



**Massachusetts Food System Collaborative  
2022 State Representative and Senator Questionnaire**

**Your name:** Margaret Scarsdale

**Office Sought, including district:** State Representative, 1st Middlesex District

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**What are three of your priorities that reflect your commitment to a healthy food system for Massachusetts and your constituents?**

**Priority 1**

I am fortunate to live in the First Middlesex District, home to many working farms. I have witnessed first-hand the collaborative nature of farmers (many of them my neighbors), including the most recent partnership between established farmers in Pepperell as they worked to help a young couple, newly arrived in town, establish their own working farm. Still, the overwhelming majority of our farmlands are not protected, and continually give way to developers or other uses. I believe the state must invest in this critical infrastructure, and I support robust funding for programs like Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) that permanently protect farmland.

**Priority 2**

In order to better protect ourselves against the increasing impacts of climate change, we must ensure that our food supply system is sustainable, which includes being resistant to supply chain disruptions: The most practical solution, environmentally and economically, is to ensure our farms are vibrant. Yet state-level support systems like UMass Extension and MDAR, which help build farm efficiencies and provide education and technical assistance, are woefully underfunded. This must be addressed and I support all efforts to ensure our state agencies can adequately support our farmers.

**Priority 3**

Relatedly, we must ensure farmers receive the financial support they need so that we do not lose more farmland to other uses, including development. There are multiple avenues for support, including priority funding from the Food Security Infrastructure Grant; adequately compensating farmers for the climate change mitigation benefits they provide, like carbon sequestration and stormwater mitigation; and allowing farmers to participate in solar development projects.

**How would you support the Healthy Incentives Program?**

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) is a proven initiative that provides integral support for families receiving SNAP benefits. Like other programs that address social justice needs, HIP is deserving of, and is in need of, additional funding to help ensure that it can meet increased demand and address gaps in the existing infrastructure. For the FY23 budget cycle, I contacted my State Senator (Edward Kennedy) to request that he support Amendment # 418: I understand from the senator that he did vote “yes”, and that this amendment has passed. For future budget cycles, I will continue to support adequate funding for this much-needed program.

**How would you support farmers in adapting to climate change?**

Farmers are on the front line of climate change and see its effects on crop yields, the increasing encroachment of invasive plants (and the resulting costs of managing these plants), and uncertainty about water supply issues vis-a-vis water rationing. I speak to farmers in the First Middlesex regularly and understand how difficult – and rewarding – this work is for them. I support allowing farmers to have solar panel arrays on unused portions of their land as a way to increase revenue. I believe farmers should be incentivized for the contributions they are already making to help mitigate climate change, including being a resource for wastewater recharge and carbon sequestration. I will advocate for funding for programs and agencies that help support farmers, including MDAR and the Food Security Infrastructure grant.

**How would you help to ensure that children understand where food comes from, the importance of healthy eating, and other essential food literacy issues?**

I would work with the Joint Committee on Education to encourage them to include food literacy in our schools' curriculum. I would work with the superintendents in my district to arrange an opportunity to come speak to classrooms to help elevate this issue, ideally partnering with a farmer so that students could see real-world examples of collaboration and understand how elected officials and constituents work together to solve problems.

**What policies or investments would you support to protect farmland and increase farmland access?**

One of my top three priorities is the protection of farmlands: As one farmer said to me, “Once a farmland is developed, it’s gone forever.” The state is a critical partner here, and I will fight for robust funding for agencies and programs that permanently protect farmland, such as Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) and other programs that employ conservation restrictions on agricultural land.

**What strategies would you support to reduce food waste?**

It is tragic that Massachusetts wastes over 20% of its food supply while so many people are food insecure. I support efforts to re-direct excess food to programs that support people in need. To mitigate the climate change impacts of food waste, I will advocate for better public education about the impacts of food waste, and support funding for municipalities to create municipal composting programs.

**How would you work to ensure that food system stakeholders of color - consumers, workers, farmers, landowners, and others - have equitable access to opportunities in all aspects of the food system?**

Growing up in the Deep South, I witnessed first-hand how people of color are disenfranchised in every segment of society: Access to quality education, housing, jobs, and more. While the decades in between then and now have secured some protections, and notwithstanding Massachusetts has historically been a progressive leader in civil rights, we are nowhere near parity, including for farmers. This must be addressed in a fierce, committed manner.

Several policy areas can be strengthened/enacted to begin to rectify centuries of disinvestment and disenfranchisement. Most fundamentally, as State Representative, I would work to ensure that there is meaningful representation of BIPOC on policy-setting Boards/Committees/Commissions and in regulatory reviews. Creating or enforcing policies without representation of all constituencies does not produce just and equitable policies and BIPOC voices should never be left out.

I will work with my colleagues to develop and implement policies that ensure that BIPOC farmers do not continue to be systematically disadvantaged. As an example, the current cost to purchase farmland is prohibitive, which scales exponentially the larger the farm. Farms smaller than 5-acres cannot take advantage of tax reductions and are not included in the protections afforded in Article 99, which advantages those with the capital to purchase larger farms immediately. I support efforts to update this Article so that smaller farms can take advantage of these protections, and I believe that small farms should be included in the same tax reductions that larger farms can access.

My community of Pepperell is partnering with Worcester to establish a food hub in town: I support establishing community food hubs and increased investment in communities with food deserts, which are prevalent in many of Massachusetts' communities of color. We must advocate for communities to have food sovereignty, especially communities of color. Access to healthy, culturally-appropriate food is a determinant of so many other components of the lived experiences of Massachusetts residents, and we need to be strategically investing and creating policies that incentivize equitable access to high-quality and affordable food Commonwealth-wide. This includes increased investment for our food pantries, which provide emergency food services and supporting legislation to lessen the burdens on farmers seeking to donate food to pantries.