GEORGE SHUMLIN APPLAUDS SODEXO’S COMMITMENT TO “VERMONT FIRST” STRATEGY TO IMPACT STATE’S AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY AND IMPROVE THE WELL-BEING OF VERMONTERS

Montpelier, VT—September 4, 2014. Governor Peter Shumlin applauded a private sector company’s commitment to the procurement of local food in Vermont institutions. Sodexo, a leader in delivering sustainable, integrated facilities management and foodservice operations with a major presence in Vermont, announced today a major initiative to help grow Vermont’s local food economy by committing to buy local food first via a comprehensive program.

Under the “Vermont First” program, Sodexo will work with farmers, distributors, processors, state government, non-profits and supply chain players within the farm to table economy to increase the amount of local food grown and sold in the state and beyond.

The company announced the commitment on September 4 at 2 pm at Vermont Technical College, along with Governor Shumlin, Agriculture Secretary Chuck Ross and a host of farmers, distributors and customers in the agriculture and food economy.

“This exciting announcement will help us expand Vermont’s farm-to-institution sector,” Governor Shumlin said. “We are grateful to Sodexo for making this commitment and recognizing that Vermont is the national leader in this field. We look forward to partnering with Sodexo.”

Phil Harty, Regional VP of Campus Services for Sodexo, said the company will commit to an annual summit on local food economics, training of providers, distributors and others and offering its technical expertise in quality control to bring more local food into the supply chain.

“Vermont is a national leader in bringing local food to market and we want to accelerate that,” Harty said. “We will bring our expertise and market presence to bear in ways that can grow what Vermont already does, not mention growing the amount of healthy food consumed by Vermonters.”

Chuck Ross, the secretary of Agriculture, Food & Markets, called the announcement a watershed event in supporting community based agriculture.

“We thank Sodexo for their 34,000 institutional and corporate meals served daily in Vermont, sourcing approximately 15% local food. What’s exciting is when a company the size of Sodexo recognizes the importance of local food economies, it means Vermont’s position has gone national,” Ross said, “Not only will this accelerate our local food economy to the benefit of farm sustainability and job creation in the agricultural sector, it increases access to fresh local food and contributes to our agricultural literacy of understanding where our food comes from.”
Ross was joined at the news conference by an assortment of farmers, customers, distributors and others who play key roles in the evolution of farm to institution and culture change in Vermont’s local food system.

The “Vermont First” commitment strategy includes investment that supports the production and purchase of local food. This Program will track progress and growth in local food procurement. Sodexo will collaborate with Vermont partners to understand which local foods the marketplace wants to procure and maintain a relationship with distributors to share suppliers of local products. Sodexo will also host matchmaking events to connect producers and buyers for supply chain partners and develop a formal plan to meet the production needs of Vermont farmers and enable businesses to buy local.

**Some of Sodexo’s Commitments to the “Vermont First” strategy include:**

- Developing a plan to meet the production needs of Vermont farmers and enable businesses to buy local. This includes market analysis, technical assistance around production, processing and marketing. A steering committee will be convened of Vermont stakeholders to discuss issues of procurement, marketing and meeting cutover demand.

- Making a formal commitment and investment that supports the production and purchase of local food.

- The hiring of a local food coordinator by the company to broker relationships with growers wanting to meet the institutional market demand and tracking progress and growth in local food procurement.

- Sponsoring an annual summit meeting and two working group sessions around “scaling up” local food growing and procurement.

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**Sodexo in North America**

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Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets Chuck Ross, Governor Peter Shumlin and Phil Harty, Regional Vice President at Sodexo
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