



March 17, 2021

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St., Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker:

Massachusetts' commitment to supporting food security with the \$36 million Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program in 2020 recognized the vital role our local food system has played in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The local food system has an equally critical role to play in the Commonwealth's recovery from the pandemic, and **we urge you to fund another round of the program by dedicating \$30 million of funds received from the federal American Rescue Act to its renewal.**

FSIG received 1,351 applications totaling more than \$200 million from farms, food pantries, fisheries, and other businesses and organizations in 314 municipalities. The proposals were all in support of efforts to produce, distribute, and market food, and to ensure that healthy food is accessible to all residents of the state. Each of the 369 projects funded represented an investment in the Commonwealth's local economy, public health, and natural resources.

The program is unique in defining food security as encompassing production, processing, distribution, and access, whereas other state programs tend to focus on a single sector of the food system. It provided significant investment into the food system at a time when it was urgently needed, and signaled a recognition on the part of state leaders that a strong local food system is critical to the overall wellbeing of the state, and to resiliency in times of crisis.

The funding for the program only allowed the state to make grants totaling 18% of requests. Significant need still remains. The number of households that are food insecure remains extremely high, and markets are still uncertain for farmers, fishermen, and other food supply chain businesses. Additional resources are needed to support the entities and organizations that feed the Commonwealth, to help them recover and build resilience so that they are able to continue to serve our residents.

We recommend that funding to renew the program also prescribe some grantmaking criteria and management practices to guide its implementation, as listed on the attachment. Further analysis

of the program, which informed these recommendations, is available in the attached report as well.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or for further information.

Sincerely,

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

Winton Pitcoff, Director

CC:

Senate President Karen Spilka

House Speaker Ronald Mariano

House Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Attachment

Operational recommendations for Food Security Infrastructure Grant program

- \$30 million in grants to be disbursed.
 - \$25 million targeted to for-profit enterprises, with priority given to farms.
 - \$5 million targeted to nonprofit entities, with priority given to entities focused on systemic solutions to food insecurity.
- \$100,000 cap per applicant.
- Proposal deadline should not coincide with peak growing season for farmers (April-October).
- The state should undertake a coordinated outreach effort with community partners to ensure that all eligible enterprises are aware of the resource, particularly those operated by and serving individuals and communities of color, low-income communities, indigenous communities, and other traditionally underserved communities.
- Webinars and email and phone support should be made available to assist with the application process.
- All applications should be reviewed and scored before any funds are committed.
- Up to 50% of grant funds should be disbursed upon completed contract, with remainder upon submission of receipts.
- Priority should be given to fully funding proposals that meet criteria, or applicants should be consulted prior to partial funding being awarded as to whether the resulting gap would mean the project would be unable to proceed as proposed.
- Grant completion date should be one year from date of completed contract.
- Short-term labor costs related to installing or launching use of new infrastructure should be allowable, within the timeframe of the contract. Such labor costs must be for new employees, or additional hours for existing employees.
- Allow for the purchase of used equipment from sellers within Massachusetts.
- The availability of other state funding resources should be a criteria, with priority given to those with fewer other opportunities for grants for similar projects.
- Adequate staff resources should be committed to ensure that reviews, decisions, and contracts are processed in a timely manner.
- Demographic information, including race, should be collected about the applicants themselves and the communities to be served by the project, and made public upon completion of decisions.
- Program administrators should write a final report, summarizing the program's grantmaking and demonstrating how the stated objectives and criteria were met through the investments.
- Analysis of the applicant pool should be used to guide future state investments in the local food system, through existing grant programs and potential new ones.