



## FY22 Local Food System Budget Priorities

March 19, 2021

Massachusetts' local food system has been vital to the response to COVID-19. When the national and global food supply chains failed, local farmers, fishermen, processors, and distributors stepped up to help fill the gaps. When the crisis increased demand for the emergency food system, food banks, pantries, schools, and other community-based organizations developed and implemented innovative ways to work with local producers, source food and distribute it to households in need.

Those same businesses and organizations are key to a strong, resilient recovery, and are integral to long term resiliency in the face of other major disruptions, such as climate change.

The public health crisis and the economic impact it has caused continue to create instability for families, food businesses, and communities throughout the Commonwealth. By investing in key food security programs the state will help ensure a smoother and quicker recovery and create long-term resilience of Massachusetts' food system. Those investments will, in turn, support public health, the local economy, and our natural resources, for many years to come.

We urge the legislature to support the following programs, at the noted levels:

### **Healthy Incentives Program (4400-1004): \$13,000,000 (level from FY21)**

The Healthy Incentives Program 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. Since its launch in April 2017, the program has provided more than 89,000 low-income households with more than \$22 million worth of fresh, healthy, local food, with all of that spending going directly to Massachusetts farms. During the COVID crisis the program was instrumental in providing food to some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents and in providing market stability for the state's farmers. This funding will allow the program to operate year-round, continue to grow, and add new farmer vendors to better meet the needs of areas of the state currently underserved by the program.

We request that line 4400-1004 include language from the February 2020 supplemental budget (H4502), stating that the program "shall be operated as a year-round 12-month program by the department of transitional assistance." In addition, we request that there be established a fund in service to the program that will consist of all revenues from public and private sources as appropriations, gifts, grants, donations, reimbursements from the federal government and grants-in-aid or other receipts to further the purposes of the program, as proposed in HD2939 from the current session.

**Food Security Infrastructure Grants: \$30,000,000 (bond funded in FY21)**

In 2020 the Commonwealth launched the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program, designating \$36 million “to ensure that individuals and families throughout the Commonwealth have access to food, with a special focus on food that is produced locally and equitable access to food” and “to ensure that farmers, fisherman and other local food producers are better connected to a strong, resilient food system to help mitigate future food supply and distribution disruption.” More than 1,300 applications from entities in 314 municipalities were submitted for more than \$200 million in proposed projects, but the funding limited support to only 18% of the amount requested. We urge renewal of this critical program to help ensure that food system businesses and organizations are able to continue to serve our communities, and we recommend a number of operational changes that will better target the program’s resources and meet the needs of potential applicants. (*Operational recommendations included in attachment.*)

**UMass Extension (2511-0100): \$1,046,400 (new)**

UMass Extension (The University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment) has been a trusted statewide presence in agriculture since 1911. This objective source of research, education, and technical assistance serves nearly 6,000 farmers and natural resource-based businesses annually. With \$4.5 billion in direct sales, \$7.1 billion in economic impact, and more than 36,000 jobs (*Farm Credit East, 2020*), the state’s agricultural production and processing industries rely on these resources to remain competitive in the marketplace, and to stay current on management practices that help them protect the farmland and natural resources they steward. Extension lost 2/3 of their staff due to budget cuts between 1988 and 2015, and in 2020 lost many more to COVID retirement incentives, with the resources for those positions recaptured by the University for other purposes. This funding would allow Extension to respond to the demands for services they receive most often, by hiring:

- Three educators to work with farmers and other green industry professionals on Integrated Pest Management, which teaches management practices intended to reduce pesticide use and protect natural resources.
- A healthy soils educator to help farmers and horticultural businesses to maintain compliance with new state regulations and achieve economic and environmental goals.
- Two educators to provide science-based information to fruit and vegetable growers, turf managers, landscapers, and the general public so they can make informed decisions that will protect pollinators and their habitats.
- Two educators to strengthen the agricultural skill sets of urban farmers, a fast-growing sector of the state’s agricultural economy.

This request would provide funding to support these eight staff positions, equipment required by each position, and overhead costs. The funding would be administered as grants through the Department of Agricultural Resources.

**Mass in Motion (4513-1111): \$1,000,000 (increase from FY21)**

This innovative program currently operates in more than 70 municipalities, helping build local networks that implement policy and practices to lower the risk of preventable chronic diseases by promoting opportunities for healthy and affordable food access, as well as increasing physical activity. During

COVID these networks were particularly effective in bringing together local stakeholder to develop solutions to rising rates of hunger in their communities, and to ensure that such solutions were implemented with consideration for the racial inequities amplified by the crisis. The networks combine immediate, practical solutions with approaches that work toward systemic change in order to ultimately reduce reliance on emergency responses. Funding for MiM helps leverage additional philanthropic and federal dollars for the Department of Public Health to pass on to participating communities, multiplying the impact of the state’s investment. The additional resources requested will allow the program to reach more communities throughout the Commonwealth.

In addition to these four priorities, we support the following investments as part of a sustainable, resilient, and equitable local food system.

Buy Local Agricultural Organizations	2511-0100	\$750,000
Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline	4400-1001	\$600,000
Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program	4400-1001	\$600,000
Massachusetts Food Trust	2511-0100	\$300,000
Mass Farm to School	2511-0100	\$120,000
Healthy soils fund		\$160,000
MA Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)	2511-0105	\$30,000,000

Thank you for your consideration of these budget items. Please address any questions to Winton Pitcoff, Director, at [winton@mafoodsystem.org](mailto:winton@mafoodsystem.org), or 508-304-1043.

## 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.