



March 9, 2026

House Committee on Ways and Means
24 Beacon St.
Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Requests for Massachusetts Local Food System

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Assistant Vice-Chair Diggs, and Members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative works with hundreds of stakeholders around the Commonwealth to build a sustainable, equitable, resilient and connected local food system. Through our engagement with our partners over the past year, we have identified several state funding priorities that support our shared vision. We respectfully share these items with you for consideration as you develop your proposed budget for fiscal year 2027, including:

- Healthy Incentives Program: \$29,700,000 (as proposed in H.2, an increase from FY26)
- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources: \$11,000,000 (level from FY26)
- Food literacy: \$250,000 (level funding from FY26 for wellness coaching and curriculum resource development at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)
- Local Food Policy Council grants: \$250,000 (level from FY26)
- A Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program: \$7,000,000 (NEW)

Details about each of these items follow my signature line below.

Massachusetts must continue its strong investments in the local food system, as farmers continue to recover from the cut to the Healthy Incentives Program, increasing costs of production and tariffs, and more. Many of our food security partners fear that their neighbors will go hungry and farms and small food businesses will close as the cuts to SNAP enacted in OB3 come into effect this year. SNAP is the backbone of our food security system; the program accounts for 20% of revenue for some grocery retailers¹, serves 1 in 7 Massachusetts residents², and is an economic driver. We recognize the current fiscal reality is extremely tight, and believe that each of the above programs is a sound investment, bringing economic growth to our state and continuing the legislature's commitment to public health.

¹<https://www.wbur.org/news/2025/10/30/some-mass-food-stores-say-theyll-also-take-a-hit-from-the-looming-snap-shutoff>

²<https://www.mass.gov/lists/departments-of-transitional-assistance-caseload-by-zip-code-reports>

These recommendations all support the goals of the [*Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan*](#), developed by the state and accepted as a state plan more than a decade ago as a “vision and plan to increase agricultural production, processing, and distribution that will serve as economic stimulus and address multiple related public health and food security issues.” The legislature has championed many of the issues raised in the Plan, and we look forward to working with you to continue that support through these priorities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller, Policy Director



Fiscal Year 2027 Local Food System Budget Priorities

March 9, 2026

Massachusetts' local food system is central to ensuring food security, meeting the Commonwealth's climate goals, building a strong local economy, and many other social and economic issues. Farmers and fishermen, schools and community-based organizations all demonstrate commitment to feeding their communities through their daily work, and are playing key roles in addressing the increase in food insecurity in Massachusetts.

By investing in the below programs and agency, the state will support long-term resilience of Massachusetts' local food system. Those investments will, in turn, support public health, the local economy, and our natural resources, for many years to come.

We urge the Committee to support the following programs, at the noted levels:

Healthy Incentives Program (4400-1004): \$29,700,000 (as proposed in H.2)

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) provides a dollar-for-dollar match for SNAP benefits spent on fruits and vegetables purchased at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs across the Commonwealth. The Campaign for HIP Funding's more than 300 member farms, farmers' markets, healthcare organizations, and advocates request that full funding be dedicated to HIP in the FY27 budget to ensure the program can operate year-round without a cut to benefit levels, support more SNAP recipients who want to use their HIP benefit, and allow DTA to add more farmer vendors to the program for the first time since 2022.

Thanks to the hard work of DTA staff and the state's new SNAP third-party processor (FIS), HIP is more accessible. These changes restore dignity to the program, and support clients' ability to pay like any other consumer. Fully funding HIP in the annual budget would be a confirmation of these infrastructure investments and a relief for Massachusetts farmers that are facing increasing insecurity and risk due to tariffs and increasing costs of production.

During the SNAP pause in November 2025, HIP was there for clients: the numbers from calendar year 2025 and 2024 were virtually identical for the month, even though in 2025 the program was still only two months out from the full benefit being restored in September. In the

past, the program has taken months to recover; HIP is strong and supporting the H2 funding level shows Massachusetts' support for this important program.

Department of Agricultural Resources Administration (2511-0100): \$11,000,000 (level from FY26)

Governor Healey's proposed budget for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) represents a cut to the line item compared to FY26. We request level funding compared to fiscal year 2026, as this line represents investment in agency staff, and any further cuts will reduce the agency's success. We also continue to raise the need for a staff economist at MDAR, as there has not been anyone in this position since 2017, and the need for an economist remains significant to understand more deeply the impact the state's investments have had and their respective returns on investment.

Food Literacy (7010-1192): \$250,000 (level from FY26)

We request that the Committee fund \$250,000 to support Massachusetts K - 12 students' equitable access to achieving food literacy. This funding is used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to support professional development for teachers and coaching for school wellness committees, through the School Wellness Initiative for Thriving Community Health (SWITCH)³. By supporting this with funding in FY26, DESE was able to fund 42 participants in the Framingham State University four-week online courses as part of the wellness coaching program. This amount in FY27 would continue to support SWITCH, support a data collection tool to assess progress on food literacy goals included in district wellness plans, and the development of high quality curriculum materials connected to Harvest of the Month⁴.

Local Food Policy Council Grant program (2511-0100): \$250,000 (level from FY26)

Thanks to the support of the legislature, in 2023 Massachusetts launched the Local Food Policy Council grant, which aimed to help these organizations "accelerate their development, expand their capacity, and increase their connections and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning to support the Massachusetts local food system." The three rounds of the grant resulted in awards to 45 councils across the Commonwealth, including 15 in fiscal year 2026⁵. Local food policy councils help build connections between food access organizations and their clients, support local farmers by expanding client knowledge of the Healthy Incentives Program, and create

³ <https://massschoolwellness.org/initiatives/>

⁴ <https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/get-involved/harvest-of-the-month/>

⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-announces-250000-in-grants-to-strengthen-local-food-access-and-support-community-food-systems>

opportunities for equitable community engagement around the local food system. We respectfully ask for level funding of \$250,000 for a fourth round of this grant program.

Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program (LFPA) (suggested line item: 2511-0100):
\$7,000,000 (*NEW*)

The Collaborative supports the LFPA Working Group's request of \$7 million to create a state-funded LFPA Program under MDAR. The federally-funded LFPA was cut in spring 2025⁶ immediately before a third round of funding was expected, creating a hectic growing season for farmers who had crop planned with hunger relief partners for these funds and had to scramble to find new market channels or absorb unexpected losses. The federally-funded LFPA supported more historically marginalized farmers than any other program previously, state or federal. A state-funded LFPA would provide more food to the emergency food system from local producers, an additional revenue stream for producers, and circulate money back into the local economy. LFPA was so impactful because MDAR designed the program to be flexible in meeting the needs of communities; for example Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance was able to partner with LFPA grantees to provide fish chowder for hunger relief. As federal SNAP is cut, the state will face increasing need in the emergency food system, and this program is one small way to ensure that local food is available and accessible in that system. State-funded LFPA was also included as a recommendation in the draft report of the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force.

⁶ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/local-food-purchase-assistance-cooperative-agreement-program>