

## Hunger Free Vermont | Vermont Foodbank 3SquaresVT Talking Points

### Talking Points:

*For organizations that work with Families with Children*

#### About this document

The following is a list of talking points developed by Hunger Free Vermont and the Vermont Foodbank that your organization is free to use when speaking with members of families with children about 3SquaresVT. Your organization is an ally in our goal to address food insecurity across Vermont, and we wanted to provide you with accurate and helpful information that you can share in conversation with families or in any communication channels you use.

Our goals with these talking points is for those who may be eligible for 3SquaresVT to not only become aware of the assistance available to them to help buy groceries but also to remove barriers and reduce the stigma surrounding these benefits.

Feel free to adapt these talking points to fit your organization's style of communication with your community members. We ask that rather than sharing this document with your community that you either incorporate this messaging into your own communications or share the provided one-page summary PDF that covers much of the same information.

For questions related to this information please contact Phil Morin, [pmorin@hungerfreevt.org](mailto:pmorin@hungerfreevt.org), 802-266-0665.

#### What is 3SquaresVT?

3SquaresVT is Vermont's name for the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is a program of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). It gives eligible people funds to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets.

#### Who is it for?

Many in Vermont have a hard time affording all of the groceries they and their families need. Since the pandemic, 1 out of every 3 Vermont residents has experienced hardships buying groceries. 3SquaresVT provides assistance for those who need an extra hand to be able to have enough nourishing food on their plates.

If any of the following apply to you, consider applying for 3SquaresVT:

- You worry about having enough food for your family



- You skip meals or eat less than you need to for your overall health
- You skip meals for yourself in order to ensure your children have meals
- You rely on a food shelf to get meals
- You sacrifice food quality in favor of affordability
- You reduce your grocery budget in order to pay for your rent, mortgage, utilities, child care, or other expenses

### **How It Works**

3SquaresVT helps you stretch your grocery budget with choice and convenience. Each month, money is loaded onto a Vermont EBT card, similar to a debit card, that can be used to purchase groceries where you normally shop, including many grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets. The amount you receive per month is based on household size, income, and expenses – giving you some extra spending money to ensure you have plenty of food for you and your family.

- NEW - You can now use your EBT card to purchase eligible grocery items online from retailers such as Amazon, Walmart (Bennington only), Aldi, and certain Hannafords
- Stretching your dollars further – Every \$1 you spend with your 3SquaresVT at participating farmers markets counts as \$3 with Crop Cash

### **Eligibility Requirements**

You may be eligible if:

- Your gross household income is equal to or less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level
- OR, you have children and receive the Earned Income Tax Credit

Visit <https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/3SquaresVT> for more detail regarding your eligibility status

### **A Ripple Effect of Good**

*Note to our partners: To help reduce the stigma, we want all Vermont residents, including those who are eligible for 3SquaresVT, to see the greater impact of 3SquaresVT on our community*

Every time you buy your groceries using 3SquaresVT benefits, you support your health and the health of your family at a critical time in your children's lives as they continue to grow. You also strengthen your community and Vermont's economy. Money spent on groceries with 3SquaresVT goes to local Vermont retailers who sell food and local Vermont farmers who provide food. An estimated \$10 million in Federal tax dollars comes to Vermont each month through 3SquaresVT, but if more people who are



eligible apply and use these benefits, more money goes into our economy, and could create more jobs in our communities.

### **3SquaresVT and School Meals**

If you receive 3SquaresVT benefits, your children are eligible to receive free breakfast and lunch at school. Additionally, if 40% of students in a school receive free meals as a result of 3SquaresVT, the entire school could get free school meals, which helps reduce the food burden on families that might not realize they qualify for 3SquaresVT.

### **Addressing Barriers**

*Note to our partners: When speaking with your constituents about 3SquaresVT, they may express objections to participating in the program. Here are some responses you can use to address frequent concerns.*

“Someone else in my community needs this more than me”

Anyone who is eligible to receive 3SquaresVT benefits receives them. You will not be taking benefits away from anyone else if you apply, and you will only be taking benefits away from yourself if you don’t apply. There is no limit to the number of people who can receive 3SquaresVT. It is not “first come, first served.”

“I don’t need a handout.”

3SquaresVT isn’t a handout, it’s a hand. And everyone needs a hand from time to time, especially with the impact of COVID-19 on our community.

“I don’t want anyone else’s money.”

You’ve paid into this program through your taxes. It’s your money, you’ve earned this benefit.

### **Next Steps**

If you’re interested in learning more about the program and finding out how to apply, visit Vermont Food Help at [vermontfoodhelp.com](https://vermontfoodhelp.com).

