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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Nice update, Rob.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 For those who rely on food programs: 'Don't get
2 discouraged'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 Food security advocates in Windham County say help is
4 still available for those in need

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 The political chatter surrounding the government
7 shutdown and cuts in benefits has been discouraging for many
8 area residents who qualify for food and other benefits.

9 The people in charge of trying to make sure that
10 everyone in Windham County has food have a message for them.

11 "Don't get discouraged," Sue Graff, the Agency of
12 Human Services food service director for the region, advised
13 county residents who qualify for food and other assistance.
14 "Make sure you apply for these programs."

15 The Windham Region Food Security Network met last
16 week to discuss how to make sure people are fed despite efforts
17 by the Trump administration to cut funding for the Supplemental
18 Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during the government
19 shutdown and plans to cut social services in general.

20 Those who make up the network represent area food
21 shelves, school nutrition programs, and state social agencies. In
22 addition to Graff, the group included co-chairs Susan Grabowski,
23 the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union food program
24 director, and Hannah Pick, executive director of the Putney
25 Foodshelf.

26 Graff said that on Nov. 7, Vermonters received half of
27 their normal 3SquaresVT payments, with the state making those
28 payments from its own funds. 3SquaresVt is the state program
29 that distributes federal SNAP funds.

30 With the federal government shutdown ending a week
31 later on Nov. 14, Graff said at the meeting that it was still up in
32 the air what the federal government would do about the
33 November SNAP payments and whether the state will be
34 reimbursed for funding paid to 38,000 3SquaresVT recipients
35 during the impasse.

36 With the Trump administration in a punitive mood, Graff
37 noted that Vermont "doesn't expect to get reimbursed" for its
38 3SquaresVT payments.

39 With the U.S. House of Representatives back in session,
40 some of those questions have been answered.

41 SNAP has been fully funded through September 2026.
42 SNAP payments for November have also been fully funded, so
43 Vermonters will be receiving their full benefit in addition to the
44 half payment the state made.

45 Graff also noted that “the EBT [electronic benefit transfer]
46 cards are working. Prior benefits are still on the cards.”

47 “People need to find where they can get food in their
48 local community,” Graff said, noting that Vermont is trying to
49 merge its 10 Food Service Networks (FSNs). There is only
50 adequate staffing for seven.

51 To that end, Pick said it might be better for Windham
52 County “to look west instead of north” and connect with food
53 services in Bennington County as opposed to those in the upper
54 Connecticut River Valley.

55 How those mergers will proceed remains to be seen.
56 Grabowski said that some of the FSNs are open to merging, while
57 others are unsure about taking that step.

58 Network members said that they have seen increased
59 demand from area food shelves and food services. Grabowski
60 said that the WSESU has definitely seen “increased participation
61 in both breakfast and lunch programs” in the district schools.

62 “There is a lot of [food] uncertainty right now,”
63 Grabowski said. “And the students are feeling it, too. Students are
64 hungry.”

65 Graff said that her department “will do everything that
66 we can do at the state and regional level to do what needs to be
67 done” to make sure that Vermonters have enough to eat.

68 People can call the state’s 211 help line for getting access
69 to health and human services, and the public should be aware of
70 all the local food sources that can help those who can’t afford
71 nourishment.

72 There are food shelves in Springfield, Bellows Falls,
73 Putney, and Brattleboro. In addition to that, area churches and
74 citizens groups have also been making food available.

75 As Thanksgiving approaches, many area organizations
76 and groups will be offering free meals, Grabowski said, including
77 one at Landmark College’s Alumni Hall in Putney from 5 to 7
78 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 22.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

79 The Vermont Foodbank maintains a list of food shelves
80 and free meal sites across Vermont at
81 vtfoodbank.org/findafoodshelf.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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