Good morning. I am Dan Smith, Interim President of Vermont Technical College.

I would like to thank Secretary Ross and my colleagues from the Vermont Higher Ed Food Systems Consortium for offering me the chance to address you this morning on their behalf. I would also like to acknowledge the leadership and facilitation of the Vermont Council of Rural Development who have kept this project moving forward.

The Consortium is a group of Vermont institutions of higher education that have committed to working together to make Vermont an epicenter of community-based food systems education.

It was Secretary Ross who initially posed the question to higher ed leaders in the state that led to this effort. He challenged us by asking:

What is your collective role in the surging revolution in food and agriculture?

He challenged us to make a collective impact on Vermont, greater than that which we might make on our own.

He asked us to consider how we might be stronger, together.

No easy question for actors in any industry, let alone higher education.
But it asks us to test an assumption about each of our institutions: namely, that what we (my institution alone) offers, is enough to serve the students who have chosen to enroll.

Does the experience we offer, provide the diversity of experience, from lecture to hands-on learning, and diversity of student population, necessary to meet the broadest variety of student-driven, personal lines of inquiry and to truly prepare students for what the world offers?

For some students, yes, of course we do. For some students, each of the individual pieces is enough.

And in Vermont, those pieces are remarkable. From Sterling College up in Craftsbury with the Rian Fried Center for Sustainable Agriculture,

to Green Mountain College’s legacy of ecological leadership, problem solving and biodiversity in agriculture,

to Middlebury’s focus on global food systems and public policy,

the University of Vermont’s experiential fruit and vegetable farm, the Breakthrough Leaders Certificate Program, and Masters and Minor in Food Systems,

to Vermont Law School’s center for Agriculture and Food Systems, focused on the legal tools and policy that will foster food system innovation,

to the efforts of my own institution, Vermont Technical College’s hands-on, experiential diversified ag degree programs, featuring an 85 head dairy farm run by students and five acres of production vegetable land.
It is an embarrassment of programmatic riches in this state, and for some students, each of these alone may offer what they need to foster their passion.

But for some people out there, any alone won't provide a satisfactory answer to the question of “how my bread and milk go to the table” let alone the question of “how I get my own milk and bread to my own table.”

Our belief is that some students may seek both the high level lecture and the hands on experience. They want a window into the policy, the culture and the practice of where food comes from and how it shapes a community.

Next summer we hope to kick off our inaugural experience for Vermont Food Systems Scholars, a ten day journey through the strongest and most unique aspects of every partner institution.

It is our hope that in working together we can offer otherwise unattainable diversity of experience, with a window into all aspects and perspectives on the food system, from the most local to the most global.

If we are successful, we'll have broadened the awareness of our collective offerings of courses, services, and learning experiences as well as our unique institutional cultures.

We don’t succeed if Vermont doesn’t thrive.

Our goal, the goal of the Consortium, is to do our part to drive the vitality of the local food movement in Vermont by throwing open our doors and drawing more and more people into the learning
pathways that support innovation in the food system movement and to seed the next stage of entrepreneurial activity.

And if a little bit of that action slips across our borders, and folks find their way into other states, cities and towns and advance the development of more resilient local food systems, I guess we'll chalk that up as a win, too, because it is all about the kid at the table who sees her food, and knows where it came from and wants to know how to do it herself.