact locally will be even greater.,

"There is no better place for the Institute than the Green Mountain State. Year after year, USDA has cited Vermont as the place to learn how educators, cooks, and families can work together to keep our kids healthy... With FTS, we are helping to raise the next generation of mindful, healthy, hunger-free families with every dollar we invest." LEAHY QUOTES