

2019 Policy Issues

Two bills that will be introduced in the next legislative session were priority items from the previous session that did not pass. We urge legislators to support these important legislative initiatives.



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 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.

Legislators are developing their priorities and agendas for the next session, and the Collaborative is working with stakeholder groups to do the same. The following items are bills that we know will be filed and proposals we know will be made that directly address recommendations from the MA Local Food Action Plan. Additional bills, proposals, and budget items will emerge in the coming months.

Food Waste: 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 with a labeled date that 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. (Refile of H.3327 from 2017-18 session.)

Farmland Action Plan

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. (Refile of portion of S.442 from 2017-18 session.)

Urban Agriculture: An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture

Would allow municipalities to adopt an optional property tax break for land used for urban agriculture, to help overcome the high price of land and promote the health, economic, and environmental benefits of growing food in cities. (Refile of H.3854 from 2017-18 session.)

SNAP Gap: An Act improving public health through a common application for core food, health and safety-net programs

Would create a common application for Mass Health and SNAP benefits (as well as other DTA administered benefits), improving efficiency and increasing food security for over 570,000 people who are on MassHealth and qualify for SNAP. (Refile of S.612 from 2017-18 session.)

School Breakfast: 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. (Refile of S.2441 from 2017-18 session.)

Farm to School: New grant program

A bill being developed by Massachusetts Farm to School that would establish a grant program to support infrastructure and training to enable schools to do more scratch cooking using local foods.

Food Policy Council/Fisheries: An Act relative to the Massachusetts Food Policy Council

A bill that would add a seat to the MA Food Policy Council for the Department of Fish and Game. (Refile of H.1712 from 2017-18 session.)

Cliff Effect

Being developed by the Coalition to End Hunger, this would seek to eliminate the barriers people face in being able to accept raises or new jobs with an hourly rate that causes them to lose benefits like housing, childcare, and SNAP, putting them in a worse financial position. Legislation would create a “glide path” where benefits decrease slowly enough to allow income to outweigh the loss, and work is incentivized with refunds like the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Reducing School Meal Debt / Improving Nutrition

A bill will be introduced to address “meal shaming,” the practice by which children are publicly denied their school meals because their lunch account is in arrears.

Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Requests

- **Healthy Incentives Program:** \$7,000,000
- **Food system measurement:** \$100,000 to develop and monitor a set of metrics to evaluate progress being made toward goals of the Plan.
- **Massachusetts Food Trust:** \$100,000 for operating costs, plus release of additional resources from bond authorization for loans and grants.

Other items under consideration that address recommendations from the Plan.

- **Legislature:** Establish a legislative Food System Caucus to develop and introduce legislation recommended by the Plan and educate legislators about food system policy issues
- **Administration:** Fully expend all existing bond authorizations for farm viability and the APR program.
- **MDAR:** Revise APR regulations as required by 2018 legislation, with consideration given to policies related to housing, farm infrastructure, impervious surface limits, and renewable energy production, as recommended in the Plan.