



March 11, 2023

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

Dear Chairman Michlewitz, Vice-Chair Ferrante, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative works with hundreds of food system stakeholders around the Commonwealth. Our engagement with these partners over the past year have identified several state funding priorities to help further a resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system. We respectfully share these items with you for consideration as you develop your proposed budget for fiscal year 2024. They include:

- Healthy Incentives Program: \$24,000,000 (level funding from FY23)
- Food Literacy: \$1,250,000 (new program)
- Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program: \$25,000,000 (as proposed in H1)
- Department of Agricultural Resources: \$11,068,149 (as proposed in H1)
- Department of Environmental Protection: \$51,969,763 (as proposed in H1)

Details about each of these items follow.

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 Committee 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,

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

Winton Pitcoff, Director



## FY24 Local Food System Budget Priorities

March 11, 2023

Massachusetts' local food system is central to ensuring food security, to meeting the Commonwealth's climate goals, to ensuring a strong local economy, and to many other social and economic issues. Farmers and fishermen, food pantries and public health professionals, schools and community-based organizations all demonstrated their commitment to feeding their communities throughout the pandemic, and are playing key roles in ensuring a strong recovery.

By investing in food security programs the state will support long-term resilience of Massachusetts' local 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): \$24,000,000 (*level from FY23*)**

The Healthy Incentives Program provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to a monthly limit depending on household size, for SNAP benefits 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 187,000 low-income households with more than \$45 million worth of fresh, healthy, local food, with all of that spending going directly to Massachusetts farms. This funding will allow the program to operate year-round, continue to grow, and add new farmer vendors to better meet the needs of areas of the state currently underserved by the program.

During the COVID crisis the program was instrumental in providing food to some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents and in providing market stability for the state's farmers. Food insecurity remains higher than it was prior to the pandemic, and as federal pandemic benefits have expired, state supports such as HIP are more essential than ever to help families cover the rising costs of food.

We anticipate that some funding from FY23 will be unspent by June 30, and request that those funds be continued and that the FY24 budget provide additional resources to total \$24,000,000.

We support the language included in this budget line in FY23, and request an addition of the establishment of a fund in service to the program as proposed in HD2737 in the current session.

**Food Literacy: \$1,250,000 (*new request*)**

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.

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.

To further this goal, we request the inclusion of \$1.25 million in FY24 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. 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.

**Food Security Infrastructure Grants (2000-0121): \$25,000,000 (*bond funded in previous years*)**

In 2020 Massachusetts launched the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program “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.” Since then the program has awarded \$62 million in grants to 500 recipients, ranging from farms to food pantries to schools. Those investments not only support food security, they also create jobs, strengthen the local economy, and by supporting local farms and fisheries contribute to the state's climate goals by allowing those businesses to employ management practices that protect natural resources. But the program has only been able to fund 21% of the nearly \$300,000,000 in proposals submitted, demonstrating significant unmet demand.

This program has been inconsistently funded thus far, through federal and bond funds. We support Governor Healey's proposal to make the program permanent and fund it with \$25,000,000 in FY24.

**Department of Agricultural Resources Administration (2511-0100): \$11,068,149**

Governor Healey's proposed budget for MDAR would increase the Department's capacity significantly, allowing it to better meet the needs of farmers around issues related to farmland protection, environmental justice, marketing, and other critical areas. Massachusetts farmers continue to spend more on producing

food for our residents than they earn selling those products, and adequate services from MDAR are essential to help close that gap. We support the funding proposed in H1 for MDAR.

**Department of Environmental Protection (2200-0100): \$51,969,763**

Governor Healey's proposed budget for DEP would boost the Department's ability to meet the Commonwealth's goals of eliminating food waste. This will help channel excess edible food to those who need it, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by diverting food waste from landfills, create clean energy by providing feedstock for anaerobic digestors, and create compost which boosts soil fertility, helping farms produce more food and remain sustainable. We support the funding proposed in H1 for DEP.

# Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)

The Healthy Incentives Program means healthy families, sustainable farms, and a strong local economy. Operated by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, the program provides a dollar-for-dollar reimbursement when SNAP users buy fresh, healthy, local food directly from Massachusetts farmers.

## Since HIP began in April, 2017:

SNAP households have purchased more than **\$45 million** from local farmers in healthy, local foods.

More than **187,000 households / 300,000** individuals have used HIP.

- 44% of those families included seniors, who need less medical attention when they eat healthy foods.
- 30% of those families included children, who do better in school when they eat healthy food.
- 30% of those families include a person with a disability.



294 HIP farmers across the Commonwealth sell food at farmers markets, CSAs, farm stands and mobile markets at **nearly 600 points of sale.**

In a study of program operations, HIP participants on average purchased **1.23 daily servings of fruits and vegetables per person.** This helps reduce the incidence of dietary related illnesses and public health care costs.

HIP helps **lessen MA's estimated \$2.4 billion in avoidable costs related to food insecurity and hunger** in MA by increasing access to healthy foods to vulnerable people.

Each HIP dollar spent results in an additional \$2 in local economic impact, when farmers spend those dollars on local goods and services. So HIP has resulted in **an additional \$88 million in local economic impact.**

To address disproportionately low usage among African American SNAP clients and SNAP clients with disabilities, **in 2022 the program added 100 vendors** who expressed a commitment to addressing these inequities.

**HIP helps build an economically sustainable food system, helping make healthy food available to more people, and supporting farmers to be able to charge fair prices for what they grow, allowing them to better steward their land, protect natural resources, and contribute to the local economy.**

# HIP's Impact



“Participating in HIP has given us an ability to actually provide fresh produce to customers who wouldn’t have access to it otherwise. Our SNAP sales have increased 40% since the HIP program started, and has been able to fund our expansion to more markets and a CSA that offers delivery for customers who can’t make it to the markets. We feel much more integrated into our local food system and able to provide in ways that we couldn’t before.”

- Mill City Grows, Lowell

“My family needs the mobile market. Cooking is what we do. It’s part of our culture, and you can’t cook with bad ingredients. [This market] has the best ingredients I’ve seen in Boston, and I can actually afford it.”

- HIP customer, Roxbury YMCA Trustees mobile market

“Since HIP has been introduced in Massachusetts, I have been able to eat much healthier. As a senior citizen in treatment for incurable cancer, I have lowered immunity. Particularly during the holidays, it is a blessing to have that extra \$40 per month of guaranteed fresh produce for an immunity boost, and with inflation and obvious rising food costs, my SNAP dollars stretch farther due to HIP.”

- Marcia M., HIP customer, Dennis

“HIP helps consumers and farmers. It is a brilliant, simple, effective method for subsidizing healthy vegetables and stimulating the local economy.”

- Elena Colman, Small Farm, Stow



The Caucus chose HIP as a priority because it demonstrates the connections between public health, local food, food access, the local economy, and the environment, and proves that public investments in comprehensive programs can have far-reaching impacts.

- MA Legislative Food System Caucus

The collaboration between MDAR and DTA on the HIP program has been a **true success story** for farmers’ markets and the communities they serve.

- Former MDAR Commissioner  
John Lebeaux

The Healthy Incentives Program is a powerful tool in our work to address food security issues across the state. The program not only increases access to fresh, locally-grown food for SNAP clients, but also brings critical economic support to our local farms and communities.

- Former DTA Comm. Amy Kershaw

The more than 300 supporters of the Campaign for HIP Funding have successfully advocated for \$59 million for HIP since 2017. Join us in supporting this essential program!

[www.hipma.org](http://www.hipma.org)



# 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.



[www.mafoodsystem.org/foodliteracy](http://www.mafoodsystem.org/foodliteracy)



# 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](mailto:brittany@mafoodsystem.org) for more information.*