

# Healthy Families, Sustainable Farms

Lessons learned from the Campaign for  
Healthy Incentives Program Funding



In early 2016 stakeholder organizations that supported the creation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan formed the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. The Collaborative is dedicated to working toward an equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system in the Commonwealth, and helps build the capacity of food-system stakeholders to advocate for policy recommendations in the Plan.

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# Introduction

Over five years the Campaign for Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) Funding has brought together a wide range of food system stakeholders, prompted the state of Massachusetts to invest tens of millions of dollars in an innovative and successful program, and helped fundamentally shift policy makers’ thinking and actions on how to support a healthy food system. It did so through coalition building, effective communications, and persistent tactics.

The Campaign links people and organizations from many different parts of the food system to advocate on behalf of a program that links food security with local agriculture. These linkages have proven transformative, as they have helped to break down the many silos that tend to separate not just food system sectors, but also community members, advocates, and legislators. The Campaign has helped these essential players in systems change work more closely together to achieve their shared goal.

Part of the Campaign’s success has come from its theory of advocacy, prioritizing clear messages and simple action steps that people with a wide range of experience and comfort in advocacy can participate in. The Campaign developed toolkits, held virtual and in-person meetings, and circulated many asks to the members of the Campaign. Because of the design of the program - which benefits individuals, farmers, the local economy, and the environment - the pressure the Campaign created, and the clear messaging from Campaign members, policymakers went from reciting common stereotypes about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to eventually competing with each other to be the loudest champion of the program.

A major lesson from the Campaign is that well-organized and focused advocacy can succeed. Without the Campaign, the state would likely not have invested \$57 million in the program over five years, hundreds of thousands of people would not have benefitted from the additional healthy local food the program has provided, and hundreds of farmers would be less sustainable and have a smaller customer base. Though the legislative process can be slow, the Campaign has demonstrated that opportunities exist to break through this dominant pattern and relatively quickly create material change for historically disadvantaged communities.

Because of this success, additional opportunities to advocate and win have opened up as advocates find inspiration in their victories and are eager to apply their new skills to another effort. Legislators, too, feel rewarded for doing their part and want to take on other initiatives. It is imperative to capture that increasing energy to create change for a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future.





# Background

Launched in 2017 and operated by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), HIP provides a dollar-for-dollar automatic electronic reimbursement for SNAP purchases of fruits and vegetables directly from participating farmers at farm stands, farmers markets, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture farms (CSAs). Households can earn incentives up to a monthly limit based on household size: \$40 for a 1-2 person SNAP household, \$60 for a 3-5 person household, and \$80 for households of six or more people. It is the only statewide nutrition incentive program in the country that is integrated into the national EBT system through which SNAP recipients obtain and spend their monthly benefits.

The program was launched with a federal grant to the state that covered most of the costs of building and launching the program, but ongoing incentive and operating costs have been borne by the state. Thanks to the work of a broad and active coalition of advocates, the state has committed more than \$57 million toward the program's incentives in just five years. But it wasn't always guaranteed to be a success. This report outlines the history of the program and an advocacy campaign that supports it. This is intended to be a resource for advocates looking to build campaigns to advocate for state policy that support a healthy local food system.

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative was founded after the state's acceptance of the 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, and supports collective action toward an equitable, sustainable, resilient, and connected local food system in Massachusetts. The Collaborative envisions a local food system where everyone has access to healthy food, to land to grow food, to good jobs, and to the systems where policy decisions are made.

At the time of the Plan's completion, the state had received notice from USDA that the application for funding for what would become HIP had been approved, and work had begun on program design and implementation. The Plan recommended that the state leverage that award to increase the use of SNAP to purchase healthy local foods, and invest in the program to ensure its successful implementation.

The Plan guides the Collaborative's work. The organization prioritizes action on Plan recommendations that address multiple sectors of the food system and that further racial equity. The Collaborative, in partnership with many community based organizations, statewide advocacy groups, food banks and anti-hunger organizations, farmers and farmers' markets, launched the Campaign for HIP Funding as its first major advocacy project in 2016.

# The HIP pilot and program

With an agricultural economy committed to direct-to-consumer sales, and a history of support for creative social support programs, Massachusetts has long been an innovator in connecting low-income households with fresh, healthy, local food.

In the 1970s, Gus Schumacher, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), led an effort to provide coupons to be used at farmers' markets through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which serves pregnant and postpartum women and children up to five years old by providing vouchers for use on certain healthy foods. The success of this program prompted its broader adoption by USDA, which launched the national Farmers Market Nutrition and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition programs, which today redeem [\\$35 million](#) per year at accepting markets nationally. Local matching programs for fruit and vegetable purchases made with SNAP began in Massachusetts in 2008 when The Food Project began offering them at farmers' markets in Lynn and in partnership with the city of Boston, called [Boston Bounty Bucks](#). Similar incentives programs were developed in communities across the Commonwealth, and around the country.

The Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Pilot was funded with a grant from USDA in order to test the efficacy of nutrition incentive programs and ran from 2011 to 2012 in Hampden County, which includes the cities of Springfield and Holyoke. It was conducted in partnership with 75 community based organizations such as Gardening the Community in Springfield and Nuestras Raices in Holyoke. Community partners like these assisted with implementation by recruiting retailers, reviewing and providing feedback on outreach and training materials, providing translation and interpretation support, providing facilities for steering committee meetings, and serving as an information and referral resource to HIP clients and other community organizations. The final [report on the HIP Pilot](#) identifies that the work of these partners was integral to its success.

This pilot proved that incentive programs could result in better diets and better overall health, demonstrating a measurable increase in intake of healthy foods by participants. That success led to the establishment of the USDA's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program (FINI) in the 2014 Farm Bill (the program was renamed the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, or GusNIP, in 2018). The program would provide grants to foster similar incentives programs nationwide.

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) received one of the first FINI grants in 2015. Led by Program Coordinator Frank Martinez Nocito, DTA applied for the funding and received notice of a \$3.4 million grant in 2015. The grant required



that the state provide an equivalent match. The build-out process for the program's infrastructure lasted until 2017, with what had been expected to be a two-year process extending into three to accommodate a change in administration when a new governor was elected in 2016.

At the same time that HIP began, the state received a waiver from USDA to run a community supported agriculture (CSA) pilot program that was also eligible for HIP. The CSA pilot allowed participating SNAP recipients to automatically pay for their CSA subscription once per month via their EBT cards, rather than requiring a unique transaction for each week's share, after completing a memorandum of understanding with the farmer that provided the CSA and DTA to allow for the automatic withdrawal of benefits. This enabled farmers who offered CSA programs to participate in HIP and for SNAP customers to use their HIP benefits to help cover the cost of the CSA. It also eliminated the usual requirement of paying for the full year's share of food all at once, a prohibitive burden for many low-income households and disallowed under regular SNAP rules.

To help inform program design, operation, and outreach DTA established two stakeholder working groups; one for low-income consumers and organizations that support them, and the other for farmers and organizations that support them. These included public health organizations, Buy Local groups, anti-hunger groups, and state agencies. As part of the sustainability requirement of the FINI grant, DTA also worked with the Collaborative to draft and file enabling legislation that would write the program into law, instead of it existing only in DTA regulations, in an effort to help protect the program from any potential future unfriendliness from an administration or legislators who might not support HIP's mission.

To help guide the project, onboard new farmers, and conduct outreach, the state contracted with stakeholder organizations such as the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers Markets, the Food Bank Coalition of Massachusetts, and Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) and their partner Buy Local organizations throughout the state. DTA also worked with the Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to recruit and assist farmers through the onboarding process, and the Department of Public Health (DPH) to develop outreach and educational materials about the program.

HIP began recruiting participating farmers in the winter of 2016-17 by tabling at trade shows and conferences around the state, conducting outreach through the MDAR farmers' market team, and by connecting with the state's Buy Local organizations, and began offering benefits to customers on April 1, 2017. Uptake was slow, at first, but when DTA began a broad outreach effort by notifying all SNAP users in June, participation began in earnest.

Marie Loranger was the first HIP user, maxing out her HIP benefit in April and May of that year. She noted that she thought it was "crazy if people don't use HIP.



After going through cancer twice, my doctors have said I have to eat healthy fruits and vegetables. My response has been that it's too expensive, and now I have no excuse! I shop and freeze peppers for later, and now I'm more apt to spend than \$40 and make sure I get my fruits and vegs. I've been telling my neighbors - instead of buying 20 bottles of coke, get fruits and veggies first. I'm excited about it, I can't wait until corn, strawberries, and blueberries are in season so I can break them down and freeze them!"

The initial program budget allowed for \$1.25 million in incentives to be earned in the first three years of operation, or roughly \$400,000 each year. More than \$400,000 was earned in just the first four months of the program, however, and usage eclipsed the \$1.25 million figure just two months later. The state scrambled to reallocate funds, canceling contracts with the support organizations and research firm and diverting those funds to incentives instead. The state also discontinued adding new vendors to the program, leaving many farms that wanted to participate unable to do so, and many areas of the state underserved by the program. But even those changes proved insufficient to contain costs, as customer usage resulted in nearly \$4 million in incentives earned in the first year of operation.

That meant more funding was needed, and pressure needed to be brought to bear on policymakers to support this successful program. Out of that need, the Collaborative began bringing together stakeholders to coordinate advocacy, forming the Campaign for HIP Funding.

The Campaign's timeline is laid out in this report's appendix. Over five years the effort has engaged hundreds of farmers, businesses, organizations, institutions, and individuals. Broad awareness of and support for the program among policymakers, tens of millions of dollars of investment from the state, and greater understanding of the broader food system and the need for supportive policy can all be credited to the advocacy of the Coalition. And the Campaign built power among a large and diverse range of stakeholders that continue to engage in policy advocacy, not just around HIP but around other critical food system policy issues as well. The lessons learned during the Campaign thus far will inform its future efforts, and can be informative for other campaigns.





# Lessons Learned

Throughout all of its campaigns, the Collaborative works to demystify the policymaking process, emphasizing that there are many ways to advocate and that being effective does not require knowing powerful people or understanding the sometimes arcane language and processes that go into passing a bill or a budget item. Individuals telling their personal stories clearly, organizations aggregating those stories and demonstrating impact, and campaign leaders coordinating these efforts and directing them to the proper audiences at the right time all play equally essential roles in policy advocacy.

During the Campaign for HIP Funding many lessons were learned on how to most effectively advocate for enough funding for the program to operate year-round without interruption, serving more consumers, and adding new farmers to the program.

## People and relationships

The Campaign's core strength has been the **active participation** of many stakeholders, and the relationships they and Campaign staff have built with each other and with policymakers. Input from farmers and SNAP/HIP customers, based on their experience with the program, has helped ensure that the Campaign has remained grounded in the realities of the program and stimulated by ideas about how to make it better.

Building a **broad coalition** of diverse supporters helped the program be taken more seriously by legislators, who have prioritized HIP to leadership every year since 2017, even as COVID and other priorities threatened to overshadow the need for and success of the program. Members of the Campaign included farmers involved with the program and farmers involved in other agricultural sectors, which from their repeated advocacy work, showed that farmers do want to advocate and should be included in outreach and coalition building efforts.

Finally, building a successful campaign coalition means finding an organization to **lead the campaign**, develop the strategy to reach the agreed-upon goals, and must include anchor staff who are committed to facilitating implementation of the campaign plan. The Collaborative has played that role, recruiting and facilitating a Campaign steering committee to help guide the Campaign's strategy, develop goals, and build relationships among key stakeholders involved in advocacy. The steering committee is made up of urban and rural farmers, farmers market managers, statewide food security organizations, representatives from a food bank and anti-poverty community based organizations, and more. The steering committee has added capacity to distribute calls to action to the broader coalition during the budget cycle and has helped the Campaign stay up to date on how the program is operating on the ground.

## Messages and communication

Developing a **clear, consistent message** for all participants to use also proved to be another key part of the Campaign's success. The Campaign's central message focused on how HIP is a triple-win program for farms, families and the local economy. This message deliberately includes the broader impact of the program and the people it serves, rather than solely relying on economic or public health data. In sticking to those messages, the Campaign eventually noted that even policymakers were using advocates' talking points when discussing the program.



Telling **personal stories** in [videos](#), on postcards, in written testimonials and during in-person meetings proved extremely effective at showing policymakers the impact of the program and gaining their support. HIP customers would often share details about what meals they liked to cook with HIP produce they otherwise would not have been able to afford, what produce they introduced to their children for the first time or shared with a neighbor, and what positive health effects they had experienced as a result of the program. At each event the Collaborative has recruited and prepared HIP consumers to tell their stories, which has deeply impacted legislators and slowly worked against biases decision-makers had about what people who receive SNAP want and deserve to eat.

The Collaborative was able to invest in hiring a videographer to make multiple **videos** thanks to a grant from Voices for Healthy Kids, a joint project of the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. These videos were [shared online](#) with legislators by the Collaborative as well as on social media platforms, in an effort to ensure that policymakers and the general public would learn more about and support the program.

Farmers' **stories** in the Campaign videos, in spoken testimony at Lobby Days, and in email and other written correspondence with legislators, about the different crops they grew for their HIP customers and the interruption suspensions brought helped make a strong case for the program's economic development impact by showing they could better plan their business and serve customers who eat all year if the program was funded year-round. The triple-win message, coupled with personal stories, was key to making sure legislators see the people that benefit from the program, and not just numbers on a spreadsheet.

Overall, the Campaign found that **positive messages** are most effective. Focusing on the success of the program was key in securing ongoing engagement of participants, and also in building support among legislators, who are understandably more willing to be associated with a success story.

## Tactics

Annual **Lobby Days**, held in-person at the State House prior to the pandemic and virtually through 2022, have been high-energy events and important ways for members to build connections within the Campaign and show the strength of our collective work.

The broad coalition helped create a higher profile for the program in the **media** as the Campaign encouraged and worked with its members to submit [op-eds](#) and [letters to the editors](#) over the years.

At each major stage of the budget process, the Collaborative has sent out [calls to action](#) to the hundreds of members of the Campaign coalition, with some essential elements in each:

- Clear instructions on what action was needed, why it was important, and who the decision makers were.
- Information on how local advocates could identify and contact their legislators.
- Language examples for calls and emails, along with encouragement not to cut and paste but rather to share personal stories with policymakers.
- Suggested social media language and legislators' social media pages to tag in any posts.

The Collaborative also regularly holds **coalition calls**, is available for one-on-one calls as requested by advocates, and updates the [Campaign website](#) and [fact sheet](#) often so advocates feel confident while completing calls to action. Each of these elements has helped make it easy for advocates to engage and build relationships with their legislators.

For several years, the Campaign developed specific **budgetary asks**, predicting need based on past growth plus additional funds in anticipation of new farmer vendors and more consumers. Each year, the program received less money than the amount the Campaign advocated for, resulting in annual program suspensions due to lack of funds for the first several years of the program. These suspensions were harmful to the program as they eroded consumers' and farmers' trust that has required ongoing work to repair. Suspensions eroded trust because consumers could not trust the program would provide year-round

support, and farmers struggled to plan their crops and businesses due to the increased volatility, with some farmers reporting harvests of crops grown specifically for HIP customers rotting in storage basements, being composted, or sold at a loss. Program suspensions should be avoided at all costs. Although the Campaign's budget predictions turned out to be quite accurate based on projected need, the Campaign could have advocated for higher levels of funding, leaving more room for negotiation.

Many advocates regularly share



with the Collaborative how helpful the toolkits and clear asks are, and how they otherwise would be less able to take action. Karen Schwalbe, Executive Director of SEMAP, recounted that she could not advocate without the fact sheet and talking points provided by the Collaborative. The consistent messaging throughout the state provided by these resources strengthened the message and left enough flexibility to adapt the message to the local legislator's interests. She reflected that the Collaborative's resources and trainings helped prepare farmers to speak with legislators and communicate effectively the importance of supporting the program. A map of legislative districts and HIP points of sale and farm locations that the Collaborative created also helped her visualize the program and advocate more effectively.



## Working with policymakers

Winning over legislators to support a budget ask or bill can be difficult, as they have many issues competing for attention within a legislative session and budget cycle. Some general principles the Campaign has followed when advocating to legislators are:

**Make sure legislators are informed and engaged.** All legislators need to have a basic understanding of a program and the ask they need to support. 25% of the legislative body should be active supporters for the issue to gain visibility. And a small core of just a few lawmakers are essential as champions of an ask, to press leadership to support the issue. This ensures there is broad knowledge of the program throughout the Legislature, and key legislators with deep understanding of the issue and a willingness to champion the ask to their colleagues and leadership.

Champions are often not who you expect; Representative Hannah Kane (R-11th Worcester), grew up around farming and food insecurity in Maine and has been one of the most vocal voices in support of the program in the Democratically-controlled legislature, writing and sharing dear colleague letters, making the ask to leadership, and promoting the program during non-Campaign events.

**Get to know your legislators.** Legislators are most persuaded by personal contact from constituents from their districts. Coalition members with established trusted relationships with legislative leadership are most effective in winning leadership's support.

**Don't only reach out when you need something.** Legislators appreciate being thanked for supporting a program and for their work making the win possible, so highlighting campaign wins on social media and giving credit where due is important.

**Get to know the Governor's administration.** Building relationships with administration officials is as important as doing so with legislators, to ensure there is support for the program in areas where programs are funded and where programs are implemented.

**Provide clear impact.** Campaigns that demonstrate a shorter (less than 18 months) return on investment grab attention more easily from the Legislature. With the Campaign for HIP, the return on investment could be seen immediately as the program was turned back on after a suspension, a family with SNAP benefits changed their purchasing habits, and farmers changed their crop plans and sold through items they had grown specifically for HIP consumers.

Make it clear where the money in a funding ask will go and prioritize the long-term sustainability and impacts of the program in funding asks. In the case of HIP, coalition members were able to describe how each dollar first went to purchase food for a family, then to a farmer to help them sustain their operation, and then circulated further in the local economy through that farmer's spending.

These strategies and practices have made the Campaign for HIP Funding successful so far but, as with any long-term effort, as the effort continues they will need to be revisited and updated regularly to make sure the program continues to grow and stay relevant, advocates are supported and know how to lobby their legislators, and more SNAP recipients and other stakeholders are engaged.

## Ongoing Opportunities for the Campaign

As the Campaign seeks to build on the momentum and success of its first few years, there remain opportunities to strengthen its efforts.

Members raised the need for the Campaign to be more explicit about racial equity and justice and center the need for additional farmers - particularly farmers of color - to be added to the program to better serve communities of color. This was reflected by both the Campaign's messaging and by DTA's addition of new farmers in 2020.

While the number of members of the coalition has plateaued, work continues to bring new stakeholders into the Campaign in order to develop a broader set of advocates with strong advocacy skills. Many of the larger HIP authorized farms have not joined the Campaign, despite repeated efforts to include them in the work. Some core members of the coalition that have been actively engaged have disengaged, indicating that they see the Campaign as having succeeded and the need no longer being urgent. Work is needed to keep all Campaign members engaged should further action be needed if the program is threatened in the future.

After five years of advocacy, it became apparent in 2021 that some stakeholders viewed the Campaign as not pressing hard enough or focusing on certain issues enough. Another coalition formed around climate policies focused on housing and food in 2021, and included doubling the HIP amounts per household size in their asks to the Legislature. It's unclear which members of the new coalition are promoting this request, or why they did not bring those issues to the Campaign. Collaborative staff have met with leaders of the new coalition several times to answer their questions and try to engage them in advocacy, but they have chosen not to participate. Some members of this new campaign have started HIP outreach efforts, such as VietAID in Dorchester.

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## Next Steps for the Campaign for HIP Funding

While the program enjoys broad support from legislators and administration officials, the Campaign for HIP Funding will continue its work to ensure that this support continues and that the program keeps pace with growing demand. The Campaign will advocate for adequate funding to ensure the program can operate year-round and reach more consumers and farmers.

As political campaigns for Governor and legislative seats take place throughout 2022, the Campaign will use that opportunity to educate candidates about the program and urge them to support it, and to ensure that new officials and leaders recognize it as a priority.

While some administration staff and officials have mentioned privately the value of the program in furthering racial justice in the food system, the state has not taken the opportunity to make bold statements on this critical issue. The Campaign will work to better emphasize the potential of the program to address poverty and systemic racism.



The Campaign is also considering how to best share evidence of the value of the Legislature’s investment in the program, to tell its story in new ways that demonstrate its broad impact and that reach a broader audience.

Since farm or farmers’ markets visits can make the program more tangible, as the pandemic eases the Campaign will again work with local groups to bring legislative champions and leaders to visit farms and farmers markets to see the program in action.

## Looking Forward Nationally

Thanks, in part, to the cohort of Voices for Healthy Kids grantees that support and operate incentives programs, the Collaborative has connected with other similar efforts around the country. As incentives programs mature, the lessons learned from all of them point to the idea that they are effective at improving access to nutritious foods to low-income households, and that efficiencies could be realized through a national incentives program run by USDA offering benefits to all SNAP users nationally.

HIP remains one of just a few nutrition incentive programs nationally to integrate with the EBT system, something that more programs should move toward and should be seen as the future of all of these programs.

Many other state and local incentives programs express that it is difficult to secure the GusNIP grant’s required match, and have proposed that USDA remove this requirement in the next RFP. Some successful nutrition incentive programs have suspended program operations indefinitely after running out of initial funding and being unable to secure additional money from their municipality or state government. If other nutrition incentive programs are starting with federal support, the HIP experience shows that securing funding from states and municipalities at the beginning will be necessary, since the federal funds are intended to seed the programs but will not provide ongoing support.

A February 2021 report from Fair Food Network and SPUR (The San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association), in collaboration with partner organizations, [\*\*The Economic Contributions of Expanding Healthy Food Incentives\*\*](#), found that “broad expansions of healthy food incentives would provide powerful returns on that investment – for families, grocers, and farmers, as well as more broadly among the state economies where such benefits are expanded. The findings demonstrate that state and federal policymakers would be wise to double down on their support for these programs.”

Creating and funding a federal program based on the HIP model would be the most equitable solution, according to advocates active in the coalition. This would require a significant push in the next Farm Bill and through federal legislation to make the program permanent. The Collaborative strongly encourages current or potential coalitions to think through program design thoroughly, with a particular focus on ensuring equity both in service and in governance, and offers the above lessons from the HIP Campaign and program as potential guidance.

# Conclusion

Today, more than 200 farmers participate in HIP, and the program operated for a full calendar year without interruption for the first time in 2021. More than one quarter of the state's SNAP caseload has used the program at one point, and between 1-10% of the caseload use the program in a given month, depending on the time of year. More than \$34 million in fruits and vegetables have been purchased through this program directly from local farmers, as of April 2022.

This success of the program is attributable to the commitment of legislative and administration leaders, but those leaders would not have made that commitment without the hundreds of advocates who have educated policymakers about the value of this program. From individual HIP users who responded to a survey or sent in a postcard, to farmers who got to know their legislators and invited them to come to their market booths and see the program in action, to organizations that signed on to letters and participated in events at the State House, every voice and every action has made a difference, whether connected to the Campaign or not.

Perhaps most importantly, the program has changed the way many policymakers consider, design, and implement policy for the local food system, and the Campaign has helped stakeholders from many food system sectors consider how to better collaborate toward shared goals. No single program can resolve all of the challenges posed by the complex food system, and no single campaign should claim to be able to do so. But HIP and the Campaign for HIP Funding demonstrate that innovative program design, committed stakeholders, and clear and consistent advocacy can result in significant systemic change and provide models for future transformation.



# HIP Campaign Highlights

Following is a chronology of milestones throughout the Campaign for HIP Funding. It is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to capture key moments and activities.

## 2016

### Campaign asks

- \$1 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 budget

### Campaign results

- \$0 for HIP in the FY2017 budget.

### March - July

Before the first benefits were earned, the Collaborative was working on the Fiscal Year 2017 budget in spring 2016, submitting a letter to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means to request \$1 million toward the required state match for the program. No funding was appropriated.

In the spring of 2016, a request from DTA prompted the state to create a budgetary account where funds from both public and private sources could be deposited into for use by the program. A fundraising meeting was held in July to solicit private funding, with DTA and the Collaborative coordinating a range of speakers to talk about the value of the program and the need for support. The John Merck Fund, the City of Boston's Office of Food Access, and Project Bread each donated to the Trust, totalling \$200,000 toward the required match.



# 2017

## Campaign asks

- \$1.7 million in the FY2018 budget
- Pass the enabling legislation into law.

## Campaign results

- \$1.35 million in FY2018 budget
- Enabling legislation passed out of the first committee.

## Program operations

- \$3.02 million earned in HIP benefits in 2017.

## January

The enabling legislation was introduced for the first time by Representative Paul Mark (D-2nd Berkshire), as part of the original FINI grant requirement for long term sustainability of the program. The bill had two additional cosponsors in the House.

## March

In the spring of 2017, the Collaborative advocated that the legislature include \$1.7 million for HIP in the state's fiscal year 2018 operating budget, sending letters to key lawmakers and the governor throughout the process.

## April

At the annual "Ag Day at the State House" the Collaborative shared HIP talking points for advocates to use in meetings with state lawmakers, and made and distributed stickers that said "Ask me about HIP!" for Campaign members to wear on their visits with legislators and in their time walking through the State House. This helped cohere the Campaign's message and helped advocates feel prepared for their meetings.

## July

The Legislature and Governor appropriated \$1.35 million in funding for HIP. The Collaborative issued a press release and press coverage was [supportive](#). Stories like those featured in the article, including McKistry's Farm, were common: "We're seeing new customers regularly on a daily basis," says McKinstry. "Most are so excited about buying local fruit and vegetables that they now can afford — many with children who never had fresh fruits and vegetables before. Seniors also are very appreciative of this program." Stories like these helped show the impact of the program throughout the state and became a key tactic throughout the Campaign.

On July 6th, the enabling legislation was heard by the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.

## September

By September, there were more than 220 participating retailers in the program. More than \$500,000 in benefits had been earned by September, already surpassing the amount of SNAP purchases at these retailers for all of 2016 as well as the amount budgeted for incentives for the program for the full year. Jeff McCue, DTA Commissioner at the time, recalled that there were growing pains in some farmers markets as low-income shoppers were coming for the first time and there were long lines. He also remembered meeting “some remarkable farmers who really welcomed the new people.” Some of these farmers even checked in on their CSA customers if they missed a week, he recalled.

The Collaborative worked with community based organizations and farmers’ markets to invite legislators to their markets in their districts. Senator Anne Gobi (D-Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex) visited the Brimfield market, Representative Smitty Pignatelli (D-4th Berkshire) attended the Great Barrington market, and several legislators toured The Food Project’s market in Lynn so they could see the program in action. The Collaborative published a press release for each visit to attract local news coverage.

The enabling legislation was reported favorably out of its first Committee and was assigned to the joint Committee on Healthcare Financing. It did not move any further during the legislative session, however.

## November

When the program had reached more than \$2.3 million in incentives earned in seven months, the Collaborative wrote and distributed a press release to share with news outlets across the state. The release featured quotes from farmers and community based organizations to demonstrate the impact the program was having on the ground, and emphasized that the rate of incentive redemption was much higher than originally anticipated.

## December

In December the Collaborative held a HIP coalition meeting with 60 partners from a broad range of community based organizations, state agencies, and statewide nonprofits. During the meeting, the research team under contract to evaluate the program, the John Snow Institute (JSI) presented on their work so far, and answered questions. A discussion was held to identify HIP operational challenges such as retailer onboarding, processing HIP, the learning curve for SNAP clients, supporting racial equity, and program

sustainability. The Collaborative presented on advocacy efforts and the group discussed ways to continue to build support over the next year.

The Eagle Tribune published [this article](#) about demand at the farmers’ market in Lawrence, a former mill town and majority Latinx city. HIP had “nearly tripled sales at the Lawrence farmers market in just a year, from \$82,303 in 2016 to \$232,800 this year.” Stories like these were common around the state and the Collaborative encouraged community organizations to reach out to newspapers to generate attention and coverage of the program.



## 2018

### Campaign asks

- \$6.2 million in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget
- \$1.5 million in a supplemental budget, to prevent suspension in April.
- Enabling legislation to be passed.

### Campaign results

- \$4 million in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget.
- \$2.15 million in a supplemental budget.
- Enabling legislation passed out of a second committee.

### Program operations

- \$5.4 million earned in HIP benefits in 2018.
- Program suspended 4/15-5/23 due to lack of resources.

### Campaign Summary

In 2018 the Collaborative began building a formal Campaign around HIP advocacy, in early January launching an online form for organizations and farms to add their names to sign-on letters to be used throughout the Campaign. The form also captured stories and other information from participants.

By the end of the year there were 318 sign-ons to the Campaign from organizations, farms, and farmers' markets, many of them HIP vendors. Early Campaign signatories included individual farms and small community-based nonprofit organizations, as well as larger groups like Mass Law Reform Institute, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Massachusetts Public Health Association, AARP Massachusetts, Massachusetts Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, The Greater Boston Food Bank, and American Heart Association and American Stroke Association.

The Collaborative also conducted outreach to organizations with members who benefitted from HIP, such as groups that work with seniors, urging them to sign on to the Campaign. The Collaborative sent out press releases to media throughout the state about the successes of the program and the need for additional funding, and submitted op-eds to newspapers in support of the funding. To keep members of the growing Campaign up to date on the program, the Collaborative sent regular emails to all farms and organizations that signed on, updating them on the status of the budget and opportunities for advocacy and published a [fact sheet](#) and sample language for organizations to use to engage their members and the general public in the Campaign.

### January

In 2018, the Campaign calculated that HIP would need \$6.2 million in funding for the state's next fiscal year to operate year-round without interruption, based on current usage and modest projected growth in consumer uptake, and to support new farmers joining the program as vendors.

In January, the Campaign organized a day of meetings with advocates from Project Bread and CISA and legislative leaders. Among others, the group met with Speaker of the House Robert Deleo, to introduce the

program and share why it needed additional support.

The same day, the Collaborative organized a meeting with the House Ways and Means Chair Representative Jeff Sanchez (D-15th Suffolk), HIP farmer Justin Chase and customer Dora Martinez, to educate Sanchez about the program and introduce the ask, which he remembered in an interview in 2021. Sanchez said of the meeting “I remember talking to the SNAP user and asking her what difference the program made in her life, and remember she was very articulate in talking about her health and her children. Bringing people like that in to talk to legislators makes a difference.” He appreciated how the program brought together two different communities - farmers and SNAP recipients - and how it was “one of the few grassroots programs that had a big impact on a lot of people.”

He said of the program in general “The cultural relevance of the program really stuck with me, how the Asian-American community really took ownership of farmers markets and helped change what farmers were growing. The culturally appropriate crops aren’t just a nice thing to do - the economics work and they help farmers make money. I remember the farmers talking to me about how the program made it so they could scale up, buy more equipment, hire more people, and buy more land.” Sanchez remembered that there was a lot of conflict that session, people were very unhappy with lots of things, and hearing about HIP was like a “breath of fresh air” because it was something that was working and could be built upon.

Allison Perron, Government Relations Director at American Heart Association-MA and an active member of the Campaign, called this meeting a turning point for the Campaign. “Bringing the farmers in to tell their personal stories meant Sanchez ended up almost doubling our ask [for a supplemental budget appropriation a few months later].” She recalls seeing Sanchez at the State House and him telling her “Oh my god Allyson, I had the best meeting - we’re definitely going to fund this program.” That was the moment that turned him into a champion of the program. Perron says that this was the only time she’s seen more money actually allocated to a program than advocates were advocating for.

This was an early example of the impact that direct advocacy could have on a legislative leader, who went from not being aware of the program to being an ardent champion thanks to conversations with people who benefitted from the program. It was also an important lesson for the Campaign - figuring out who needs to be convinced and who can do the convincing that will actually be heard by the decision maker will lead to success.

On January 8, 52 state Representatives signed on to a dear colleague letter, a letter shared by one or a group of legislators with their colleagues to encourage others to cosponsor, support, or oppose a policy request, circulated by Representative Daniel Donahue (D-16th Worcester) to the House Committee on Ways and Means supporting \$6.2 million for HIP in the fiscal year 2019 budget. The Campaign sent a letter on January 28 to the House Ways and Means Committee, also asking them to support the \$6.2 million ask. The letter focused on how the program had already resulted in more than \$3 million in sales, a 600% increase in SNAP sales at farmers markets from the previous year, generated an additional \$1.12 in economic activity for each \$1 spent, and benefitted a wide range of particularly vulnerable households - of the 35,400 households that had participated at the time, 50% included a senior, and 34% included a child.

## February

DTA convened a meeting with partners in February at the Worcester Public Library where they announced that a lack of funds would force a suspension of the program from April 15 to June 15. This was the first time the program was suspended, which was devastating as it created confusion and fear among customers about the benefit being taken away, and lessened farmers' ability to plan their crops for the season, as they now faced an unstable market. This helped build the case for immediate program investment and the need for \$6.2 million for the following year, although this amount was seen as a large increase in funding for a still new program.

## March

The Collaborative developed an [ask sheet](#) that included funding requested for that year's budget and background information on the program. The coalition has adapted this ask sheet model repeatedly over the years, as a clear way of communicating the need with policymakers.

On March 1, farmers, advocates, and HIP customers participated in the first annual HIP Lobby Day at the State House, visiting every legislator's office to talk to lawmakers about the program and make the case for why it should be supported in the upcoming budget. The Collaborative purchased t-shirts with the HIP logo and a Campaign slogan on them, and coordinated the purchase of 200 oregano brujo plants, decorating them with drawings from students in western Massachusetts as a leave-behind for each legislator's office. Core Campaign members held meetings with legislative leadership including the Speaker of the House, the Senate President, and the House and Senate Chairs of Ways and Means. Each meeting had a farmer vendor, a consumer, and an organization involved with HIP, either in local agriculture or public health, at them.

The Lobby Day speaking program featured legislators who were championing the program among their colleagues, consumers with lived experience with food insecurity and HIP, farmers and local food policy advocates. Dai Kim, from Mill City Grows in Lowell, was one of the farmers who spoke at Lobby Day. "Having the opportunity to share my story with HIP stakeholders was extremely empowering," he recalls. "It gave me a new found confidence I hadn't felt before. Since then, my career has taken different directions but all roads have always led back to advocating for a more just food community and making local work. I did not have a relationship with our state legislators before the HIP Campaign. I seldom reach out about non-HIP issues. When I first spoke at Lobby Day, I was likely a nervous wreck. Having said that, reflecting on that experience, I could not be more thankful for that opportunity. It's made me examine my work from a macro perspective, and I like to think that I've gained a bit more confidence in public speaking."

Each advocate was asked to visit a handful of legisla-



tive offices from their area to speak with legislators and staff and leave a fact sheet and a plant behind. Advocates were provided with instructions and a brief training after the briefing, prior to being sent out for office visits. Messaging that advocates were instructed on focused on the triple-win nature of the program as it benefitted public health, local farmers, and the local economy.

Laura Sylvester, Public Policy Manager at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, recounted that this first lobby day had huge turnout. “So many people showed up, and there was a lot of excitement. I was blown away by the number of advocates that came. It’s so fun working with farmers and anti-hunger organizations, people who use HIP. It’s such a great and unusual coalition in terms of people you don’t normally see advocating together. Every legislator loved the oregano brujo. It was brilliant, something different, memorable and to the point. The messaging that the Campaign prioritized around a strong economic argument for farmers is really powerful. Everyone wants to support local farming, and the triple-win nature of the program.”

Karen Schwalbe, Executive Director of the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), said that by the time of the lobby day most legislators knew about the program, but some staffers did not. “The education of staffers happened then. Coming in with something to give [the legislator/their staff] was the best entry point. By starting the relationship with a gift you didn’t immediately have to launch into talking points. You could start with social niceties and then say this is what we’re here for.” She emphasized that the personal stories shared cannot be exploitative, that those stories need to solidify the authentic triple-win nature of the program, and that legislators respond best when they interact directly with someone who has been impacted by a program.

Despite the general positive feelings generated by lobby day, the program was rapidly running out of money. A program suspension was announced with just one month’s notice via email to farmers and partners, through text alerts to SNAP recipients and through distributing and posting flyers at farmers markets and other points of sale. The Campaign worked to spread the news by sharing the announcement and answering questions from local newspapers, so articles [like this](#) one from the Daily Hampshire Gazette would reach consumers across the state.



## April

### *Supplemental budget*

The program suspension began on April 15, leading the Campaign to begin advocating for an additional \$1.5 million to be allocated to the program immediately in a supplemental budget that was making its way through the legislature, to restore program operations.

### *Annual budget*

The House Committee on Ways and Means budget was released in April with \$3.5 million allocated for HIP. The Campaign worked with Representative Hannah Kane to file and sign on co-sponsors for an amendment increasing the budget request to \$6.2 million, and organized allies to make

calls to urge Representatives to support the request. More than half of the chamber (more than 80 Representatives) co-sponsored the amendment. The final House budget included \$4 million for HIP, an increase of \$500,000.

The Campaign sent a letter to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means urging the Senate to include \$6.2 million for HIP in their budget. At the same time, 26 senators - more than half of the chamber - signed on to a letter from Senator Gobi to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means supporting \$6.2 million for HIP.

## **May**

### *Annual budget*

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means budget proposal was released with \$3 million allocated for HIP. The Campaign worked with Senator Gobi to file and secure co-sponsors for amendment increasing the budget request to \$6.2 million, and organized allies to make calls to urge senators to support the request. More than half of the chamber co-sponsored the amendment. The final Senate budget included \$4 million for HIP.

### *Supplemental Budget*

On May 21, Governor Baker signed into law a supplemental budget, passed by the Legislature, that included an additional \$2.15 million for HIP for the remainder of the State's fiscal year (through June 30) - more than the Campaign's ask of \$1.5 million. As a result of this additional funding, HIP was reinstated on May 23, shortening the planned suspension by several weeks.

On May 29, the enabling legislation was reported out of the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing and was assigned to its third committee, House Ways and Means.

## **July**

In July, the Legislature released a final conference committee reconciled budget with \$4 million for HIP. The Campaign sent a letter and customer [postcards](#) from across the state with stories about the program to the Governor, urging him to include the funding for HIP in his final budget. The Governor signed the final budget with \$4 million included for HIP, a nearly 300% increase in funding for the program over the previous year.

## **September**

In the summer and fall, the Campaign held events at farmers markets in key legislators' districts, inviting senators and representatives to thank them for supporting HIP, and circulated press releases for each. On September 7 Speaker of the House Robert Deleo visited the farmers' market in Revere to meet with consumers and farmers who had benefited from HIP. He said "I support HIP because many families in my district and across the Commonwealth want to eat healthy foods but sometimes can't afford to do so. Low-income households have a greater risk of preventable, dietary-related diseases, and HIP can help them avoid these health issues. That means healthier families, and also lower costs for the public health system."

The Collaborative invited Chair Sanchez to visit the Mission Hill farmers' market in his district. The message that he recalls taking away from that event was that the program is not a pass-through or a handout,

but an “investment in infrastructure, building the farming economy.” By the time the Collaborative invited Sanchez to the farmers market event he was already supportive of the program, but seeing it in action - the mechanics of how it works - helped him appreciate it more. Sanchez remembered not hearing much about the program from his colleagues - his interest came entirely from the Campaign’s outreach.

Due to the late commitment of supplemental funds in May, not all of the resources committed were spent before the end of the state’s fiscal year on June 30, and such funds are not automatically carried over to the following fiscal year. On September 18 the Campaign sent a letter to Senate Ways and Means asking that \$1 million in unspent funds from the previous fiscal year be carried over into the next fiscal year.

On September 29, Senate President Karen Spilka visited the Ashland farmers’ market in her district to speak to consumers and farmers about HIP. She said of the program, “Access to healthy, nutrient-rich food is the foundation for success, particularly for our children. What better way to ensure that our children are eating great food than by connecting them with our fantastic farmers? The HIP program utilizes creative incentives to help both our agricultural producers and our low-income families, and I am thrilled to see how successful it has been. I look forward to seeing this program continue into the future, and to know that our families are eating local and eating well.”

### **November**

In November, the Collaborative received a grant from the Voices for Healthy Kids to fund the Campaign for the following year. This grant would be instrumental in building the capacity and impact of the Campaign.

### **December**

On December 14 the Collaborative organized a HIP coalition meeting with 60 stakeholders to allow JSI to present their findings on the first year of HIP operations, and to discuss additional challenges the program was facing. JSI’s [report](#) found that the program was effective and made a difference in clients’ and farmers’ lives, and that consumers were spending money above and beyond what their monthly cap allowed - spending their own SNAP dollars at these farm retailers - indicating an even greater impact than the HIP numbers alone demonstrated.

As the enabling legislation was not acted on by House Ways and Means it did not pass, and would need to be reintroduced next session.

## 2019

### Campaign asks

- \$8.5 million in the FY2020 budget
- Reintroduced the enabling legislation

### Campaign results

- \$6.5 million in the FY2020 budget

### Program operations

- \$6.14 million earned in HIP benefits in 2019.
- Program suspended 3/1 - 5/25 due to lack of resources.

### Campaign Summary

Thirty-four new organizations signed on to the Campaign in 2019, including some large organizations like the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association, Blue Cross Blue Shield MA, Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, and the Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs. While many of the early sign-ons occurred organically, with word of mouth or broad solicitations through social media or organizational newsletters, the Collaborative relied on targeted, individual meetings to encourage many of these new stakeholders to add their names to the list.

### January

The Collaborative hired Becca Miller to manage the Campaign for HIP Funding, increasing its capacity to engage with grassroots supporters and legislators.

Becca convened a steering committee of food bank staff, farmers market staff, farmers, Buy Local organizations, and public health organizations. While HIP customers were not directly seated on the steering committee, due to the Collaborative's lack of resources to compensate them for their time, they were well represented by many of the committee members. A survey hosted by statewide community partners helped develop a list of 80 HIP clients and the Campaign has been in regular contact with them about HIP advocacy opportunities and shares an annual survey to solicit their input to help inform the Campaign's work.

Laura Sylvester of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts mentioned that the simple survey revealed "many personal stories, including many anecdotes about how consumers were able to lose weight, go off their medication, and introduce their children to new produce for the first time. This helped reduce the perception that poor people do not want to eat healthy food, which the Campaign had been working through."



The Governor's budget was released in late January with \$4 million included for HIP. Based on projections of what would be needed for a year-round program with modest increased growth and the addition of some new farmers, the Campaign steering committee settled on an ask of \$8.5 million for the state's fiscal year 2020 budget.

The enabling legislation was reintroduced, since it was the start of a new two-year legislative session.

Several key legislators were in new roles, including the House and Senate Chairs of Ways and Means; Representative Aaron Michlewitz (D-3rd Suffolk) and Senator Michael Rodrigues (D-1st Bristol and Plymouth), and the Campaign worked to bring constituents in these districts to meetings, take action at key moments, and share their stories.

Legislators who had been key champions of HIP formed a Food System Caucus to further a range of local food system issues in the legislature. HIP was the first issue the Caucus prioritized, helping build the program's visibility and support among policymakers.

### **March**

In the spring of 2019 the Collaborative worked with community partners to film advocacy videos and gather [written stories](#) from consumers. The videos were posted on the [Collaborative's YouTube channel](#) and shared in calls to action with legislators and on social media and at the 2019 Lobby Day. The written stories were shared with legislators at Lobby Day as well.

The program was suspended from March 1 to May 25 due to insufficient funds, as spending had once again outpaced the appropriation.

Based on the Campaign's ask, more than 75 of the chamber's 160 Representatives advocated for \$8.5 million in HIP funding for the fiscal year 2020 House Budget in a letter circulated by Representatives Hannah Kane, Dan Donahue, and Paul Schmid (D-8th Bristol) sent to the Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means on March 5. Their letter emphasized the multiple benefits of the program, from public health to local economies, and that the amount requested would allow the program to operate year-round without interruption, which had not occurred since the program was launched.

The Campaign held the annual HIP Lobby Day on March 21, with the program suspension lending some extra urgency to the ask. During Lobby Day, the coalition held a briefing for legislators, a speaking program for advocates that featured legislators, farmers Txong Yang and Chris Kurth, HIP shopper Adrienne, and CISA staff member Mia Kortebein. The video that played during the briefing was particularly effective at communicating the program's impacts in a way that was more visceral than the data alone.

After the presentations, advocates visited legislators and staff with pack-



ets that included fact sheets, stories, [guides for advocates](#), and ears of locally-grown popcorn for each legislator's office. The Campaign organized meetings with the Senate President, staff in the Speaker of the House's office, and the Ways and Means Chairs' offices to make the case. Farmers and consumers from each district attended each of these meetings, along with staff from supportive organizations that were key members of the coalition. Members of the coalition who attended Lobby Day were asked to report back on how their meetings went to the Collaborative, and to send anyone they had met with a thank you email after the day.

Charlie Stefanini, a lobbyist the Collaborative engaged for the Campaign, said of 2019 Lobby Day that he was "In awe of peoples' reaction and energy around wanting to help out - [legislators] were aware of it, they wanted to help thanks to the work [the Campaign] had already done with farms and families which helped build the buzz around the program."

The House Ways and Means budget was released with \$4 million included for HIP. The Campaign sent out an action alert and Representative Hannah Kane introduced an amendment to increase the amount in the House budget to \$8.5 million. 109 Representatives cosponsored the amendment, making it the most popular amendment in the House budget debate. The House budget ultimately included just \$4.5 million for HIP as the amendment was adopted but reduced by the House.

However, this was the first time HIP had its own line item and was not an earmark in a larger line item, a significant win for the Campaign. The language in the line item also included requirements for DTA to file a report with the Joint Committee on Ways and Means by March 1, 2020 on the number of households using HIP, the number of HIP transactions, the number of vendors processing HIP transactions, a breakdown of the number of HIP clients and vendors by their location, and the program's efforts to identify and better serve those with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Voices for Healthy Kids team led a two-day training for core coalition members to develop their advocacy skills as the program continued to outpace expectations and would need ongoing advocacy.

## **May**

HIP was reinstated on May 25 thanks to a supplemental budget that passed and included \$2 million for the program. The program ended up needing almost exactly what the coalition had predicted the year prior to operate all year - \$6.5 million.

Senator Gobi again circulated a dear colleague letter to Senate Ways and Means in support of the Campaign's ask, which 22 Senators signed on to. The Senate Ways and Means budget included \$6.5 million for HIP, and the Campaign asked Senator Gobi to file an amendment to increase the amount for HIP to \$8.5 million, while also sending out an action alert to encourage Campaign members to contact their Senators in support. Dozens of Senators signed on to the amendment, but leadership indicated that it would not be adopted. Senator Gobi spoke passionately about the bill during debate on the Senate floor, but withdrew the amendment rather than forcing a vote that would have failed. The Senate budget passed with \$6.5 million for HIP. The Campaign mobilized to send letters to the Conference Committee to include the Senate amount for HIP in their final budget.

## July

After the Conference Committee budget was released with \$6.5 million for HIP, the Campaign again encouraged its members to contact the governor, urging him to support the HIP line item. The final fiscal year 2020 budget was signed in July with \$6.5 million included for HIP, a more than 50% increase from the previous fiscal year.

At the end of the budget cycle, the Collaborative circulated a survey for Campaign members to fill out about their thoughts on the Campaign, when they took action, and what they thought should be next for the work. There were 50 responses, indicating an average of two actions taken, and respondents supported an ambitious next ask to cover the program's year-round operation without interruption.

The Campaign held events at farmers' markets in Worcester, Lowell, Fall River, and Revere to generate press coverage about the program now that it had been restored and thank legislators who were championing the program in the Legislature. The Campaign also worked to collect stories from farmers and consumers during the summer at the height of the growing season to share with legislators as a thank you and to use in the next budget cycle.

## September

The Collaborative scheduled meetings with the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, where the enabling legislation had been assigned earlier in the year. Chair Sonia Chang-Diaz's (D-2nd Suffolk) office met with advocates from the district, including an advocate with lived experience using HIP and staff from The Food Project. The Senator's staff member that the group met with had previously participated in The Food Project's teen empowerment program and was enthusiastic about supporting the bill.

## October

In October, Jeff McCue transitioned out of his role of Commissioner of DTA to serve in another state agency. He recalled that the Campaign had been especially helpful in promoting sensitivity training and education for farmers, and was a strong advocacy base for the program that brought new approaches and engaged state representatives to participate in the discussions which "was a significant game changer." He believed that the differences between what advocates were asking for and what the Administration was able to accomplish were normal, and were less about values and more about the pace of program growth. "Every advocacy group I've ever worked with would like to see things move faster than the governmental



entity is able to move it.”

He also recalled that even though HIP is in the DTA line item, it came up often in budget hearings for the Executive office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (which the state Department of Agricultural Resources is located under) and other agencies, so having other secretaries get educated and engaged was helpful. He sees the program as “checking so many boxes” food access, nutrition, agriculture, environment, economic development – which is rare for a government program.

Also in October, the Collaborative worked with the chairs of the legislature’s Food System Caucus to draft and submit an op-ed - [Healthy families and sustainable farms for every season](#) - to the Boston Globe in support of HIP. “HIP is the latest in a long line of innovative and successful investments in a sustainable and equitable food system for the Commonwealth, and it deserves to be funded adequately to fulfill its mission,” wrote the legislators.

## **November**

The Campaign organized its members to prepare written and oral testimony for the enabling legislation bill’s hearing in November. Ten legislators testified in support of the bill as did 20 Campaign members, including staff from The Food Project, The Bowdoin Geneva farmers’ market, HIP consumers, and farmers like Laura Smith, who owns Lane Gardens and Oakdale Farms, while many others submitted written testimony to the Committee. The Campaign asked for technical changes to the bill, which the bill sponsors supported and included their testimony as well. The bill passed out of the Committee after its hearing, with the Campaign’s proposed changes reflected, and was assigned to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

## **2020**

### **Campaign asks**

- \$17 million in the FY2021 budget

### **Campaign results**

- \$2 million in a supplemental budget
- \$13 million in the FY21 budget
- \$5 million in CARES Act I funding
- New farmers added to program

### **Program operations**

- \$6.9 million earned in HIP benefits in 2020.
- Program suspended 2/23-3/6 due to lack of resources.
- 38 new farm vendors added.

## **Campaign Summary**

Five new organizations signed on to the campaign in 2020, mostly community health centers. The pandemic shifted some of the Campaign’s focus, and while the renewed attention on food insecurity due to

the pandemic was an overall positive development, HIP was not prioritized in the same ways that solutions to new and immediate challenges were, and attention to the program was lessened.

## **January**

The Campaign steering committee developed an ask of \$17 million for the state's fiscal year 2021 budget, again based on expected year-round operation, increased growth, and adding new farmers. This ask was a large increase from the previous year's as the steering committee believed it was appropriate to ask for a bold commitment by asking for what was truly needed for the program to carry out its mission. The steering committee also agreed that the ask was a negotiating strategy, and that if more than \$10 million was allocated to the program, that would be a victory. The Governor's budget released late in the month included \$5 million for HIP, level funding from his previous proposal.

## **February - June**

The program was suspended due to lack of funds on February 23. Administration officials expressed their intent to define HIP as a seasonal program, in order to avoid unannounced suspensions and remain within the budget. Legislators, however, responded to the Campaign's call for ensuring that the program would remain year-round, passing a supplemental budget that included \$2 million for HIP, allowing it to be restarted on March 6. This supplemental budget also included important language, indicating for the first time that HIP should be operated year-round.

The House Ways and Means budget for fiscal year 2021 included \$13 million for HIP, and no amendment was filed as this was seen as an acceptable compromise by the campaign steering committee. The Senate budget matched this amount, demonstrating the broad commitment to the program in both chambers.

When the COVID pandemic began in March, the Campaign began to meet virtually, conferring in March and June to discuss updates on the campaign. Lobby Day was moved online as well, since the State House was closed to the public. Instead, Campaign members took part in a Zoom call to action, with participants calling or emailing their legislators during the meeting. Campaign members shared their stories with one another about why they were HIP advocates and what the program meant to them, which helped build the relationships within the coalition. A panel of BIPOC advocates spoke about the urgent need to add more BIPOC and immigrant farmers to the program to increase equity and better serve BIPOC communities, one of the three asks of the Campaign that deserved more attention. These stories were well received by Lobby Day attendees and renewed the Campaign's energy to advocate for more funding during a very busy time.

During a meeting with DTA staff, a member of the Campaign emphasized the inequities demonstrated by the lack of Black farmers participating in the program, and the lack of coverage for Hampden county, the site of the original pilot, urging the agency to open up the program to participation by more Black farmers. And at the June coalition meeting during the height of the uprising for Black lives, three Black members of the Campaign spoke about the need to center BIPOC voices and create a more just and equitable food system, including in this campaign, to build a renewed and shared focus on racial equity moving forward.

## July

The final budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor included \$13 million for HIP. Shortly thereafter, the Governor also dedicated \$5 million in federal CARES I Act funding to the program as the pandemic caused a spike in food insecurity, SNAP enrollment, and market disruption for local farmers.

As a result, DTA opened up the program to new farmers for the first time in three years, a goal that the Campaign had been advocating for, issuing a Notice of Opportunity (NOO) for farmers to reply to. The process prioritized farmers that would be able to serve particularly vulnerable and low-access communities, and who could demonstrate cultural competence and a commitment to serving diverse communities.

The NOO drew 91 applicants and resulted in 38 farmer vendors being approved. Of the selected vendors, 49% serve multiple communities, and 66% serve families in at least one Gateway City, which had been identified as being underserved by the program to date. Vendors indicated plans to serve communities in 12 of the state's 14 counties (no vendors applied from Dukes or Nantucket counties). 23% of new vendors proposed to serve towns that had no HIP vendors the prior year. Some of the accepted farmers were existing HIP vendors who were adding a new sales point for additional markets. Farmers new to the program were largely BIPOC farmers that were well known to their communities and had been eager to join the program for years.

New farmers were also prioritized for funding for the required equipment, which could cost more than \$1,000, through the newly launched Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program. The Collaborative and the Buy Locals helped farmers apply for that funding, resulting in more than 40 farmers receiving support.

The enabling legislation was not taken up by the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, and so was not sent to the full chambers for consideration before the end of the session.



# 2021

## Campaign asks

- \$13 million in the FY22 budget.
- Enabling legislation reintroduced.

## Campaign results

- \$13 million in the FY22 budget.

## Program operations

- \$9.9 million earned in HIP benefits in 2021.
- No program suspensions.

## January

The Campaign steering committee set a \$13 million ask for fiscal year 2022, for the first time asking for level funding. In the Governor's budget, HIP was again proposed to be funded at \$5 million, which the Campaign saw as an unacceptable cut from the previous year's funding, and sent a [letter](#) to the administration and publicized it widely to build pressure.

The Campaign asked Representative Paul Mark and Senator Anne Gobi to re-introduce the enabling legislation, and requested meetings with chairs of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities when the bill had been assigned to that Committee again. Senator Adam Gomez (D-Hampden), a new Co-Chair, was especially supportive and responsive to advocates and constituents.

Representative Ron Mariano (D-3rd Norfolk) was elected Speaker of the House in January 2021, and the Campaign has so far not connected with his office on the same level as it had with Speaker DeLeo. The Campaign coalition has members in the community he represents, but food security has not traditionally been a priority for him. The Campaign continues to reach out to him to build that relationship.

Fifteen new organizations signed on to the campaign in 2021, including the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action and Catholic Charities of Worcester County.

## March - May

Both the House and Senate budgets included \$13 million for HIP, and no amendment was filed in the House. The House budget included language requiring HIP to be a year-round program, carry forward leftover money from the previous year, and maintain at least the current benefit levels. Language to maintain at least the current benefit levels was included due to ongoing conversations at DTA about potential reforms to the program that would potentially include lowering the amount of HIP incentive dollars each household would be able to earn. An amendment was filed in the Senate to match this language, which they did.

## July

For the first time, in July, August, September, and October more than \$1 million in HIP incentives were earned each month, representing growth of 33% in incentives earned from the same time during the previ-

ous year. This was likely due to multiple factors, including a return to farmers markets from the low points of the 2020 season due to the pandemic, the 38 new farmers coming online, and more consumers learning about the program for the first time thanks to on the ground partners and new tools from DTA like the DTA Finder map. This map shows all HIP retailer locations across the state. Farmers are required to keep their information updated on the map to continue to participate in the program, and a link to the map was sent out to all SNAP participants via text message in October.

### **September**

On September 29, the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities held a hearing for the enabling legislation and related bills. The Campaign had met with the new Senate Chair of the Committee, Senator Adam Gomez and the House Chair Representative Michael Finn (D-6th Hampden) separately earlier in the year, with advocates from each district. Many members of the Campaign submitted written testimony and the Collaborative and one farmer provided oral testimony at the virtual hearing.

At a farmers' market in Fall River local advocates invited legislators to participate in an appreciation day and to learn more about HIP in action. A SNAP/HIP customer told Representative Paul Schmid that "Just because I am poor does not mean I don't deserve to eat well." Representative Schmid would later recount this story to colleagues, advocates, and the press on a farm tour in the western part of the state.

### **December**

The Campaign steering committee decided to advocate for \$20 million in the fiscal year 2023 budget, an amount that would allow the program to operate year-round, increase the number of consumers benefiting from the program, and allow DTA to open the program to new points of sale again.



## 2022

### Campaign asks

- \$20 million in the FY23 budget.
- Passage of enabling legislation.

### Campaign results

- \$18 million in the FY23 budget (*in process*).
- Enabling legislation passed two committees.

### Program operations

- \$2.8 million earned in HIP benefits January-April.
- Applications open for new vendors.

### January

The Governor's budget proposal was released with only \$5 million included for HIP, which prompted the Campaign to issue a [statement](#) condemning this proposed dramatic cut to the program.

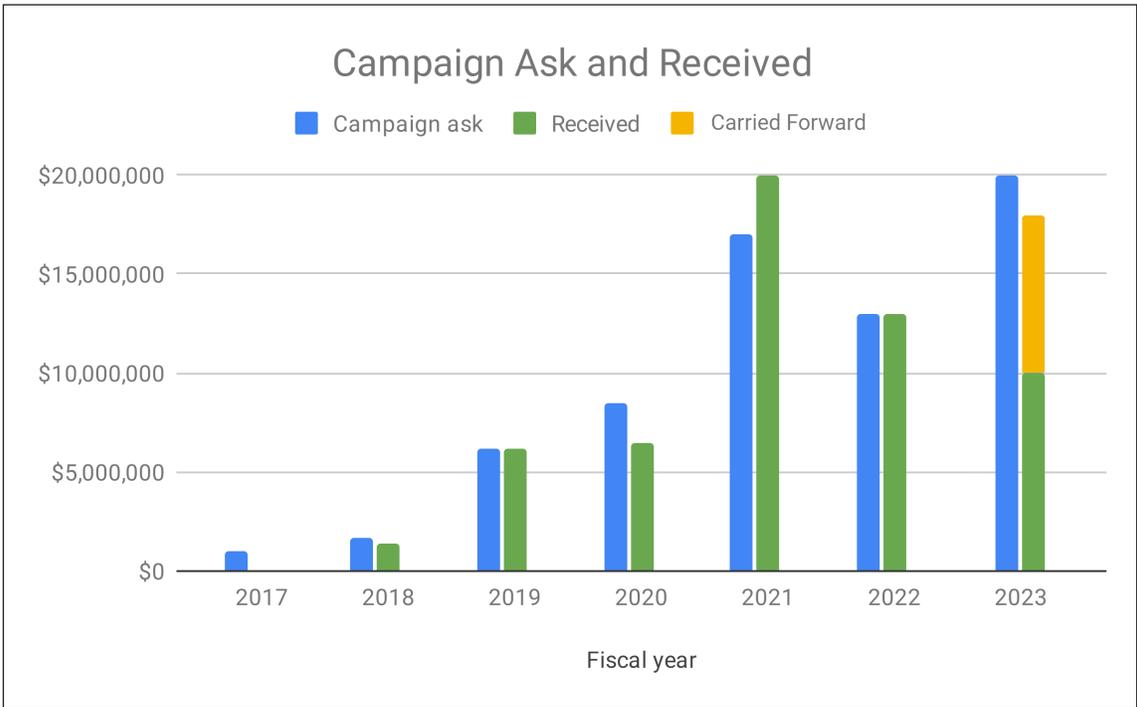
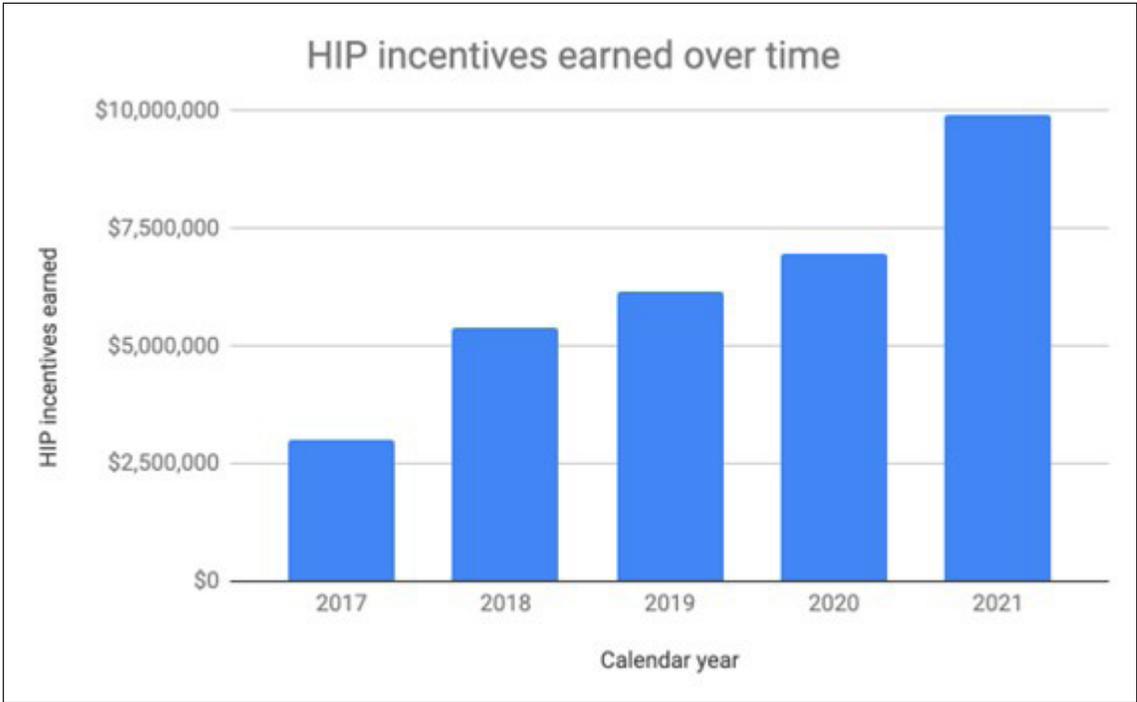
The enabling legislation was reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities at the end of the month, and was assigned to the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing, which further passed the bill to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. The Campaign will continue to press leadership to pass the bill this session.

### March-May

The House budget contained \$10 million of new funding for HIP, and committed to carry forward remaining funds from the prior fiscal year, estimated to be \$8 million. The Senate budget contained \$12 million in new funds, with a similar commitment. Language changes the Campaign advocated for to increase transparency of reporting were also adopted in the Senate Ways and Means line item, another win for the Campaign that we will monitor as the budget progresses.

### April

DTA issued a Notice of Opportunity (NOO), inviting farmer vendors to apply to participate in the program. The Notice indicated that priority would be given to applicants who could serve "those living in areas designated as food deserts and/or environmental justice communities as well as areas with relatively few HIP access points relative to their SNAP client populations," and "those for whom food insecurity has been historically disproportionate and rates of chronic disease high." It further stated that "DTA is seeking vendors who will sell via innovative models that reach clients where they live, as well as models that provide consistency of access by being open multiple days a week at one location." This NOO is specifically targeting SNAP clients with disabilities and Black SNAP clients for increased access to HIP, indicating a commitment on the part of DTA to utilize this program to further racial equity in healthy food access.



As of this writing the FY2023 budget was still incomplete, but legislative proposals indicated support for \$18 million in the form of a new appropriation of \$10 million, and an additional \$8 million in unspent funds to be carried forward from previous budget years.



## Photo credits

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Page 1: Civil Eats

Page 3: Winton Pitcoff

Page 4: Regional Environmental Council of Worcester

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Page 7: Winton Pitcoff

Page 8: Winton Pitcoff

Page 9: Leran Minc

Page 11: Mill City Grows

Page 13: Just Roots.

Page 14: Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture

Page 16: Winton Pitcoff

Page 19: Unknown

Page 20: Unknown

Page 23: The Food Project

Page 24: Unknown

Page 26: Grow Food Northampton

Page 29: Unknown

Page 31: Unknown