

November 25, 2024

Governor Maura Healey
Climate Chief Melissa Hoffer
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey, Climate Chief Hoffer,

Subject: Urgent Need for Action on the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program

As representatives of the undersigned advocacy and conservation organizations, we have long supported the creation of a Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program and many of us participated in the drafting of the Commonwealth's *Healthy Soils Action Plan*. We, the undersigned, are now asking for the Administration's assistance in equipping the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) to successfully implement this program.

In 2019, Massachusetts became a national leader in advancing soil health by commissioning the first statewide Healthy Soils Action Plan (HSAP), a roadmap for protecting and improving the health of our Commonwealth's soils, which contain our largest carbon stocks. These efforts will safeguard our water quality, food security, farm viability, flood resilience, ecosystem stability and bring us closer to achieving our climate goals. In 2021, the legislature created the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program to carry this bold and essential vision forward.

The absence of adequate staffing for the Healthy Soils Program, however, has impeded the ability of the EEA to ensure timely and effective management of the program and implementation of the recommendations of the HSAP. To help address these challenges, our coalition respectfully asks that the Commonwealth take the following steps to help ensure the EEA is successful:

1. **Fill the Soil Health Coordinator Position:** This dedicated staff member would help manage the Healthy Soils Program, promote communication, and ensure effective collaboration among stakeholders. Although the MA State Commission on Conservation of Soil, Water & Related Resources previously allocated \$150,000 in the FY25 and FY26 budget for a Soil Health Coordinator, no plans have been made to fill this critical role.
2. **Include Healthy Soils Funding in the Governor's FY2026 Budget:** We request a line item of at least \$2 million for the Healthy Soils Program Fund, providing much-needed continuity and support.

Funding distribution challenges go back to the program's first fiscal year. While \$100,000 allocated for FY22 was used to purchase no-till equipment for conservation districts, recent larger appropriations are still largely undistributed. Although \$1,020,000 was secured for the program in FY24, only \$300,000 was deployed, and the remaining funds were carried into the FY25 budget without a clear plan for distribution. This challenge prevents key stakeholders and

organizations from successfully implementing their projects and undermines the program's intended impact. As a result, essential soil health programs remain under-resourced, despite the availability of funds and the many individuals and organizations who are willing and ready to implement the goals outlined in the Healthy Soils Action Plan.

Massachusetts has shown inspiring leadership in addressing soil health and environmental sustainability, and we believe the Commonwealth can continue to be a model for the nation. We are asking for the Administration's assistance to help EEA be successful. By fully supporting the Healthy Soils Program, we can realize its benefits for the soil, our communities, the state's resilience in the face of climate change and ability to meet its climate goals.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. We look forward to working together to advance this important program.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Gazillo
Senior New England Policy Manager
American Farmland Trust
cgazillo@farmland.org

Ben Crockett
Climate-Smart Agriculture Program Manager
Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
ben@berkshireagventures.org

Ambroes Clausen, Program Manager
Berkshire Conservation District
programs@berkshireconservation.org

Sharon McGregor, Board of Directors
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
sharon.mcgregor@bio4climate.org

David Reed, Executive Director
Central Mass Grown
director@centralmassgrown.org

Kelly Coleman, Interim Executive Director
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)
kelly@buylocalfood.org

Rosalie Anders, Co-Chair
First Parish Cambridge, Environmental Justice Team
rosalie.h.anders@gmail.com

Abigail Ferla
Foxtrot Farm (Ashfield)
foxtrotherbfarm@gmail.com

Meghan Siudzinski
Franklin Conservation District
franklinmaconservationdistrict@gmail.com

William Braun, Executive Director, farmer
Freed Seed Federation/Ivory Silo Farm
(Westport)
williamjbraun@gmail.com

Susan Worgaftik
Greening Greenfield
suworg1@gmail.com

Alisa Klein, Executive Director
Grow Food Northampton
alisa@growfoodnorthampton.org

Matthew Karas, Conservation Program Manager
Hampden-Hampshire Conservation District
matthewhcd@gmail.com

Carolyn Shores Ness
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (President)
Franklin Conservation District (Chair)
acornhillfarm@hotmail.com

Michael Leff, Executive Director
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD)
MLEffMACD@gmail.com

Karen Schwalbe, Executive Director
Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation
karen@mfbf.net

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative
rebecca@mafoodsystem.org

Renée Scott, Program Coordinator
Massachusetts Pollinator Network
renee@nofamass.org

Erbin Crowell, Executive Director
Neighboring Food Co-op Association
erbin@nfca.coop

Roger Noonan, President
New England Farmers Union
roger@newenglandfarmersunion.org

M. Dagoberto Driggs, Sr. Policy Advisor
Rubén Parrilla, Education Director
Randy Violette, Technical Assistance Provider & Policy Coordinator

Northeast Organic Farming Association, Mass Chapter
lauradavis@nofamass.org
dago@nofamass.org
ruben@nofamass.org
randy@nofamass.org

Rob Moir, Executive Director
Ocean River Institute
rob@oceanriver.org

Lloyd Miller, General Manager
Old Creamery Cooperative
oldcreamerygm@gmail.com

Deborah Leta Habib, Ed.D, Executive Director
Seeds of Solidarity Education Center
Seeds of Solidarity Farm (Orange)
deb@seedsofsolidarity.org

Vick Mohanka, Chapter Director
Sierra Club Massachusetts
vick.mohanka@sierraclub.org

Stacey Daley, Executive Director
Waltham Fields Community Farm (Waltham)
Stacey@communityfarms.org

Wendy McCluskey, Coordinator,
Mothers Out Front, Healthy Soil, Livable Future Action Group
wendy_mcccluskey@comcast.net

cc:

Secretary Rebecca Tepper, EEA
Kurt Gaertner, EEA
Thomas C. Anderson, EEA
Senator Jo Comerford
Laura Davis, Board Member