



January 8, 2023

Secretary Rebecca Tepper
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge St., 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Secretary Tepper:

Congratulations on joining the administration. We look forward to working with you in your new role.

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative was founded in 2016, following the completion of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the state's Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the legislature and governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability and equity in the Commonwealth's food system.

The Plan represents the views of thousands of residents and farms, as well as hundreds of organizations and businesses. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to food system policy, where issues of economic development, natural resources, equitable access to resources, and others are all taken into account when considering laws and regulations related to food. The Collaborative works to facilitate implementation of the Plan, toward a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system.

We work extensively with state partners toward the goals of the Plan, particularly with the Department of Agricultural Resources in their role supporting the Commonwealth's farmers. In doing so, there are a number of policy and budgetary priorities we have identified for 2023.

Release the Farmland Action Plan. Funded through the FY22 capital budget, the Farmland Action Plan was developed through a robust engagement and research process and lays out numerous recommendations to support farmland protection, farmland access, and farm viability. The draft was submitted to MDAR and EEA in the fall of 2022, but has not been released. This document will provide vital direction and support to legislative and regulatory activity, as well as to stakeholders in their work, and we urge that it be finalized and released as soon as possible.

Fund the Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program. FSIG was established in 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic, and has proven to be an effective tool in supporting food system resilience through capital investments in farms, fisheries, schools, the emergency food system, and other food system enterprises. These grants have allowed food producers to employ environmentally sound management practices that help the state work toward its climate goals, helped businesses thrive, and made healthy food more accessible for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable communities. We encourage

funding of \$30 million annually to this grant program, along with continued support for adequate administrative staff to manage it.

Fully fund the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program. Massachusetts led the nation when we established this program in 1979, purchasing deed restrictions on farmland in order to ensure it would be permanently protected from development and remain in active production. To date, the program has protected more than 75,000 acres. But annual funding has declined significantly, by more than 50% in just the last 10 years, despite the growing pressures of development and land prices that threaten farmland. By not fully funding this program, the state also fails to capture available federal matching funds that could further support local agriculture. Available funds in existing environmental bonds should be fully expended, and staffing at MDAR should be increased to ensure appropriate stewardship of existing and new projects.

Fund MDAR grant programs to meet demand. Non-land grant programs managed by MDAR total only about \$3.5 million each year for an industry that generates more than \$7 billion in economic impact. According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, Massachusetts farmers earn 94 cents for every dollar they spend on production, due to the high costs of land, labor, energy, and other necessary inputs. The MDAR grant programs help support farmers in remaining sustainable, with a significant amount of the resources targeted to helping farmers adapt to climate change and employ management practices that help capture carbon and reduce energy consumption. All of the programs are oversubscribed, and should be capitalized adequately to meet demand.

Demonstrate a commitment to racial equity in all programs and policies. The draft environmental justice policy currently under review represents an excellent first step toward this goal. Further measures are needed to ensure that the state's food system interventions work toward undoing centuries of systemic racism that have left BIPOC communities with inequitable access to food, to land to grow food, to jobs in the food system, and to the processes through which policies are developed that regulate and support the food system. Changes in hiring practices, outreach, and grant targeting and tracking are all in order.

We look forward to having an opportunity to discuss these and other issues with you as you develop your priorities for the new administration. I'd be happy to come to Boston for a conversation at your convenience, and to connect you with other key food system stakeholders as well.

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