



March 1, 2022

House Committee on Ways and Means
24 Beacon St.
Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Michlewitz and Vice-Chair Ferrante:

From farms to food pantries, grocery stores to restaurants, food manufacturers to fishermen, Massachusetts' food system represents nearly 5% of our state's gross economic product and employs 10% of our workers. Its functioning is interwoven with our public health, our labor markets, our environment, and our commitment to equity and social justice.

The following recommendations for funding priorities to support our local food system in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget represent investments to ensure that the local food system is sustainable, equitable, and resilient. It includes support for education, food access, community-based coordination of services, production infrastructure, and necessary state agency capacity.

Also attached are recommendations for capital spending in support of local agriculture through funds committed by the American Rescue Plan Act. These are investments in farmland and in infrastructure needed by Massachusetts growers to remain sustainable and continue to play their vital roles in meeting the state's goals of strengthening food security, creating jobs and economic activity, and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

These recommendations all support the goals of the *Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan*, developed by the state as a "vision and plan to increase agricultural production, processing, and distribution that will serve as economic stimulus and address multiple related public health and food security issues." The legislature has championed many of the issues raised in the *Plan*, and we look forward to working with you to continue that support through these priorities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Winton Pitcoff, Director



FY23 Local Food System Budget Priorities

March 1, 2022

Massachusetts' local food system has been vital to the response to COVID-19 and is key to a strong, resilient recovery, as well as 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): \$20,000,000 (increase 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 113,000 low-income households with more than \$32 million worth of fresh, healthy, local food, with all of that spending going directly to Massachusetts farms.

Usage has increased significantly during the COVID pandemic, with FY21 incentives earned increasing by 15% over FY20, and FY22 through January increasing nearly 34% over the same period of FY21. SNAP enrollment has increased as well, climbing by 23% in the last two years. Massachusetts SNAP recipients will lose \$85 million per month in federal emergency SNAP allocations starting in May of this year. At the same time, food prices have been increasing significantly. HIP usage is expected to continue to grow as families struggle to fill those gaps, and it is essential that the program have enough funding to meet demand.

We support the language in this line as included in the FY22 budget, with the following changes:

- “...(i) the number of households utilizing the program including household size, age, and racial demographic information;...”
- “...(iv) a breakdown of the total number of program clients and vendors by their ~~location in the commonwealth~~ municipality;
- “...(v) ~~the program’s efforts to identify and better serve those areas with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables~~ the Department’s efforts, plans, and timeline for identifying geographic areas that are underserved by the program and increasing program activity in those areas.

including metrics and factors to be used to make determinations for the addition and siting of vendors,...”

In addition, we recommend that there be established a fund in service to the program that will consist of all revenues from public and private sources including 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 S108/H250 in the current session.

Food Security Infrastructure Grants: \$30,000,000 (*bond funded in FY21 and FY22*)

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.” In 2021 Governor Baker launched a second round of the program with \$15 million in capital spending. Combined, the two rounds received more than 1,900 applications from entities in more than 300 municipalities for more than \$300 million in proposed projects. Available funding limited support to only 17% of the amount requested. We urge further investment in this critical program to help ensure that food system businesses and organizations are able to continue to serve our communities.

UMass Extension (2511-0100): \$620,570 (*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:

- An educator 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 maintain compliance with new state regulations and achieve economic and environmental goals.
- An educator 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.
- An educator 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 four staff positions, equipment required by each position, and overhead costs. The funding would be administered as grants through the Department of Agricultural Resources.

Local Food Policy Councils (2511-0100): \$250,000 (new)

Massachusetts is home to more than twenty food local policy councils (FPCs) that work to strengthen the food system and increase food security. Each of them bring together local food system stakeholders, including public health, agriculture, and anti-hunger organizations as well as institutions, schools, youth, farmers, and people experiencing food insecurity. The state recognizes the value of FPCs, having formed the Massachusetts Food Policy Council more than ten years ago. In 2020 Governor Baker launched the Food Security Task Force in response to COVID, and it played a critical role in developing the state’s response to the food supply chain crisis, further demonstrating the value of collaborative work to solve complex food system issues. Support is needed to build the equity, efficacy, and capacity of local FPCs to develop and implement local solutions to food system challenges. This grant program, to be administered by the Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) in consultation with the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, would provide some of that needed support.

Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) staffing: (2511-0100): \$300,000 increase

MDAR is one of the state’s smallest agencies, yet it plays an essential role in ensuring that our food supply is safe and consistent, our local food economy is resilient and competitive, and our agricultural resources are stewarded in ways that enhance our environment and build sustainability for our food system. Due to rapidly changing agricultural markets and technologies, food supply chain disruptions brought on by the COVID pandemic, and significant state and federal funding allotments to be managed, demand on the agency has grown substantially in recent years. Staffing needs for land stewards and contract and grant management are particularly acute, as well as for personnel to help farmers respond to the growing threats of both invasive species and climate change. We recommend this additional funding to allow the Department to hire staff where most needed.

In addition to these five priorities, we support the following investments as part of a sustainable, resilient, and equitable local food system. Campaigns for these items are being led by other stakeholder organizations.

Buy Local Agricultural Organizations	2511-0100	\$ 750,000
Project Bread’s FoodSource Hotline	4400-1001	\$ 850,000
Project Bread’s Child Nutrition Outreach Program	7053-1925	\$ 700,000
Massachusetts Food Trust	2511-0100	\$ 300,000
Mass Farm to School	2511-0100	\$ 120,000
MA Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)	2511-0105	\$ 30,000,000
Senior Farmshare Program	9110-1900	\$ 75,000
School Meals Extension	7053-1925	\$ 120,000,000
Mass in Motion	4513-1111	Maintain FY22 language



Addressing local agriculture needs in the ARPA II budget

March 1, 2022

Farms play an essential role in ensuring that Massachusetts is able to meet its goals of food security for all residents, and have an equally vital role in helping the state address climate change through management practices that enhance natural resources and can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Farmers steward hundreds of thousands of acres in the Commonwealth, create tens of thousands of jobs, and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the local economy. But our ability to sustain farms and grow food in Massachusetts faces two significant challenges: the loss of farmland to development and other threats, and the changing climate.

As the legislature discusses how to invest the remaining funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), we urge lawmakers to consider these two priority needs for the local food system.

Farmland Protection: \$100,000,000

Massachusetts lost nearly 60,000 acres of farmland between 1997 and 2007, or more than 10% of all productive farmland in the state. The state has an active program to purchase agricultural restrictions and permanently protect farmland, as well as other programs that help sustain farms and protect their land, but they are all oversubscribed and unable to keep up with demand or outpace the threats from development and other pressures. Farmers and aspiring farmers regularly cite the lack of available farmland as the primary challenge for sustaining their operations. There are 208,000 acres of unprotected farmland currently in use, and recent state purchases of agricultural restriction easements cost an average of approximately \$12,500 per acre to permanently protect that farmland. The cost to the Commonwealth to protect all of this vital non-renewable resource would be \$2.6 billion, and at our current rate of spending, this would take 300 years. We propose an investment of \$100 million to begin making more significant progress toward this goal.

For a reserve for investments in protecting and improving access to farmland; provided, that funds shall be transferred to the department of agricultural resources for expenditure, including, but not limited to, for acquisition of agricultural conservation easements, support for licensure of publicly owned lands for agricultural production, support for existing land protection programs operated by the department as well as any proposed by the forthcoming farmland action plan, development and implementation of data collection and monitoring to measure impact of these investments, and other eligible purposes; provided further that no less than \$10,000,000 of these funds shall be used in the support of socially disadvantaged farmers and those farming in environmental justice communities, including those producing food to satisfy the state's commitment to the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program ...
\$100,000,000

Climate adaptation and mitigation: \$50,000,000

Just as farms help mitigate climate change by capturing carbon and protecting vital natural resources, the viability of their operations is continually threatened by the changing climate. Dramatic changes in temperature and precipitation result in crop loss and pose other challenges each year. The state's grant programs that target climate-related needs for farmers are oversubscribed every year, and much of the more than \$120 million in farm requests to the Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program (FSIG) have been related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, though the program has been able to fund only a very small fraction of those. We propose an investment of \$50 million to help farmers remain sustainable through the ongoing climate crisis.

For a reserve for farm climate change adaptation and mitigation; provided, that funds shall be transferred to the department of agricultural resources for expenditure, including, but not limited to, grants to farms to support controlled climate growing, energy efficiency, renewable energy, climate resilient management practices, infrastructure needs to support climate resilience, development and implementation of data collection and monitoring to measure impact of these investments, and other eligible purposes ... \$50,000,000