



September 13, 2024
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Comerford:

Thank you for your leadership in supporting a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system in the Commonwealth. As Co-Chair of the Special Commission on Agriculture in the 21st Century in the Commonwealth, we write to share our thoughts as the Commission finalizes its recommendations and report. The Commission was authorized to address three topic areas within the food system: 1) climate change and natural disasters, 2) education and technical assistance, and 3) farm energy. We appreciate the draft recommendations shared at the July 15, 2024 hearing, and offer the following additions:

Climate change and natural disasters

- Recommendation 1d. As suggested in [H.88](#) / [S.2570](#) that were filed in the 2023-24 legislative session, we believe it is important to add food production capacity to the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency's mission statement so that the local food system is taken into account as part of emergency preparedness planning across state government agencies.
- Recommendation 3e. We emphasize the need for increased investment to the Climate Smart Agriculture Program (CSAP) through the anticipated 2025 environmental bond, as there are several state regulatory processes that will affect farmers, including the Clean Heat Standard and the Air Pollution Control, and the investment in this suite of programs will be needed to ensure that farmers can make the transition to clean energy effectively.
- Recommendation 3f. We encourage the state to align the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program overall with the state's climate goals, and allow grant recipients to purchase used equipment.
- Recommendation 4a. We strongly agree with the need to set goals related to farmland protection, and propose the state set a goal of protecting 232,000 acres, or half of the state's remaining farmland as stated in the 2022 Census of Agriculture, by 2050.
- Recommendation 4b. We recommend aligning this goal with the [New England Feeding New England 30% by 2030 goal](#). The New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers passed [resolution 45-2](#), in support of regional food security, at their September 2024 conference.
- Recommendation 5. Representative Mindy Domb's bill [H.91](#) proposes a program for agriculture and fisheries, similar to the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program, and could be a useful model for this recommendation.
- Recommendation 6. We agree with the need to expand MDAR's urban agriculture grant program and suggest it should be moved from bond funding to the annual budget so the grant could better support urban producers. Support for staff time at urban agriculture organizations is the top need the partners in our Urban Agriculture Coalition express to the Collaborative.



Continued education and technical assistance

- Recommendation 1a. We agree with the need for a state-level biennial census, and caution that, as was mentioned in the July hearing, farmers are the most over surveyed population and getting buy-in will be key to ensure the results are valid and useful.
- Recommendation 3. We would suggest adding the food literacy bill, [H.4424](#) / [S.2588](#), to the list of bills that were recommended to pass in this section, as it would add topics like nutrition, agriculture, food justice, and culinary skills to the state education standards.

Farm Energy

- Recommendation 4a. We believe this will need increased funding for the Climate Smart Agriculture Program, as mentioned above.
- Recommendation 7iii. We encourage the Commission to align this recommendation with pending legislation related to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and agriculture.

Many of these recommendations target the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), which as an agency already works extremely close to capacity. The Collaborative wants to emphasize the need for continued and increased investment in MDAR's administrative budget and staffing levels throughout the implementation of these recommendations, especially the roles identified in the recommendations. Identifying partner organizations that could take on some of the work to gather stakeholders could also be useful. The Collaborative is available to discuss this further at your convenience.

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative was established to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the [Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan](#), accepted by the state in 2015. The Collaborative supports collective action towards a sustainable, equitable, resilient and connected local food system.

We respectfully ask that the above thoughts be included in any policy proposals that may be drafted from the final recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to share these reflections.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director