



January 16, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey, Governor
Massachusetts State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

Knowing where food comes from, how it affects our bodies, and the role it plays in our culture, our communities, and our environment is essential. To help Massachusetts children lead healthy, independent, thoughtful lives, **all students in grades K-12 should have access to food system education in school**, learning about agriculture, nutrition, food justice, and culinary skills. These lessons will teach critical life skills and allow students to make informed decisions about food.

To further this goal, **we urge you to include \$1.25 million in your fiscal year 2024 budget** to support a grant program to fund District-Level Food Literacy Coordinators, professional development opportunities for school staff, and state agency staff to support this work. Details about the proposed funding are on the attached sheets.

Many students throughout the state are already learning about the food system in science, social studies, wellness, culinary arts, horticulture, and other classes, as well as in cafeterias and school gardens, and in their broader communities. But not every student in Massachusetts has consistent access to high-quality education about the food system.

Food literacy is not included in most state frameworks or tested on the MCAS, making it challenging to include these concepts in the curriculum. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach about the food system and struggle to find high-quality, culturally appropriate, curriculum aligned lessons. To ensure that all students have access to food system education, state investments are needed.

This proposed investment in food system education will have a lasting impact on hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts children's health, the environment, and local economic development. We urge you to include it in your budget proposal as a first step toward enduring that high quality food education is available to all students statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input.

Sincerely,

Winton Pitcoff, Director

On behalf of these campaign supporters:

Backyard Growers
Berkshire Grown, Inc.
Chicopee FRESH
ChopChop Family
CISA (Community involved in Sustaining Agriculture)
CommonWealth Kitchen
Gardening The Community
Groundwork Somerville
Grow Food Northampton
Growing Places
Health Equity Partnership of North Central Mass Inc (CHNA9)
Healthy Chelsea
Hilltown Community Development Corporation
Island Grown Initiative
MA Healthy School Lunch Coalition
Mass. Farm to School
Massachusetts Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND)
Massachusetts Environmental Education Society
Massachusetts Envirothon
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts Seafood Collaborative
Mill City Grows
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association/Mass Chapter
Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Project Bread
Regional Environmental Council
Salem Food for All
Seeds of Solidarity
Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP)
Sustainable CAPE
Terra Cura Inc.
The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
The Food Project
The Food Voice
The Greater Boston Food Bank
The Marion Institute
The Trustees of Reservations
Worcester County Food Bank
World Farmers

Food Literacy for all Massachusetts Children

Knowing where food comes from, how it affects our bodies, and the role it plays in our culture, our communities, and our environment is essential. To help Massachusetts children lead healthy, independent, thoughtful lives, all students in grades K – 12 should have access to food system education in school, learning about agriculture, nutrition, food justice, and culinary skills. These lessons will teach critical life skills and allow students to make informed decisions about food.

Food system education connects with a range of critical issues:

- **Physical health:** Understanding how nutrition and cooking impacts physical growth and health can have a long term impact on students' wellness and that of their families.
- **Mental health:** Activities like growing plants, raising animals, and cooking allow students to participate in social-emotional learning and practice skills such as teamwork, planning, and empathy.
- **Jobs:** Massachusetts' food sector employs hundreds of thousands of workers with a range of skill levels. By learning about these potential careers and developing the necessary skills, more students will be prepared to enter professions such as farming, fishing, health and wellness, engineering, processing, and transportation.
- **Environment:** Learning about the food system is an important lens through which to understand the impacts of climate change as well as how individual decisions can have an impact.
- **Community:** Food system lessons incorporate discussions about inequitable access to food, providing students with the opportunity to become civically involved in their community.

Many students throughout the state are already learning about the food system in science, social studies, wellness, culinary arts, horticulture, and other classes, as well as in cafeterias and school gardens, and in their broader communities. These lessons have had a profound impact on many of their lives and their families. But not every student in Massachusetts has consistent access to high-quality education about the food system.



Successful models of classroom food literacy work abound in Massachusetts. Building on those successes can have a transformative impact not just on the students themselves, but on their families, their communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.

Food Literacy for all Massachusetts Children

Food literacy is not included in most state frameworks or tested on the MCAS, making it challenging to include these concepts in the curriculum. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach about the food system and struggle to find high-quality, culturally appropriate, curriculum-aligned lessons. The state should set food literacy standards and provide resources to support educators in integrating these subjects into their curricula.

To ensure that all students have access to food system education, state investments are needed in:

- professional development and materials;
- staffing food system education coordinator positions;
- a central repository for high quality, culturally appropriate, standards-aligned lessons; and
- better coordination among state agencies and nonprofits.

Funding for these efforts will leverage significant impact, as it will facilitate collaboration among decision makers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students who recognize the importance of teaching food literacy in schools and want to collectively work to implement solutions.

Curricula, lessons, field trips, materials, and professional development must include concepts of racial equity in the food system including historical context of how inequities in the food system came to be. Grants and other opportunities should give preference to under-resourced schools, especially those in food marginalized areas.

Successful models of classroom food literacy work abound in Massachusetts. Building on those successes to ensure that all students graduate with an understanding of where their food comes from, how to feed themselves healthfully, and the role they can play in ensuring a sustainable and equitable food system can have a transformative impact not just on the students themselves, but on their families, their communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.



Invest in Food System Education for Massachusetts Children

A \$1.25 million investment in food system education will have a lasting impact on hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts children's health, the environment, and local economic development.

Fund State and District Staff Positions through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

To ensure that teachers are supported in offering food system education, the state should allocate funding to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to hire a full-time Food Literacy Coordinator, expand the Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program, fund professional development opportunities, and offer a pilot grant for school districts to hire district-level food literacy coordinators.

The statewide **Food Literacy Coordinator** will review grant applications from districts, create a database of high-quality food literacy lessons, ensure food literacy is embedded in curricula and Frameworks, facilitate a network of district food literacy coordinators, and organize professional development opportunities and an annual conference about food system education.

Expanding the capacity of the **Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program** will ensure that school districts go beyond the requirements of wellness policies to integrate best practices around nutrition education and make plans to implement those goals.

Professional development opportunities and an annual conference about food system education will provide spaces for teachers to learn how to integrate food literacy lessons into their curriculum and make connections with community partners, earn continuing education credits, receive ongoing support, and identify funding sources to purchase materials to implement new lessons.

District-level **food literacy coordinators** will create food system curricula for the district, connect teachers to resources, apply for local, state and federal grants, and increase local procurement. These positions exist at several districts in Massachusetts and this pilot will enable five more districts to hire this position. Funding for each pilot district will also include stipends for a teacher to coordinate the garden at each school that has one, and funding for nutrition and agricultural education-related infrastructure needs.

Proposed DESE Funding

- DESE Food Literacy Coordinator: \$150,000
- Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program expansion: \$100,000
- Professional Development and Annual Conference: \$150,000
- Grant for District-Level Food Literacy Coordinators and stipends for teachers: \$600,000 (5 Districts @ \$120,000)

Total: \$1,000,000

Fund A Statewide Position through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

The state should allocate funding for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to hire a full time Agricultural Literacy Coordinator to help connect schools to people, places, and opportunities in the Massachusetts food system. Funding for transportation for field trips and workshops for teachers will help deepen students' learning.

The **Agricultural Literacy Coordinator** at MDAR will bring the Massachusetts food system to students by coordinating visits to farms, aquaculture farms, farmers markets, and other food sites; providing engaging and accurate materials; explaining food system career opportunities; and bringing food system practitioners and experts into the classroom. They will collaborate with the Division of Marine Fisheries around local seafood, the Department of Transitional Assistance around food justice, and the Department of Public Health around nutrition and food safety, and will work closely with the Food Literacy Coordinator at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

As **funds for transportation** are often a barrier for schools to participate in field trips, MDAR will facilitate a grant program to offset travel costs. The grant program will also include funds to provide honoraria to support the farmers and food producers who are investing time in offering these educational opportunities.

MDAR will also coordinate in-person **workshops for teachers** to deepen their understanding of the local food system, or make grants available for other organizations to provide workshops. Funds will support materials, space rentals, and speaker honoraria.

MDAR Funding:

- Agricultural Literacy Coordinator: \$150,000
- Workshops for teachers: \$50,000
- Grant fund for field trips: \$50,000

Total: \$250,000



The Campaign for Food System Literacy is facilitated by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. Contact Brittany Peats at brittany@mafoodsystem.org for more information.