



Thursday, May 12, 2021

Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St., Room 218
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support for H.884 An Act supporting the Commonwealth's food system

Dear Chairs Rausch and Dykema:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in support of to H.884 An Act supporting the Commonwealth's food system.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working toward implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, which makes recommendations for a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (FPC), and 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 the food system.

One recommendation of the Plan is the dedication of resources to a Food Policy Coordinator staff position to support the work of the FPC. The FPC plays an important role in providing state agencies, legislators, and private sector food system stakeholders a forum to collectively discuss food system issues, explore opportunities for coordination and collaboration, and develop policy recommendations.

Founded in 2010, the FPC's work has explored issues such as food waste, nutrition incentives programs, farmer education and training, and others. All members of the Council have benefited from these discussions and many have forged relationships that have strengthened their work in their agencies or in their communities. At the same time it has become clear that additional staff support is needed to ensure that the FPC can fully carry out its mission, particularly in helping to facilitate regular communication and coordination among state agencies.

This bill would address that issue by establishing a food system coordinator position to staff the FPC and work with all state agencies with programs or regulations that relate to the local food system. By adding this capacity, agencies will be better able to identify duplicative efforts, find opportunities to collaborate to support each other's missions related to the food system, and create new solutions to shared goals. This role would also be responsible for developing benchmarks and tracking metrics related to the state's food system goals, as a way to inform where investments of time and resources are effective and where more are needed.

In the summer of 2020 the Collaborative facilitated a series of listening sessions around the Commonwealth to assess progress toward the recommendations of the 2015 Plan, and identify areas where more work is needed. Those listening sessions consistently reflected concerns from food system stakeholders about the complexity of the state's food system regulatory, support, and policy structure. Many reported that it was challenging to find the correct individual or even agency to address concerns during the COVID-19 crisis. This staff position would also address this need, establishing a single point of contact who is familiar with all food system work within state government and can provide connections when needed.

Many of the state's strategies for addressing food system issues have acknowledged the need to implement cross-sectoral solutions that, for example, address both food security and agriculture in the case of the Healthy Incentives Program, or soil health and climate change in the case of the Commercial Food Material Disposal Ban. The Food Security Task Force, initiated to resolve food supply chain issues during the COVID crisis, demonstrated an acknowledgement that more collaboration is needed. Cross-sectoral programs are more sustainable, more efficient, and more impactful than those that focus more narrowly. The state's ability to launch and manage such efforts would be strengthened with the addition of a food policy coordinator position to help facilitate collaboration among agencies.

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