



Representative David Muradian
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

July 23, 2024

Dear Representative Muradian:

An Act relating to economic growth and relief for the Commonwealth (H.4789/S.2869) contains policies and funding that support a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system. The economic bond bill could take steps in undoing generations of racial inequity in agriculture, make significant investments in the permanent protection of farmland, and create a new grant program that fosters greater climate resiliency and workforce growth, if the below proposals are included in the final package.

Farmers in Massachusetts have faced significant challenges in recent years including drought and floods, as well as other climate related losses. Farmers also only earn 95 cents for every dollar they invest into their business, and the Commonwealth continues to lose farmland at one of the highest rates in the nation. At the same time, according to the latest Census of Agriculture, farmers have significantly increased agritourism activities, and many are creating value-added products to sell to consumers and institutions. The need for the sections outlined below to remain in the final economic bond bill is urgent, and these proposals have broad support among food system stakeholders.

The following items are essential priorities for the Collaborative and for the local food system in Massachusetts:.

Priorities from Senate amendment S.2869:

- Section 2A:
 - Line 2000-7076, which would commit \$21 million to a new grant program that promotes climate resiliency for the local food system, supports species conservation in fisheries, and supports the development of a robust next generation of farmers.
- Section 291, which would establish a special commission to develop recommendations for supporting investments, policies and practices designed to further racial equity in agriculture in the Commonwealth. This commission was also passed in the House as part of H.4745, and is a top priority of the Collaborative's Agricultural Equity Network.
- Section 17, which changes the timeline for special permits allowing nonagricultural activities on land in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, from a maximum of 5 years to a minimum of 1 year, so that farmers have more agency in planning nonagricultural activities such as agritourism on their land. This policy was also passed in the House as part of H.4745.
- Section 19, which grants the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources the authority to buy, protect, and sell farmland for the purposes of farmland conservation.
- Section 220, which defines agritourism to allow for increased agritourism activities on agricultural land.



- Section 123, which creates more consistency for what is considered horticultural land for the purposes of taxation, adding land used to create products from horticultural crops to the definition to support farmers who produce value added products.

We urge the conference committee to adopt these funding levels and policies, to continue the legislature's commitment to the Commonwealth's local food system. As always, the Collaborative remains available as a resource for any further information you may need regarding these items or other food system issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director