



September 7, 2021

Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
24 Beacon St.
Room 218 and Room 473F
Boston, MA 02133

RE: S.502/H.860, An Act promoting equity in agriculture

Dear Chairs Rauch and Dykema, and members of the committee:

On behalf of BIPOC farmers, food equity leaders, and the organizations that represent and support them across Massachusetts, I am asking members to report favorably S.502/H.860, An Act promoting equity in agriculture.

For BIPOC communities around the Commonwealth, access to food and to resources that support farmers of color is inequitable. BIPOC Communities suffer food-related disease at 2x-3x normal rate. People of color make up 20% of the population in Massachusetts yet BIPOC farmers represent less than 3% of farmers in the state, resulting in lost jobs, lower food security, and reduced local economic activity. These inequities did not happen by accident. Agricultural and related policies and laws have historically not considered equity, and many of those policies and laws are still having damaging impact generations later.

This bill represents a chance to examine the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resource's (MDAR's) work and the opportunities that the agency has to address some of these inequities. More than simply creating a commission, it proposes a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of existing programs and successes, and the development of a plan to build upon those efforts. The bill would create a process that will begin to address some root areas of inequity in agriculture and the food system across the state while utilizing data to guide its endeavors by recommending:

- Policy that supports racially equitable investments, policies, and practices;
- Data collection, benchmark development, targeted outreach, and grantmaking to promote equitable access;
- Opportunities for existing programs and resources to be more equitably accessed; and
- Changes to existing laws and regulations to help them better address inequities.

Passage of this bill is an initiative of the Equity Policy Network of the MA Food System Collaborative, a working group comprised of leaders in agriculture, food, and policy from across the state. This group helped develop the bill with Senator Comerford and Representative Blais,

and is leading the campaign to engage organizations and individuals as part of our rapidly growing statewide network.

The working group, network members, and I look forward to providing testimony at the hearing for this bill and answering any questions that members may have. On behalf of the organizations and individuals that comprise the working group and the Equity Policy Network, I again urge all members of the committee to please support An Act Promoting Equity in Agriculture and report the bill favorably out of committee.

The Network 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 cursive script, appearing to read "Norris Guscott", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Norris Guscott
Equity Policy Network Manager