2019 Legislative Priorities

The 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan recommended a range of policy changes toward a sustainable and equitable food system. Many bills have been filed in the 191st General Court that address these recommendations.

The MA Food System Collaborative and the undersigned organizations have identified these five bills as priorities for passage in the 2019-2020 legislative session.

An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program  
The Healthy Incentives Program doubles SNAP recipients’ purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers, improving health outcomes for vulnerable communities and increasing sales for local farms. This bill will establish the framework for the program’s long-term sustainability.

An Act relative to Agricultural Commission input on board of health regulations  
Many municipal boards of health have no expertise around farming, but are tasked with making decisions that can impact the viability of local farms. This bill will require that municipal boards of health give local agricultural commissions an opportunity to weigh in on new or changing regulations related to agriculture, so that farmers’ perspectives and needs can be taken into account.

An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need  
Would provide civil liability protection for persons who donate food directly to consumers, as well as for food establishments that donate food whose labeled date has passed and a tax credit to Massachusetts farmers in the amount of the fair market value of the donated food, with a $2,000 annual cap per farmer.

An Act regarding a farmland protection and viability action plan  
S482: Sen. Anne Gobi
Legislation to develop a statewide Farmland Action Plan to compile data on land use trends, and use that data to guide state investments and policies related to farmland access, protection, and use.

An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture  
Would allow cities with populations over 50,000 to adopt an optional property tax break for land used for urban agriculture, to help overcome the high price of urban land and promote the health, economic, and environmental benefits of growing food in cities.
Several dozen other bills have been filed this session that directly address recommendations in the Plan. We urge the legislature to refer to the Plan when considering these bills, and to communicate with stakeholder organizations about the importance of these pieces of legislation to their communities. Among those under consideration, the following are of particular importance:

**An Act to Exempt from taxation structures and buildings essential to the operation of agricultural and horticultural lands**  
S1786: Senator Tarr  
Would allow farmers to apply for property tax exemptions for certain agricultural structures.

**An Act relative to the preservation of agricultural lands / An Act supporting farming on non-contiguous land**  
S1793: Senator Tran / S1613: Senator Jo Comerford  
Would allow some non-contiguous farmland under the same ownership to benefit from Chapter 61A tax valuation.

**An Act to promote healthy soils and agricultural innovation within the Commonwealth**  
Would establish a healthy soils program to encourage agricultural innovation and result in long-term greenhouse gas benefits.

**An Act relative to the Massachusetts Food Policy Council**  
H2784: Representative Paul Schmid  
Would add a seat to the MA Food Policy Council for the Department of Fish and Game.

**An Act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy**  
Would establish a grant program for infrastructure and training to enable schools to do more scratch cooking using local foods.

**An Act regarding breakfast after the bell**  
Would require that all schools where 60% or more of the students qualify for free and reduced meals serve breakfast after the bell, in the classroom.

**An Act improving public health through a common application for core food, health and safety-net programs**  
S678: Senator Sal DiDomenico / H1173: Representative Jay Livingstone  
Would create a common application for Mass Health and SNAP benefits, as well as other DTA administered benefits.

**An Act to Promote Student Nutrition**  
S526: Senator Cynthia Creem / H585: Representative Andy Vargas  
Would address “meal shaming,” where children are publicly denied their school meals because their lunch account is in arrears.

**An Act relative to expanding access to healthy food choices in vending machines on state property**  
S1290: Senator Jason Lewis / HD3951: Representative Natalie Blais  
Would limit food and beverages sold by vending machines located in government buildings or on government property to those that comply with nutritional standards established by the commissioner of public health.

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**The Following Organizations Support these Priorities**

- American Farmland Trust, Northampton
- Arlington EATS, Arlington
- Backyard Growers, Gloucester
- Berkshire Farm & Table, Sheffield
- Berkshire Grown, Great Barrington
- Boston Area Gleaners, Waltham
- The Carrot Project, Boston
- Central Mass Grown, Worcester
- Coastal Foodshed, New Bedford
- CommonWealth Kitchen, Dorchester
- Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc., Somerville
- Community Health Network for North Central Mass, Leominster
- Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), South Deerfield
- Conservation Law Foundation, Boston
- The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Hatfield
- Food For Free, Cambridge
- The Food Project, Lincoln/Dorchester/Lynn
- Franklin County CDC, Greenfield
- Franklin County Food Council, Greenfield
- Fresh Truck, Boston
- Greater Boston Food Bank, Boston
- Groundwork Lawrence, Lawrence
- Groundwork Southcoast, New Bedford & Fall River
- Health Care Without Harm, Cambridge
- Healthy Chelsea Coalition, Chelsea
- Healthy Hampshire, Northampton
- Heath Agricultural Society, Heath
- Island Grown Initiative, Martha’s Vineyard
- Just Roots Inc., Greenfield
- Mass Farmers Markets, Waltham
- Mass in Motion, Salem
- Mass Law Reform Institute, Boston
- Massachusetts Association of Health Boards, Plainville
- Massachusetts Farm to School, Easthampton
- Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition, Mattapan
- Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Lowell
- Mill City Grows, Lowell
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, Athol
- New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI), Belchertown
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Beverly
- Northeast Harvest Buy Local, Topsfield
- Northeast Organic Farming Association/ Massachusetts Chapter (NOFA/Mass), Barre
- Project Bread, East Boston
- Regional Environmental Council of Central MA (REC), Worcester
- Shape Up Somerville - City of Somerville, Somerville
- Southeastern MA Food Security Network, Southcoast
- Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership, S. Dartmouth
- Springfield Dementia Friendly Coalition, Springfield
- Springfield Food Policy Council, Springfield
- Springfield Partners for Community Action, Springfield
- Sustainable CAPE - Center for Agricultural Preservation & Education, Truro, MA
- Sustainable Nantucket, Nantucket
- The Marion Institute, Marion
- The Trustees, Boston
- Tufts Friedman Food Policy Action Council (FFPAC), Boston
- Water Alliance, Gloucester
- Worcester County Food Bank, Shrewsbury
- Worcester County Food Policy Council, Worcester

324 Wells Street, Greenfield, MA 01301 | 413-634-5728 | www.mafoodsystem.org | winton@mafoodsystem.org