



Wednesday, March 3, 2020

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

Dear Governor Baker:

The undersigned organizations, representing thousands of farmers and businesses from across the Commonwealth, write to urge you to include **\$271,500 in the 2022 Capital Investment Plan to assist in the purchase of laboratory equipment and related services by the UMass Extension Soil and Plant Nutrient Testing Laboratory**. This funding represents an investment in economic development, preservation of natural resources, and climate change mitigation and resilience.

More than 6,000 farms, landscapers, institutions, municipalities, and homeowners in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Massachusetts rely on the services of the UMass Lab each year, submitting thousands of samples for analysis. Information generated by these analyses provides growers critical information about the health of their soil, helping them determine needed treatments so they can maximize crop yield and revenue, keep lawns and recreation facilities healthy, and comply with state regulations. The Lab is the only facility providing unbiased and independent agricultural and horticultural soil and tissue sampling in Massachusetts.

Healthy soils grow healthy and abundant crops, ensuring that farmers can produce high-quality fruits, vegetables, and fodder for their livestock. Lawns, recreational properties such as golf courses and parks, municipal and other community parks and recreation areas, the nursery industry, and other ornamental growing operations also rely on information provided by soil testing. These industries employ thousands of people and represent hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity each year in the Commonwealth. The analysis provided by the Lab informs the growers of how to best supplement their soil which, in turn, supports the highest yields and revenues for those growers.

Healthy soils are critical to mitigating the impacts of climate change by sequestering carbon and retaining water. Regular testing of soil and plant tissue has additional environmental benefits, in

that it helps ensure that all types of landscapes are built on a healthy foundation, using judicious amounts of nutrients, fertilizers and other soil amendments without excess nutrients entering the environment. Testing for lead and other heavy metals in soils and plant tissues is also needed to ensure that soil is managed in such a way so as not to negatively impact human health.

The Commonwealth has a demonstrated commitment to healthy soils, implementing regulations that necessitate the testing infrastructure provided by the Lab. Plant Nutrient Application Regulations (330 CMR 31), developed in response to legislative action in 2012, require regular testing of soils from agricultural and non-agricultural lands. The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs is currently developing a *Healthy Soils Action Plan* that will lead to recommendations for soil management practices that will require the kinds of testing conducted by the Lab. The Healthy Soils bill passed by the legislature and signed by you in January, commits the state to a healthy soils program that will also require ongoing testing facilities in order to measure progress. The UMass Lab is the only facility in Massachusetts committed to providing analysis tailored to meet the needs of industry professionals striving to meet the requirements of these regulations.

Two pieces of equipment critical to the services provided by the Lab – a CN analyzer, which determines total Carbon and Nitrogen in plant tissue, soils and other planting media; and an ICP spectrometer, which measures nutrient and heavy metal levels of soil, plant tissue and greenhouse media – have been in service for many years. They are expensive to repair, and when they are out of service the Lab cannot provide services. This funding will facilitate the purchase of new units, which will be in service for 15-20 years, and will allow the Lab to continue to perform its vital role. Lab staff and supplies are paid for through fees charged to customers for testing, and prices for these services must remain competitive, as many out-of-state labs provide similar services. Since the purchase of equipment used for fee-generating services is disallowed under guidelines for federal funds, state investment in this infrastructure is critical.

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative promotes, monitors, and facilitates implementation of the 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. We work with stakeholders from all sectors of the food system toward policy and regulatory solutions that support a sustainable and equitable food system.

The mission of the Green Industry Alliance of Massachusetts is to promote awareness and educate the public, elected and appointed officials, and relevant state government in the Commonwealth on best practices and professional standards in landscape, lawn care, irrigation, and integrated pest management.

Together, our organizations and those that join us in this request represent thousands of Massachusetts farmers, landscapers, and other green industry professionals whose livelihoods are dependent upon accurate and reliable diagnostic testing of the soils they work. This investment

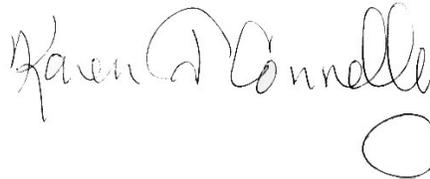
in the UMass Extension Soil and Plant Nutrient Testing Laboratory will help ensure that these professionals can continue their work producing food, maintaining our landscape, and carefully stewarding our natural resources.

Thank you for your consideration for this funding.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of:

American Farmland Trust, Northampton
Berkshire Grown, Great Barrington
Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association, Plymouth
Central Mass Grown, Worcester
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), South Deerfield
Golf Course Superintendents Association of Cape Cod
Golf Course Superintendents of New England, Norton
Groundwork Lawrence, Lawrence
Irrigation Association of New England, West Roxbury
Island Grown Initiative, Martha's Vineyard
Mass Audubon, Lincoln
Mass Fruit Growers Association, Amherst
Massachusetts Arborist Association, Natick
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts, Westford
Massachusetts Association of Dairy Farmers, Conway
Massachusetts Association of Landscape Professionals, Natick
Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals
Massachusetts Flower Growers Association, Bedford
Massachusetts Forest Alliance, Marlborough
Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association, Conway
New England Small Farm Institute at Lampson Brook Farm, Belchertown
New England Vegetable & Berry Grower's Association, Essex

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Beverly
Northeast Organic Farming Association/Massachusetts Chapter (NOFA/Mass), Barre
Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership, South Dartmouth
Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts, Cambridge
Sustainable Nantucket, Nantucket
The Trustees of Reservations, Boston