



**Massachusetts Food System Collaborative
2024 State Representative and Senator Questionnaire**

Your name: Natalie Higgins

Office Sought, including district: State Representative, 4th Worcester District

Website: <http://www.electnataliehiggins.com/>

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

Priority 1

Eliminating Food Insecurity: SNAP and HIP Access

Priority 2

Supporting Local Food Systems + Local Farms

Priority 3

Climate Change

How would you support the Healthy Incentives Program?

The Healthy Incentives Program has helped us to encourage many eligible Leominster residents to sign up for SNAP benefits. Thanks to partners like Growing Places, accessing HIP benefits has never been easier. We need to invest in local food distribution systems that can support local farmers and ensure their fresh produce reaches our residents.

How would you support the food system in mitigating the effects of and adapting to climate change?

Leominster experienced a 900-year flood in September 2023, we need to ensure our communities, including our farms, have the planning and resources they need to mitigate and adapt to ever changing and extreme weather events. The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program is a great start, but also needs to prioritize food system needs.



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

I am a co-sponsor of H.87 - An Act promoting equity in agriculture, which would create a commission comprised of BIPOC farmers and leaders which would make recommendations regarding racially equitable investments and practices, examine resource and program accessibility of current programs, and recommend changes to increase equity in existing laws and regulations.

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

Food literacy should be prioritized across our public K-12 school curriculum, and we need to ensure our schools have the resources to implement programming across science, social studies, health and wellness classes and more.

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

The Farmland Action Plan can be a blueprint for investments and policy changes, but as the Mass Food Systems Collaborative suggests, we should be prioritizing public funds, setting benchmarks for acres conserved or percentage of farmland protected, and expanding technical assistance through programs like the UMass Extension.

What strategies would you support to reduce food waste?

We can learn from the Food Waste Reduction network, expanding composting and food rescue programs. I will continue to support policy solutions like "An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need."