



October 20, 2025

Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
24 Beacon Street  
Rooms 215 and 167  
Boston MA 02133

RE: S.549 / H.1005 An Act investing in natural and working lands

Dear Chairs Barber and Rausch, and Members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of S.549 / H.1005, An Act investing in natural and working lands. 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 leads collective action towards a sustainable, equitable, resilient local food system through advocacy campaigns and networks. We work with hundreds of food system stakeholders across the Commonwealth who help us identify our legislative priorities.

This bill gives the Commonwealth and its agencies the mission to preserve natural and working lands and wetlands, and prevent their degradation and loss. It directs state agencies to prevent the permanent conversion of these lands, places a value on forest lands and farmland for the totality of the services they provide, including their contributions against climate change, and incentivizes municipalities to make land use and planning decisions and bylaws that further the state's land preservation goals while requiring the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) provide financial and technical support to municipalities who choose to do so.

The Commonwealth should adopt a no net loss goal or requirement for working lands. According to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Census of Agriculture, between 2017 and 2022, 27,000 acres of farmland were lost to abandonment, development, or other land uses<sup>1</sup>. Once farmland is lost, it is virtually impossible to return to agricultural use. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) is working to implement the many goals of the 2023 Farmland Action Plan, and developing regulations for its new Buy-Protect-Sell authority granted by the legislature, but the pressures of the real estate market are still high on farmland, and we see this goal as a way to coordinate additional resources to prevent the further loss of this limited resource. Additionally, EEA is currently undertaking a broader land use planning effort – the Massachusetts Integrated Land Use Strategy (MILUS), which seeks to coordinate the conservation of natural and working lands with development while advancing net-zero and biodiversity goals and centering equity and access, which align with the goals of this bill, and could be beneficial to align the many state plans that have various land use goals.

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<sup>1</sup>[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)

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets published a report on payment for ecosystem services in 2023<sup>2</sup> that explored potential programs to compensate farmers for the services they provide. This report recommended a pilot program that would supplement the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Stewardship Program payments to farmers, to leverage existing federal resources and base the pilot program on whole-farm conservation performance. This is one example of how states in the New England region are thinking about compensating landowners for the totality of services they provide.

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue, and urge you to consider this bill in the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole. We respectfully request that the Committee pass S.549 / H.1005 out with a favorable report.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director

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<sup>2</sup>[https://agriculture.vermont.gov/vermont/sites/agriculture/files/doc\\_library/PES-Working-Group-Final-Report-15Jan2023.pdf](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/vermont/sites/agriculture/files/doc_library/PES-Working-Group-Final-Report-15Jan2023.pdf)