



December 12, 2024

The Honorable Maura Healey, Governor  
Massachusetts State House, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

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 local food system through our several advocacy campaigns and many networks. We work with hundreds of food system partners across the Commonwealth who help us identify our state funding priorities. There are a few programs in the annual operating budget that we'd like to bring your attention:

**Healthy Incentives Program (4400-1004): \$25,000,000 (level from FY25 proposal)**

On behalf of the more than 300 member organizations, farms, farmers' markets, and individuals of the Campaign For HIP Funding, we request that you include full funding of at least \$25 million for HIP in your Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal. We deeply appreciate the Administration's support for HIP in your fiscal year 2025 proposal. As you know, the 50% cut to monthly benefits that started on December 1, 2024 due to insufficient funding in FY25 budget has made it difficult to anticipate what level of funding HIP will need moving into the next fiscal year. Due to this cut, customers are experiencing increased food insecurity, and Massachusetts farmers are seeing a loss of revenue and customers. We anticipate that \$25 million for FY26 should support year-round operation of HIP, including continued growth in participation from SNAP client households, and allow the program to equitably reach all communities in the Commonwealth. Other states look to Massachusetts as the leader in nutrition incentive programs, and we urge your Administration to continue to support this important program.

**Food Security Infrastructure Grant (2511-0111): \$25,000,000 (level from FY25)**

We urge you to level fund the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program in your Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal. In fiscal year 2025, this program is funded through a combination of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars and an appropriation in the annual budget. FSIG has played a critical role since it was started in 2020 in supporting organizations, businesses and farms that reduce food insecurity, and remains critical today as farmers face challenging economic conditions and more residents are facing food insecurity.

**Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (2511-0100): \$11,233,075 (level from FY25)**

We urge you to fully fund MDAR to support the needed increase in staff over the past few years and allow the agency to meet the needs of farmers around issues related to farmland protection and access, environmental justice, climate change adaptation, and more. We also request the Administration's support for the reinstatement of an economist staff position at the agency, a position that has been vacant for the past several years. An economist's expertise is critical to understand the impacts of various policy interventions and develop a more detailed picture of the state of local agriculture beyond the Agricultural Census, which takes place every five years.



Each of these requests is a strong fiscal investment for the Commonwealth - for every \$1 that is spent through the Healthy Incentives Program, \$2 in local economic activity is generated<sup>1</sup>. The Food Security Infrastructure Grant program supports farmers, school districts, fishermen, distributors, food pantries to invest in needed infrastructure, allowing them to provide more local food via HIP, school meals, food banks, and in commercial markets. This grant program helps move the Commonwealth closer to the New England Feeding New England 30% local food produced and consumed in New England by 2030 goal. The state's fiscal outlook is challenging, and we recognize that some quick adaptations may need to take place as soon as this fiscal year, and heading into next fiscal year due to the change in federal administration, but including the above investments in your proposal is critical to the state's food security and agricultural sector.

Finally, we would like to address the line item vetoes that your Administration took in fiscal year 2025. The cuts to the local food policy councils grant program and the Massachusetts Food Trust Program, both of which are earmarks within line item 2511-0100, while small in terms of overall impact to the budget, had a large effect on these programs; the local food policy council grant program was fully cut and the Massachusetts Food Trust Program's administrative budget was cut by one-third. The local food policy councils grant program supported efforts to increase food security, community planning, and engaging residents with lived experience with food insecurity in the work of the councils. The Massachusetts Food Trust Program annual operating budget funding supports the Franklin County CDC (FCCDC) and LEAF, who partner to administer the program. This reduction in funding reduces FCCDC and LEAF's ability to move \$1 million annually to new or expanding healthy retail options in areas of the state that are identified as food deserts, thereby creating new jobs and economic activity in depressed areas of the state.

Again, we recognize that the state's fiscal outlook is challenging, but we also believe that programs that aim to decrease food insecurity and support the local food system should continue at a time when the four food banks report sharp increases in the number of residents they serve, and Massachusetts farmers continue to make \$0.95 for every \$1 they invest in their businesses<sup>2</sup>. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director

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<https://www.spur.org/publications/research/2021-02-04/economic-contributions-expanding-healthy-food-incentives>

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[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full\\_Report/Census\\_by\\_State/Massachusetts/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Census_by_State/Massachusetts/index.php)