



Tuesday, March 21, 2022

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

RE: Agricultural Requests for FY2023 Capital Investment Plan

Dear Governor Baker:

The thousands of Massachusetts farmers that feed us each day have a reputation for innovation, perseverance, and a commitment to serving their communities. Never has been this more evident than in the last two years, when farms have adapted quickly to changes in the food supply chain, stepped up to fill gaps that the industrial supply chains were unable to, and boosted increased our state's local economy at a time of broad economic turmoil.

But financial sustainability is challenging for most of the Commonwealth's farms. Land, energy, and other inputs cost more in Massachusetts than elsewhere in the US, and yet the products raised by our farmers must be priced competitively against food coming from states and countries where costs are lower. The USDA reports that Massachusetts farmers earn, on average, 96 cents for every dollar spent on production, making us one of only four states in the nation where on average farms operate at a loss.

With \$4.5 billion in direct sales, \$7.1 billion in economic impact, and more than 36,000 jobs (*Farm Credit East, 2020*), state investment in agriculture has failed to keep pace with demand, and does not reflect the Commonwealth's commitments to food security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, or local economic development. We recommend the following investments in the FY23 capital spending plan in order to help close that gap.

MDAR grant programs

The state's agricultural production and processing industries were offered only \$3.8 million in grants last year through the six critical programs below, while demand was more than twice that. State investment must increase to meet this demonstrated need. As you consider capital budget allocations for FY23, we urge you to increase funding for some of the most critical grant programs that support local farms and other local food businesses.

The programs referred to in the chart include:

- **Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP).** Funds conservation practices that protect natural resources while supporting farm sustainability. This program is particularly

critical as a tool to help farmers recover from the 2020 drought. In past drought years, most recently 2017, additional funding has been directed to this program to meet that need.

- **Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP).** Provides business planning and technical assistance to farms as they innovate to compete in the marketplace. In doing so, it helps those farms protect farmland and provide greater food security for their communities.
- **Urban Agriculture.** Supports projects that grow food, teach job skills, build community, and provide nutritious food to households with limited access to fresh produce in their communities.
- **Agricultural Produce Safety Improvement Program (APSIP).** Helps farms keep our food supply safe by supporting them in meeting the requirements imposed by the federal government and enforced by the state under the Food Safety Modernization Act.
- **Agricultural Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies (ACRE).** Supports farms in updating aging infrastructure and adopting sustainable management practices as part of the Commonwealth’s commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Agricultural Compost Infrastructure Enhancement Program (ACIEP).** Supports farms that provide critical composting infrastructure, necessitated by the pending lower threshold of the state’s Commercial Food Material Disposal Ban, the need for soil amendments to help increase food production, and the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our requests for each of these programs are in the far-right column, following data about the FY22 program’s demonstrated demand.

		<u>FY22</u> Allocation	<u>FY22</u> Awardees	<u>Total</u> <u>FY22</u> Requests	<u>FY22</u> Applicants	<u>FY23</u> Request
E019	Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP)	\$350,000	11	\$648,939	19	\$600,000
E031	Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)	\$700,000	9	\$1,313,000	25	\$1,000,000
E048	Urban Agriculture	\$315,000	13	\$318,924	13	\$315,000
E061	Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP)	\$750,000	28	\$2,336,089	71	\$1,500,000
E083	Agricultural Climate Resilience Enhancement	\$1,250,000	41	\$2,167,047	68	\$2,000,000
E114	Agricultural Compost Infrastructure Enhancement Program (ACIEP)	\$185,000	5	\$388,851	12	\$300,000
		\$3,550,000	113	\$7,172,850	208	\$5,715,000

Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG)

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 you included an additional \$15 million for the program in your capital budget. 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 you to support this program with \$30,000,000 this year.** This investment in this critical program will help ensure that food system businesses and organizations are able to continue to serve our communities.

UMass Extension Soil and Plant Nutrient Testing Laboratory

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. Two pieces of equipment critical to the services provided by the Lab have been in service for many years. **We are requesting \$200,000** to 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. Further information about this request is in the attached letter from 28 agriculture and natural resource service and protection organizations.

Each of these requested investments represents a commitment on the part of the Commonwealth to support farms and other businesses in securing our food supply, mitigating and building resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting businesses with a proven track record of bolstering the local economy.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this input.

Sincerely,

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

Winton Pitcoff
Director



Tuesday, March 22, 2022

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 **\$200,000 in the FY2023 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 2021, 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.

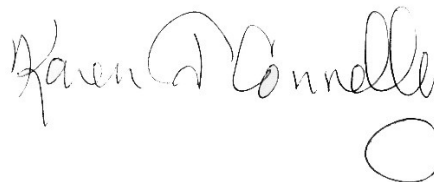
Together, our organizations and those that join us in this request represent thousands of Massachusetts farmers, landscapers, and other green industry professionals whose livelihoods are dependent upon accurate and reliable diagnostic testing of the soils they work. This investment in the UMass Extension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



Winton Pitcoff, Director
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative
winton@mafoodsystem.org



Karen Connelly, Coordinator
Massachusetts Green Industry Alliance
karen.connelly.gia@gmail.com

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