Monday July 15, 2019

Joint Committee on Revenue
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Rooms 109E & 34
Boston MA 02133

RE: S1645 An Act mitigating water resource impacts

Dear Chairs Hinds and Cusack, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony. Under S1645 farmers could be assessed fees for normal agricultural activities such as irrigation, land contouring, field water flow management, drainage, wetland management, washing produce, and other standard management practices. This will likely lead to the demise of a number of farming operations across the state and conflicts with the support of agriculture entailed in numerous elements of legislation, programs, and polices set forth by the legislature and all recent administrations, as well as the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan represents the views of Massachusetts residents, farmers, hundreds of organizations and businesses, and many government agencies, and offers recommendations toward a sustainable and equitable food system.

The Plan states that “Land is agriculture’s foundational infrastructure, and most farmers’ primary asset. Accordingly, property taxes and land use regulations and programs play a large role in farm profitability and business viability.” The Plan calls for relief from these kinds of taxes and fees in order to foster strong and viable farm businesses and a robust and equitable food system in the Commonwealth.

Fees provided for in this legislation are also counterproductive to the state’s climate change plans and goals, as such fees are likely to materially prevent farmers and foresters from employing recommended climate adaptation practices and mitigation actions on the majority of the land available to provide ecosystem and climate change mitigation services.

The Collaborative recommends exemptions from all fees set forth in this or similar legislation for agriculture and forest land, provided management plans approved by NRCS and/or other federal and state agencies, which provide expert guidance in these matters, are in place and active.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan as adopted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Winton Pitcoff
Director