



May 16, 2025

Joint Committee on Agriculture  
24 Beacon St.  
Rooms 473F and 70  
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.111/S.53 An Act Promoting Equity in Agriculture

Dear Chairs Fernandes, Blais, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of BIPOC farmers, food equity leaders, and the organizations that represent and support them across Massachusetts, it is my pleasure to appear before the Joint Committee on Agriculture to ask that members report S.53/H.111 favorably out of committee. Given the forces at play, it's important now more than ever to underscore Massachusetts's commitment to an equitable agriculture and food systems as a whole.

For BIPOC farmers across the state, the status quo is inequitable; BIPOC farmers are represented on only 3% of the Commonwealth's farms- farms that steward just .3% of the land in farming, and sell just .4% of the market value of agricultural goods in Massachusetts despite people of color making up 32% of the state's population. This results in lost jobs, lower food security, and reduced local economic activity. BIPOC Communities suffer food-related disease at 2x-3x the rate of white communities and these inequities did not happen by accident; agricultural and related policies and laws have historically not considered equity, and many of those policies and laws are still having damaging impact generations later.

This bill represents a chance to address those inequities; the Agricultural Equity Network (and other groups like ours) rely on policy for change, we can see there is still a vital need for this bill outside of just MDAR's EJ initiative. This bill does more than just create a commission; it proposes a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of existing programs and successes, and the development of a plan to build upon those efforts. The bill would create a process that will begin to address some root areas of inequity in agriculture and the food system across the state while utilizing data to guide its endeavors by recommending:

- Policy that supports racially equitable investments, policies, and practices;
- Make impactful recommendations that support equitable investments, policies, and practices;
- Optimize data collection, benchmark development, targeted outreach, and grantmaking to promote equitable access;
- Provide the opportunity to analyze existing programs and resources to be more equitably accessed; and
- Changes to existing laws and regulations to help them better address inequities.

Passage of this bill is an initiative of the Ag Equity Policy Network of the MA Food System Collaborative, a network comprised of BIPOC farmers, leaders in agriculture, and the allies and



organizations that support them from across the state. This group spearheaded language for the bill with Senator Comerford and Representative Blais, who have championed this work for years, and is leading the campaign to engage organizations and individuals as part of our growing statewide network.

The working group, network members, and I look forward to providing testimony at the hearing for this bill and answering any questions that members may have. On behalf of the organizations and individuals that comprise the working group and the Equity Policy Network, I again urge all members of the committee to report our bill favorably out of committee.

The Network is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer specific insights on this legislation, at the pleasure of the Committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Norris Guscott

Agricultural Equity Policy Network Manager