



Monday, June 7, 2021

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon Street  
Rooms 413-B & 146  
Boston MA 02133

RE: S108/H250 An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program

Dear Chairs Gomez and Finn, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this written testimony in response to S108/H250, An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program.

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to a monthly limit dependent on household size, for SNAP dollars spent on fruits and vegetables purchased at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs across the Commonwealth.

The impact on families, farms, and the local economy since HIP's launch in April 2017 has been significant:

- SNAP recipients have purchased more than \$23 million of produce from local farmers, earning back an equal amount of incentives in the process.
- More than 91,000 households have participated in the program as of May 2021, representing more than 150,000 individuals. 45% of the households that have used the program include a senior, 30% include a child, and more than 33% include a person with a disability.
- The program's success also means annual savings of millions of dollars in public health costs, due to reductions in chronic disease and medical costs brought about by healthy eating.
- For every dollar spent on purchasing produce directly from a Massachusetts farmer, an additional \$2 in local economic activity is generated, meaning HIP has stimulated at least another \$46 million in financial transactions in the Commonwealth.
- For the more than 240 farmers participating in HIP, this \$23 million in increased sales has made it possible for them to hire more staff, purchase goods and services from local businesses, and employ sustainable management practices that protect farmland and other natural resources, contributing to Massachusetts' environmental health.

Incentives that give consumers more buying power to purchase fresh and healthy food through food assistance programs have a long history of success in Massachusetts, dating back to our

first-in-the-nation farmers market coupon program for WIC recipients in 1986. There is a need and opportunity to support and expand these efforts in order to: deliver SNAP and other benefits more strategically to help increase purchases of fresh, healthy, local food; demonstrate the long term viability of such incentives programs; and offer a model that can be replicated widely and sustained into the future. Many other states are looking to Massachusetts as a leader once again, as the only state with a statewide nutrition incentive program.

The Commonwealth has invested heavily in extensive operating infrastructure, management, and outreach, and this legislation is needed to protect that investment, and to ensure that the Program and a funding source exist in statute so that it will continue to operate. This no-cost bill has reported favorably from first reading in the last several General Courts, and we urge you to do the same this session.

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 was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability and equity in the Commonwealth's food system.

The Plan represents the views of thousands of residents and farms, as well as hundreds of organizations and businesses. 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 the food system. The goals of S108/H250 are directly addressed in an action item in the Plan:

Leverage and maximize the FINI grant award to increase use of SNAP and complementary benefit programs at farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and for community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Identify, support, and implement methods to sustain FINI-related healthy food purchasing incentive initiatives.  
(<http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/goal/rec/action/542/>)

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue, and urge you to consider it in the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole. The Plan, which provides that context, is available at <http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/>, and the Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer further details, at the pleasure of the Committee.

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

Sincerely,



Winton Pitcoff  
Director