



Tuesday, May 18, 2021

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

RE: H974 An Act An Act protecting the natural resources of the Commonwealth

Dear Chairs Rausch and Dykema:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in response to H974 An Act An Act protecting the natural resources of the Commonwealth. We support the proposals in the bill.

The 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan recommended taking steps to ensure that the Commonwealth not lose land protected under Article 97 of the Constitution. This bill would represent action toward that goal.

We believe the legislation can better meet the Commonwealth's need for increased food security and climate change mitigation by removing or replacing the language in section 4(a) stipulating that waivers may only be provided when a lease interest for a natural resource purpose or use does not exceed 5 years.

Limiting the length of tenure on farmland creates instability in the food supply chain, and reduces investments in infrastructure such as soil health that not only help stabilize food production but also help mitigate the impacts of climate change. Leases for farmland should be for at least 15 years, with options to renew.

In addition, we recommend that the need for a waiver be suspended when land is leased for farming purposes. This will help address the goals of the Plan by increasing food production in Massachusetts, in turn supporting the state's local economy, public health, and natural resources.

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

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 read "Winton Pitcoff", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff
Director