Response to Massachusetts Food System Collaborative questionnaire sent to 2018 candidates for Massachusetts Governor.

Candidate: Bob Massie

How would your administration support implementation of the Plan’s recommendations?

As governor, I will see to it that a Massie Administration works to:

- **Increase production and consumption of local food** through supporting production of local food and assuring stable markets for producers,
- **Expand and improve jobs in the food sector**, through education, wage and benefit support for workers,
- **Protect the land and water**, with expanded farm land trusts, zoning reforms, and tax breaks for farmland, and
- **Reduce malnutrition and food insecurity**, by improving access to fresh foods, protecting HIPS, expanding school breakfast and lunch programs and supporting local markets.

How can Massachusetts better align our food system, public health, and economic development efforts?

These elements are closely interconnected and should be addressed in unison. We need a vibrant farm and fishing sectors to provide us with healthy food. We have 7,755 small farms in Massachusetts and they employ almost 28,000 workers producing nearly $500 million in products. This is a major piece of our economy and the revenue it generates stays in our local communities. Industrial farming by contrast relies on federal supports, uses environmentally destructive practices and produces high calorie low nutrition foods with profits accruing to big agribusinesses and fast food chains based outside Massachusetts. Investing in our local organic farms is a smart strategy for maximizing value in every way for our communities. In just one example: if we ask every school district to contract with local farmers for fresh produce, we create guaranteed markets for farmers, provide fresh healthy food for our children, and our public expenditures benefit local communities. We also
reduce transportation requirements by fostering local consumption. Small investments in facilitating those relationships will create value in multiple ways.

The example of the economic exploitation of the New Bedford fisheries is telling. One set of private business interests run by the “Codfather” created a monopoly on boats and processing facilities, that pushed fisherman into unsustainable and illegal fishing practices which, when finally stopped, threatened the entire local economy. By contrast, Maine regulations stipulate that lobsterman must own their own boats, preventing monopolies of the fleet. Many of the processing facilities are cooperatively owned so that individuals maintain their stake in the maintenance of the natural resource and no one set of private profit interests can dominate the industry.

**What role should state government play in reducing farmland loss and protecting farmland?**

Massachusetts state government is well positioned to assist in the protection of farmland, once it is committed to that goal. (The first farmland protection efforts in the country were in Suffolk County Long Island in the mid 1970’s. The first statewide program was in Maryland in 1977.

Most farmland protection programs today are at the state and local level, with 25 states and over 150 local governments actively working to protect farmland.)¹ The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program in Massachusetts is essential to protection of farmland. The program was established in 1977 shortly after Maryland’s program, but the Massachusetts program has not been modified in 40 years.² I agree that it is time to update and expand this program. For example, statewide mapping of agricultural land, soil quality and habitats could allow us to target important and vulnerable land areas and work with local land trusts and landowners to fill the gaps. Finding ways to support local land trusts, cluster development, and farm easements can expand the impact of these strategies.

**What tools or programs would you support to do so?**

As governor, I will start by creating a cabinet undersecretary for Agricultural Economy. I would charge that office with coordinating and updating existing state programs, regulations and policies to support land conservation. The creation of a state bank could be useful for assisting local land trusts through loan guarantees. Zoning reform is necessary to protect farmland from development and eliminating “approval not required” development along our scenic roadways. We would review tax policy for impacts on long term farmlands.

**What role should state government play in helping farmers improve profitability, develop**
new products and markets, and address environmental challenges?

This would be a key priority for my administration. Our economic development policy would focus on small, local, and sustainable businesses, with particular focus on food businesses. As governor, I will create an agricultural economy office and cabinet undersecretary to focus on sustainable resource-based businesses. The secretary would begin immediately with a listening tour across the state, to learn from producers and communities about what is needed. The office would be charged with expanding and supporting these industries through grants, technical assistance, regulatory and permitting assistance, relationship building, public outreach and institutional contracting. The small farm as a stand-alone business is an old fashioned and risky proposition. Instead we need to understand the complex interdependent economic ecosystem of regional farms, workers, markets, consumers and communities. There are many examples of local farming operations creating local or regional brands that help to increase prices of products sold and demand for those products (e.g., Napa wines, Damariscotta Maine oysters, Idaho potatoes) and supporting local Massachusetts farmers in brand creation could be part of that strategy.

Farmers also need access to affordable reliable high-speed internet and we would provide that through municipal utilities. Cheap renewable power and quality transportation infrastructure are essential. Access to grants and loans, agricultural research, networking and logistics support are all needed. Continuing education, and tax, estate and retirement planning should be available to all farmers. Expansion of facilities, including slaughterhouses and food processing facilities located inside Massachusetts are critical to maintaining and expanding farm businesses.

Institutional contracts are needed guarantee yearly income streams. All these things can be facilitated and supported at the state government level. No other institution has the reach, convening power, policy making and regulatory powers and above all public purpose to support the aims of sustainability, food justice, public health and prosperity for all.

In addition, we need to start a long-term plan for integrating and balancing the three economic sectors with claims on rural land: farming and forestry, tourism and energy production. Careful, inclusive planning could insure successful and supportive co-existence. But a competitive approach will damage all three sectors.

What would you do to address the severe economic challenges that the Commonwealth’s dairy farms face?

Without detailed knowledge about the workings of dairy farms in Massachusetts I will begin by listening to local dairy farmers. I know that we have lost 219 dairy farms (60 percent of the total) in the last 20 years. The decline in milk consumption has caused prices to plummet
and out-of-state large-scale dairy producers have taken market share, subsidized in part by our own flawed truck registration fees, which fail to recoup all of the impact of big trucks on our highways, giving out-of-state dairies an unfair advantage in our market. Supporting cooperative processing centers, guaranteeing local markets for milk through school systems, hospitals and nursing homes, and paying fair prices for local milk would be a start. Regulatory review and reform of bias toward big agriculture would be another step to be taken across the farm sector. The questions of raw milk might need research and new safety standards.

**How would your administration work to ensure the long-term viability of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)?**

This is an excellent example of a win-win program that makes a huge amount of sense and should be expanded. The values are so broadly spread that a simple analysis of cost benefit often fails to capture the significance of an intervention like the HIP program. My administration would promote the program by analyzing, publicizing and championing the complex overlapping benefits of improved public health, a stronger agricultural sector, food sector jobs and more.

**What role would your administration play in providing food education and encouraging residents to make healthy and sustainable food choices?**

As governor, I will promote schoolyard gardens in all elementary and middle schools with curricula that uses the garden for science, art and all subject areas, as well as giving all students exposure to growing food. A Massie Administration would launch a major public information campaign illustrating the health benefits of eating fresh local food, and the environmental value of supporting urban and rural farms and our fisheries. We would create and promote fresh food access to all communities, underwriting local food festivals, supporting small groceries and bodegas who stock fresh local food and maintain and expand HIP.

Urban farming projects have an important role to play in bringing food production and ecological awareness directly into population centers.

**How would your administration support the University of Massachusetts in its role providing research and development and other services for the farm, food, and fishing industries?**

At UMass Boston, I started the Sustainable Solutions Lab (SSL), designed to create collaboration among four schools, for the purpose of addressing climate justice challenges in...
the greater Boston area. I am a strong believer in the opportunities of the UMass system. Starting as a land grant agricultural school, UMass has an agriculture tradition that is now focused in the Stockbridge program on sustainable farming. We should support UMass’ effort to be a premier research institution on sustainable agriculture, forestry and fishing. In the model of inter-school cooperation and community outreach that we established at SSL, we could expand the impact and import of research by partnering with local producers, and expanding scientific and social science research to address the opportunities of 21st century small scale local agriculture, including public health and local and statewide economic impacts, soil reconstruction, carbon sequestration, habitat promotion, sustainable practices and seed development. The university can and should provide the research and development engine that small scale enterprises lack in competition with large agribusiness.

**What local food initiatives, policies and programs have you personally and professionally supported, and in what capacities, to support our local food system?**

Personally, I have been an enthusiast of farms and farmers’ markets for years. This started more than 50 years ago when, during summers in Maine, we drove weekly to the farm owned by Mr. and Mrs. Cousins near Deer Isle. I would spend time in the cow barn talking to Mr. Cousins and petting the cows, while my mother, an excellent cook, carefully selected the produce for the next week of meals.

My wife and I shop weekly at the local markets in Somerville and Cambridge, including the winter market in Somerville. Indeed, my very first “Massie Minute” campaign video was shot live at the Somerville Farmer’s market; I spoke about the critical role of food justice and the joy of diversity reflected in both the produce and the people gathered to buy it.

I also have a family tie to farming; my sister grows commercial hay and raises cattle and horses in rural Kentucky, and my nephew, her son, is a diversified farmer who grows organic soybeans, corn, hay, pumpkins, chrysanthemums, and vegetables on his farm nearby. I am thus extremely familiar with the many challenges that confront farmers who are trying to survive financially while being buffeted by competitive, biological, and climate problems.

In addition, my wife and I have long been supporters of CitySprouts, the innovative Cambridge based school gardens program started by Jane Hirschi. Professionally, I was the founding director of the New Economy Coalition, whose members include more than 200 organizations promoting a more sustainable economy, many focused on agricultural interests, including: Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, New England Grassroots Environment Fund, Cooperative Fund of New England, GreenWave, Real Pickles, and Local Enterprise Assistance Fund. Our initial conferences, Common Bound, in
2011 and 2012, included a strong focus on sustainable local farming enterprises, including urban farming.

1  https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=cplan_papers
