

NO. 145. AN ACT RELATING TO USE OF VERMONT PRODUCTS AND NUTRITION
EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

(H.456)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS; INTENT

(a) The general assembly finds that it is in the best interests of Vermont children, farmers, and communities to empower schools, regulated child care programs, and state agencies to increase their use of local farm products in their food service programs, particularly school meals programs, because:

(1) Research shows that children who exercise moderately and eat a healthy diet are less likely to be overweight and have less risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or high blood pressure as adults. Since a child can receive 55 percent of his or her daily nutritional requirements from the school breakfast and lunch program, it is important to encourage children to eat a healthy diet of fresh food at school. This is particularly important for the 21,000 Vermont children who live in households unable to provide enough nutritious food in order to lead an active and healthy life. Further, inadequate nutrition can prevent children from learning effectively; research shows an improvement in student behavior and academic performance and improved health scores when nutrition is improved.

(2) Farmers gain an increased market for their products. In school year 2002–2003, Vermont schools spent \$13 million on food for their food service programs, yet less than five percent of the \$13 million went for direct purchase of produce from local farms and other local producers. Recent farm-to-school efforts in Vermont have demonstrated that when children and food service personnel have relationships with local farmers and producers, they are more likely to try new foods and use fresh and less-processed foods.

(3) Support for Vermont farms benefits the entire community. Food dollars spent locally benefit the community economically, the working landscape and open land crucial to Vermont's quality of life

and tourism industry are maintained, and the environment gains through less dependence on a large transportation system.

(4) The Vermont economy benefits when the agricultural sector is strong. Agriculture accounts for 14 percent of Vermont's gross domestic product and 16 percent of Vermont jobs are in or related to agriculture.

(b) Therefore, in order to encourage healthy and lifelong habits of eating nutritious local food as well as to foster relationships among farmers and schoolchildren, school personnel, and other adults in the Vermont community, it is the intent of this act to provide aid and incentives to local school districts, regulated child care providers, state agencies and farmers to:

(1) serve food to Vermont students and adults that is as fresh and as nutritious as possible;

(2) maximize use of fresh locally grown, produced, and processed food;

(3) educate students about healthy eating habits through nutrition education, including using hands-on techniques to make connections between farming and the foods that students consume;

(4) increase the size and stability of farmers' direct sales markets; and

(5) increase school meal participation by increasing the selection of foods available to students.

Sec. 2. LOCAL FOODS MINI-GRANT PROGRAM

(a) There is created in the agency of agriculture, food and markets a local foods mini-grant program for the purpose of helping Vermont schools develop relationships with local farmers and producers.

(b) A school, a school district, a consortium of schools, or a consortium of school districts may apply to the secretary of agriculture, food and markets for a mini-grant award to:

(1) purchase equipment, resources, and materials that will help to increase use of local foods in the school food service program;

(2) purchase items, including local farm products, that will help teachers to use hands-on educational techniques to teach children about nutrition and farm-to-school connections; and

(3) provide professional development and technical assistance to help teachers educate students about nutrition and farm-to-school connections.

(c) In making awards, the secretary shall work with the commissioner of education to develop specific criteria and application forms for the mini-grants. The secretary shall make awards provided that there is significant interest in the school community and shall give priority consideration to schools and school districts that are in the early stages of developing farm-to-school connections and education and that are making progress toward the implementation of the Vermont nutrition and fitness policy guidelines developed by the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the department of education, and the department of health, dated November 2005 or the guidelines' successor. No award shall be greater than \$15,000.00.

Sec. 3. FARM ASSISTANCE; SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD

AND MARKETS

(a) The secretary of agriculture, food and markets shall work with existing programs and organizations to develop and implement educational opportunities for farmers to help them to increase their markets through selling their products to schools and state government agencies and participating in the federal food commodities program, including the federal Department of Defense Fresh program, and to regulated child care programs participating in the adult and child food program.

(b) The secretary of agriculture, food and markets shall award one-time funds to the Vermont food venture center or other food processing entity which:

(1) processes locally grown farm products for school and institutional markets, thereby helping farmers to increase the size and stability of their markets; or

(2) rents equipment to local farmers so that they can process their products for sale.

Sec. 4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR FOOD SERVICE

PERSONNEL

(a) The commissioner of education shall offer expanded regional training sessions for public school food service personnel and child care resource development specialists during 2007. Training shall include information about strategies for purchasing, processing, and serving locally grown foods, as well as information about nutrition, obesity prevention, coping with severe food allergies, and food service operations. The commissioner may use a portion of the funds appropriated for this training session to pay a portion of or all expenses for attendees and to develop manuals or other materials to help in the training.

(b) In 2007, the commissioner of education shall train people to provide technical assistance to school food service personnel and use a portion of the funds appropriated for this purpose to enable the trained people to provide technical assistance at the school and school district levels.

(c) Training provided under this section shall promote the policies established in the Vermont nutrition and fitness policy guidelines developed by the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the department of education, and the department of health, dated November 2005 or the guidelines' successor.

Sec. 5. EXPANDING MARKETS FOR VERMONT FARMERS;

NUTRITION POLICIES; REPORT

(a) On or before January 15, 2007, the commissioner of education, secretary of agriculture, food and markets, and secretary of human services shall jointly make recommendations to the senate and house committees on agriculture, institutions, and education and the house committee on human services on the following:

(1) Strategies the general assembly could adopt or encourage to increase use of locally grown foods in Vermont schools, regulated child care programs, and state agencies. In developing recommendations under this subdivision, the commissioner and secretaries shall:

(A) consider the benefit to the economy of Vermont and the rural farm economy compared to

the impact on state spending of requiring the secretary of administration, the commissioner of buildings and general services, and any state-funded institutions to purchase agricultural products grown or produced in Vermont when available at more than the cost of like products produced outside the state;

(B) consult with farmers, food service personnel, state agency personnel involved in purchasing agricultural products, and representatives of organizations interested in creating strategies to increase use of locally grown foods in Vermont schools and state agencies; and

(C) consider other strategies to increase use of locally grown foods in Vermont schools, regulated child care programs, and state agencies.

(2) Whether moving administration of the U.S.D.A. food distribution program (the food commodities program) from the agency of human services to another department or agency such as the department of education or the agency of agriculture, food and markets would improve integration of the program with efforts to include more fresh foods in general and Vermont-grown foods in particular and would result in more frequent delivery of foods in a timely fashion. In developing recommendations under this subdivision, the commissioner and secretaries shall consult with people who work in and use or have the potential to use the food commodities program.

(3) Ways to improve the effectiveness of the local foods mini-grant program created in Sec. 2 of this act.

(4) Ways to improve the effectiveness of training for public school food service personnel conducted pursuant to Sec. 4 of this act.

(b) On or before January 30, 2007, the commissioner of education shall report to the senate and house committees on agriculture and on education, the senate committee on health and welfare, and the house committee on human services regarding the number of school districts which have and have not adopted a nutrition policy and, based on a sample of a minimum of 10 percent of those which have adopted a policy:

(1) approximately how many adopted a policy which is substantially the same as the nutrition components of the Vermont nutrition and fitness policy guidelines developed by the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the department of education, and the department of health, dated November 2005 or the guidelines' successor; and

(2) a description of how some of the policies adopted by the school boards differ from the Vermont nutrition and fitness policy guidelines.

Approved: May 15, 2006