



Monday, May 17, 2021

Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Rooms 218 & 473F
Boston MA 02133

RE: H1007 An Act relative to the use of Department of Conservation and Recreation property for farmers markets and community gardens

Dear Chairs Rausch and Dykema:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in response to H1007 An Act relative to the use of Department of Conservation and Recreation property for farmers markets and community gardens. We support the proposals in the bill.

The 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan recommended that the state identify publicly owned land suitable for agriculture and develop processes for making that land available to farmers and gardeners, and that access to fresh, healthy, local food be increased by expanding opportunities for community gardens and farmers markets. This bill addresses all of those issues, expanding access to land managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for these purposes.

The legislation can better meet the Commonwealth's need for increased food security with these changes and additions:

- 1) Special permits issued to gardeners should prioritize access for low-income and socially disadvantaged residents, who are disproportionately impacted by limited access to healthy food and land on which to grow their own.
- 2) The maximum term of a license for community gardens granted to non-profit organizations or to municipalities should be increased to 20 years. This will encourage increased investment in soil health and sustainable management practices, infrastructure needed for increased food production, and long-term improvement to residents' access to healthy foods.
- 3) In order to expand access to healthy food, tracts of appropriate DCR land of larger sizes should be made available to farmers for commercial use and should not be subject to the commercial limitations under section 2B of chapter 132A.
- 4) Establishing and operating a successful market requires significant investments of resources, including vendor recruitment, marketing, and infrastructure such as electricity to meet local Board of Health requirements and to ensure operation of SNAP & HIP systems. Therefore, special permits for farmers/public markets should not be subject to revocation at any time, as proposed in the current language, but rather should be permitted for at least 10 years and revokable only for cause or material change to use or site conditions of the permitted area.
- 5) Climate-controlled growing and season extension management practices, along with public need for increased access to healthy food, have allowed markets to operate in the late fall and winter, sometimes outside of daylight hours. When feasible and approved, markets should be allowed to operate past daylight hours.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan represents the views of thousands of residents and farms, as well as hundreds of organizations and businesses and is accepted by and used to inform the activities of in the Massachusetts Food Policy Council in developing recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability and equity in the Commonwealth's food system. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to food system policy, where issues of economic development, natural resources, equitable access to resources, and others are all taken into account when considering laws and regulations related to food.

We appreciate the Committee taking up these issues. You can find the Plan and see how these issues fit into the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole at <http://mafoodsystem.org/plan>. The Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer specific insights on this legislation, at the pleasure of the Committee.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Winton Pitcoff', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff
Director