
April / May Farm and Market Report

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COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN

In the typical fashion of New England winters, Mother Nature always tosses a few curve balls at us. Just after I wrote my previous column, we experienced a vicious cold snap in what had been up until

that date, a mild winter. The weather then moderated again, until late March and early April brought us colder than average temperatures and a fair amount of snow. Though it's no great surprise when Magnolia flowers and buds get nipped or destroyed by cold, I don't know if I've ever seen the Forsythia bloom in my yard totally destroyed by cold. It's been a strange winter, one in which some of our sectors have benefitted, and others have been treated adversely.

I am pleased to announce that I have recently appointed MDAR Chief Pesticide Inspector Taryn LaScola as Acting Director of our Crop and Pest Services (C&PS) Division. In this position Taryn oversees most of MDAR's regulatory responsibilities and the associated education, outreach, inspection, audit, registration, and licensing programs. Having worked in a C&PS program for several years, Taryn is very familiar with the Division's wide portfolio of activities.

I thank MDAR Chief of Staff Alisha Bouchard for handling this position most recently. I hope to announce a permanent appointment in the near future.

MDAR staff has been working the last year on its review of all its regulations following Governor Baker's Executive Order from last March directed to all state agencies. As I mentioned last column, the Nutrient Management regulations released last June have had a very high profile. MDAR has conducted dozens of interactions with stakeholders, attempting to identify stakeholders' "pain points", and examine possible adjustments to the current regulations that mitigate that pain without disrupting the fundamental environmental goals of the statute. We appreciate the candid, thoughtful dialogue with the stakeholder community.

In late March, the department released for public comment through April 30th a draft version of its [Massachusetts Pollinator Plan](#). Included in the draft is its purpose: "Given the diversity of factors involved in the decline of managed bees, combined with the need to effectively evaluate, sustain and enhance these populations, there was a national memorandum issued in 2014 by President Obama, followed by the release of a National Strategy calling on Federal Agencies to coordinate their efforts to improve managed bee pollinator health. A key component of this strategy was the engagement of all states to develop independent state-level Pollinator Protection Plans (MP3) that facilitate collaboration and provide a set of recommendations of practices for those key stakeholders involved in the protection of managed bee pollinators including state agencies of agriculture, beekeepers, pesticide applicators, land managers/farmers and the nursery/landscaping industry".

I'd like to thank the Eight County Beekeeping Association Presidents and the Mass. Farm Bureau for each presenting their suggested Frameworks to the department; both served as excellent references in the development of the department's Plan.

As of this writing, the department has conducted six listening sessions throughout the Commonwealth; I thank all those who have submitted comments to date.

The Cranberry Revitalization Task Force's work is progressing at a rapid clip. There have been three very productive meetings to date along with numerous sub-committee meetings. At the next meeting we hope to have a draft of a final report for the Task Force to consider. The Task Force is composed of a wide range of interested parties: growers, processors, educators, legislators, and state agencies. This allows issues to be fully fleshed out from identification of issues to development of potential solutions.

The US Food Modernization Safety Act (FSMA) should be well known to produce growers and handlers. It was signed into law on January 4, 2011 by President Obama. It is the most sweeping reform of the United States food safety laws in over 70 years. The objective of FSMA is to focus on prevention of food safety issues. There are seven rules included in FSMA. Two of them, the Produce Safety Rule and the Preventive Controls for Human Food, are areas in which MDAR's constituents should be familiar. FSMA falls under the authority of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Recently, MDAR Assistant Commissioner Jason Wentworth and Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) Coordinator Mike Botelho attended a conference attended by FDA and representatives of all 50 states to discuss a framework developed by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture in which state agencies will participate in the implementation of FSMA in their respective jurisdictions. I am very hopeful that the involvement of state agencies like

MDAR will serve to help our farmers comply. Our current thinking is to adapt our existing CQP as necessary to become the compliance vehicle for FSMA, ensuring that Massachusetts farmers and growers maintain vital market access. MDAR will actively seek out stakeholder input as that process develops. Stay tuned-there is much more to follow on this subject in the coming months.

Over the course of the winter, our Pesticide Licensing group went through a multi-day Business Process Redesign of our Applicator Licensing program, the goal of which is to streamline the process and allow our customers to move through the process more quickly. The group arrived at a series of short and long-term changes to achieve that goal, which we are beginning to implement. Stakeholders were asked to participate, and their input was critical to the process.

We intend to examine other business processes in the attempt to eliminate as many customer “pain points” as possible and make interactions with the agency more efficient.

I try to get out of the office as much as possible-I think it’s very important to get “out in the field” as much as possible. I have recently attended or presented at:

- Mass. Farmer Wineries and Growers Association, Annual Meeting, Sturbridge
- Mass. Association of Agricultural Commissions Annual Meeting, Marlborough
- Southeastern Mass. Agricultural Partnership, Ag & Food Conference, Dighton
- Maple Kick Off, Stonegate Farm, Conway
- Sustainable Business Network of Mass., Local Food Tradeshow, Northeastern University
- Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association Winter Meeting, Plymouth
- Farm Fresh Worcester
- Urban Agriculture Conference, Northeastern University
- Hardwick Farmers Co-op Annual Meeting, Ware
- State Senator Don Humason’s Annual Pancake Brunch, Pomeroy’s Sugar House, Westfield
- Mass Association of Dairy Farmers and Mass. Dairy Promotion Board Winter Annual Meeting, Northampton
- Mass. Farmers Markets Manager Workshop, Grafton

Last but not least I can’t omit the very successful Ag Day at the State House on Tuesday April 5th. It was great to see the State House jammed with farmers, nursery professionals, and so many Future Farmers of America and 4H-ers! Governor Baker attended, along with scores of legislators and staffers. Many thanks to the Massachusetts Promotional Board, the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation and the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers Markets for organizing such a successful event!

On that note I will close, noting that for many of you, the busy season approaches and everyone here at MDAR wishes you a successful growing season. On your mark, get set, GROW!

John Lebeaux



FOREFRONT

MDAR Announces Open Application Period for Grant Programs

MDAR will be accepting applications from agricultural operations who wish to participate in the Department's grant programs. Interested agricultural operations are encouraged to review the information and applications on each program's webpage. If interested in applying, applications must be submitted with any supporting documentation by the program's deadline.

Ag-Energy Grant (Ag-Energy)

The purpose of the MDAR's Ag-Energy Grant is to assist agricultural operations in an effort to improve energy efficiency and to facilitate adoption of alternative clean energy technologies in order that they can become more sustainable and the Commonwealth can maximize the environmental and economic benefits from these technologies. Reimbursement grants of up to \$30,000 will be awarded on a competitive basis. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. Ag-Energy Grant applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html.

Ag-Energy Special Projects Grant - New

The purpose of the Ag-Energy Special Projects Grant is to provide funding for agricultural energy projects that would typically require higher capital cost but potentially yield greater savings and/or positive agricultural impacts in an effort to improve the farm's energy efficiency and to facilitate adoption of less conventional, alternative clean energy technology applications. By implementing these projects, the agricultural operation will demonstrate novel ideas that will help farms become more sustainable while contributing to the goals of: the MA Food Systems Plan; MA Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Implementation; and the MA Global Warming Solutions Act; and to advance technologies that can be replicated at other agricultural operations in Massachusetts.

AgEnergy Special Projects is a competitive, re-imbursement grant program that funds specifically specified project categories up to varying amounts according to the project category. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The RFR release date and deadline for applications still to be determined. Ag-Energy Special Project Grant applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html

Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP)

The purpose of AEEP is to support agricultural operations that are looking to install conservation practices that prevent direct impacts on water quality, ensure efficient use of water, as well as address impacts on air quality. By providing reimbursement directly to agricultural operations that implement eligible projects that prevent, reduce or eliminate environmental impacts, the program achieves its purpose and goals of minimizing environmental impacts from these operations for the benefit of the Commonwealth. AEEP is a competitive, re-imbursement grant program that funds materials and labor up to \$25,000 or 85% of project costs. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AEEP grant applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aEEP.html.

Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP)

The purpose of AFSIP is to support agricultural operations that are looking to upgrade food safety practices within their operation. By enhancing food safety measures these operations are able to maintain or increase their market access while working towards minimizing the risk of microbial contamination and food-borne illnesses. AFSIP is a competitive, re-imbursement grant program that funds projects up to \$20,000 or 75% of project costs. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AFSIP grant applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/afsip.html.

APR Improvement Program (AIP) – for APR farms

The APR Improvement Program (AIP) helps sustain active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. AIP provides technical assistance and business analysis to improve farm productivity and profitability of APR farms selected to participate in the program. Grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 may be available on a reimbursement basis to implement identified on-farm infrastructure improvements. AIP funds are used primarily for

capital improvements, such as constructing or repairing barns, farm stands, livestock housing, or processing facilities; or land management, such as reseeding hay fields, pasture improvements, fencing, or establishing perennial crops. The deadline for submitting applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AIP applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aip.html.

Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)

This popular business planning and technical assistance program provides management advice and grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 to implement farm growth and sustainability strategies. Farm operators not only receive upfront cash awards for signing a 5 or 10 year Agricultural Covenant, but also receive valuable consultations and visits from a team of experts to discuss farm production and management, marketing, and business planning. Typical uses of funds from the Farm Viability Program include building or repairing farm structures, modernizing field equipment, purchasing delivery vehicles and tractors, and improving retail marketing structures or food processing capacity. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. FVEP applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/fvep.html.

Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) - Grant Program for Beginning Farmers in MA

The Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) Program helps with business improvement on new farms. MEGA provides technical assistance and business planning help, and then provides funds for farm improvement strategies. Grants of up to \$10,000 are available from this Program on a one to one cash-matching basis. It is the objective of the MEGA Program to assist beginning farmers in their first through fifth year of business who aspire to develop their farms into commercially viable operations. Funds are typically used for equipment, infrastructure or other capital improvements needed to implement strategies recommended through the business planning process. The RFR release date and deadline for applications still to be determined. MEGA applications are available at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/mega.html.

Energy News

Governor Baker Signs New Net Metering Bill into Law

Acting on a net metering bill finalized by state legislators at the end of last week, Governor Baker signed the legislation, An Act Relative to Solar Energy, into law Monday April 11, 2016. Raising the net metering caps and revising net metering credits for certain solar PV projects going forward are among the highlights of the new law. The bill, An Act Relative to Solar Energy, passed both legislative chambers with overwhelming support and achieves the Baker-Polito Administration's goal of reducing costs to ratepayers while strengthening the state's clean energy economy and progressing towards the greenhouse gas reduction requirements set forth under the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). [More here.](#)

Energy Audits – Now is a great time - Grants are upon us!

As the warmer weather sets in and grant opportunities for the coming year begin, the Massachusetts Farm Energy Program is able to help provide energy audits and technical assessments, providing up to 75% of the cost of an energy audit/assessment. Audits/assessments are good for five years, and required for many if not all grants.

Request yours now! 413-727-3090, info@massfarmenergy.com, or visit www.massfarmenergy.com, submit a Request Form, and we will contact you.

Upcoming Deadlines - The next REAP deadline for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency grants and loan guarantees is April 30, actually May 2, 2016 due the weekend, for all project sizes. For more information on applying, [click here.](#)

REAP Application Assistance

Need help preparing your REAP application? The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program is able to provide it! Our program recently received a grant to help farms prepare their REAP applications, at no cost. But don't wait until the deadline approaches; REAP applications can be submitted any time, so contact us now.

MDAR's AgEnergy Grant RFRs are Posted

This year, thanks to the help of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EEA) and the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER), MDAR is able to advertise two energy grant programs for FY2017. One is our annual traditional AgEnergy Grant, covering all conventional energy efficiency and renewable energy projects; the other AgEnergy Special Projects, devoted to specific categories of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects that typically require higher capital cost but potentially yield greater savings and/or positive agricultural impacts, all in an effort to improve the farm's energy sustainability and to facilitate adoption of less conventional, alternative clean energy technology applications. Please see the related article above within this Farm & Report Market regarding these, the program links, deadlines, etc., as well as all other FY2017 MDAR Grants.

MassCEC Solar Loan Program

The MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) and the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center have launched a new \$30 million loan program for residentially metered and low income properties. The program also helps pay for the first 20 or 30% of the project costs.

Certain agricultural operations may qualify for this program. Please visit www.masssolarloan.com under the Consumers and Residents tab for details. For more information, you can contact MassCEC's main telephone number 617-315-9355 and ask for the Mass Solar Loan Program staff. You can also contact Gerry Palano @ MDAR 617-626-1706, Gerard.Palano@state.ma.us.

Federal Business Investment Tax Credit (ITC) Extended

In December 2015, Congress extended the Business Investment Tax Credit (ITC) predominantly for solar related technologies through at least 2022. All Other technologies, including geothermal, small wind, fuel cells, combined heat and power, etc will still have the original ITC in-service deadline of December 31, 2016 in order to be eligible for the tax credit. In related news the federal Production Tax Credit (PTC) was also extended, a credit primarily assisting large-scale wind, electric generating biomass, hydro-electric etc. The PTC extension also allows the developer/owner to select between ITC and PTC. For more information on these two important federal tax credits please see the website of Data Base of State of Incentives for Renewable Energy (DSIRE) - <http://programs.dsireusa.org/system/program/detail/658> and <http://programs.dsireusa.org/system/program/detail/734>.

Savor Massachusetts



Savor Massachusetts, our Culinary Tourism program, complements Agritourism by offering farms and food producers a platform to highlight their unique culinary offerings. Travelers from near and far are looking to discover the culinary delight farms & food producers have to offer. From the shores of Cape Cod and the Islands to the hills of Western Mass our Savor Massachusetts program offers something to satisfy even the most discerning palates. If you would like to learn more about the program, visit our resource page [here](#).

Event submission instructions can be found at the bottom of our [Culinary & Agriculture Calendar page](#).

Apiary Updates

Reminder: The MDAR is seeking public comment on the state [Pollinator Protection Plan](#) . Please note that this document is a draft and will be finalized after a comment review period. Comments can be sent to the following email address: Kim.Skyrm@state.ma.us with the subject line "Pollinator Plan Comments." **The extended deadline for the Pollinator Plan comments is April 30, 2016.** Updates made at [Apiary homepage](#).

*The MDAR is also now taking requests for [2016 Apiary Inspections](#) at this time. Please use our [Hive Registration and Inspection Form](#).



The "Massgrown and fresher" [website](#) is now mapping honey producers and beekeepers. If you produce honey, and are looking to increase sales, please fill out our two page survey  . If you offer workshops or classes on beekeeping, please let us know, and we will add to our Massgrown [Calendar](#) as well. To submit an agricultural related event, click on submission form [here](#), or send date, details, and website to Julia.Grimaldi@state.ma.us. If you have honey bee or apiculture related questions, please contact Kim Skyrms at Kim.Skyrm@state.ma.us.



Arbor Day Ash Tree Tagging

With Arbor Day coming soon (April 29th), it's time to think about planning how we can celebrate trees and their ability to provide our neighborhoods with clean air, shaded streets, and aesthetic value. This year, why not consider joining our Arbor Day ash tree tagging project! Spearheaded by the Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), the goal of this project is to get as many organizations as possible to tag at least one ash tree to spread the word about Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

If you have ash trees in your town and want to help raise awareness about the impact of Emerald Ash Borer this Arbor Day, MDAR is offering free Tree Tagging Kits to interested groups. [More here](#).

Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration Seeks Feedback

The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration is seeking your help in learning about the conflicts farmers face and their impact. Help us learn more about your needs and where the most needs exist across the state. This information will be used to advocate for additional funding to provide broader low or no cost mediation services to the Massachusetts farming community through our Agricultural Mediation Program.

Please fill out our very brief survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/AgMed by May 31, 2016. Your responses will be kept confidential.

For more information on this survey or the services provided by the Massachusetts Agricultural Mediation Program, please contact Program Manager Courtney Breese at 617-287-4046 or Courtney.breese@umb.edu.

Friends Set up Fund for Farm Due to Fire

Friends set up a fund with Crowdfunding through the "Go Fund Me" site for the Bohan Family, who suffered a farmhouse fire recently in New Braintree. [Details here](#).



Annual Massachusetts Agriculture Photo Contest

Did you take pictures of your farm this year? Are a recreational photographer who enjoys capturing images of agriculture; including farms, farm products, and horticultural products? Then join Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom

(MAC) and MDAR for the annual “Celebrating the Season of Massachusetts Agriculture” photo contest.

The annual “Celebrating the Seasons of Massachusetts Agriculture” calendar provides an interesting daily reminder of the diversity of agriculture across the Commonwealth. It includes monthly educational/teaching tips, special ag-related days and website links on each page. Twelve winning photos, one for each month, along with possible honorable mentions, will be published in the 2017 calendar.

Photos for consideration should represent Massachusetts grown crops (maple, cranberries, livestock, flowers/plants, fruits and vegetables), as well as farms practicing innovative methods such as renewable energy systems, urban agriculture, and more. See last year’s winning photos [here](#), and learn how to [submit your photos here](#).

The deadline is June 1st. Contact Rick LeBlanc @ Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us, or 617-626-1759 if you have any questions.

UPCOMING EVENTS / WORKSHOPS

Bear Swamp Orchard to Hold Organic Care Workshop

April 23 – Ashfield - In an effort to share lessons learned about orcharding, [Bear Swamp Orchard and Cidery](#) is offering a [series of workshops](#) this spring and summer at their orchard in Ashfield. Workshops are held from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, and cost is \$60 including a farmstead lunch after the workshop.

Discuss organic methods used to manage the orchard, including disease and pest deterrents, understory management, and fruit care. Participants will explore the growth characteristics of different apple varieties and rootstock sizes, examine tools and products used to manage the orchard. This workshop was preceded by Pruning and Grafting in March, and will be followed up by Preserving the Harvest on Aug. 20 and Fermenting on Sept. 10. Bear Swamp Orchard will also hold a free open house May 14, and will open its tasting room every Saturday for the rest of the summer, with expanded hours during the fall. For more information, visit www.bearswamporchard.com/styled-5/index.html.

Food Product Development Workshop

April 27, 9:00 am-5:00 pm, 196 Quincy St. Dorchester, MA. [CommonWealth Kitchen](#) & [UMASS Amherst's Food Science Department](#) are co-hosting a workshop on Food Product Development and Manufacturing

[Register here](#) - The course is \$200. The full day course will cover:

- Principles of Food Safety and Risk Management
- Establishing Process Controls & Effective Strategies for Record Keeping
- Quality Attributes of Food
- Financial/Business Considerations to account for in your product development process
- Food Regulation and Product Labeling and Claims
- HACCP Plan Requirements and/or Low-Acid and Acidified Certification
- Determine Formula, Process and Packaging for a safe food system
- Commercial Canning (Acidified Foods)
- Product Development Life Cycle

The instructor is Amanda Kinchla, who leads the UMass Amherst Food Science Extension Program, where she focuses on applied research and food safety education to support the regional food industry.

EPA Worker Protection Standard Train-the-Trainer Course for Organic and Non-Certified Pesticide Users

All farmworkers must be trained under the EPA Worker Protection Standard (WPS) if your farm uses any pesticides, including , those approved for organic production and other general use pesticides. The agricultural worker employer is responsible for complying with all components of WPS including the training of farmworkers. This training can only be provided by an individual who has a pesticide certification license or has attended an approved EPA WPS Train-the-Trainer workshop.

Participants will received the EPA WPS How to Comply Manual, WPS Pesticide Record Keeping book, EPA WPS Safety Poster, EPA WPS Trainer's Manual, Certificate of Attendance, and the ability to train farmworkers in WPS.

To learn more and to register for these workshop please [click here](#).

- **April 27** - 8:00 am - 11:00 am - Country Club of Pittsfield, 639 South Street, Pittsfield
- **May 12** - 8:00 am - 11:00 am - Hadley Farms Meeting House, 41 Russell Rd, Route 9, Hadley

For questions about this workshop please contact Natalia Clifton, UMass Extension , 413-545-1044 or email nclifton@umass.edu. Sponsored in part by the UMass Extension Risk Management/Crop Insurance Education Program.

Conservation Biological Control Short Course: Farming for Beneficial Insects

May 5 - Bristol County Agricultural High School, 135 Center St., Dighton, 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Join Kelly Gill and Jarrod Fowler of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation for this full-day course on conservation biological control – a science-based pest management strategy that seeks to integrate beneficial insects back into cropping systems for natural pest control. Intended audience: farmers, conservation agency or organization staff, cooperative extension, state department of agriculture employees, crop consultants, and other agricultural professionals. Topics include farmscaping and habitat management for beneficial insects, field exercises in habitat assessment and conservation planning, incorporating conservation biocontrol into farm practices and IPM strategies, pesticide protection and mitigating risk to beneficial insects, USDA NRCS conservation programs / resources for farmers, and more. This course focuses on the agricultural application of conservation biocontrol and on-farm conservation practices that support beneficial insects. This training is being conducted in partnership with the Bristol County Conservation District. Certified Crop Advisor (6 CEUs); Pesticide Applicator Continuing Education (PACE, 5 CEUs). For more information, course agenda, or to register, click [here](#).

AgCom Boot Camp "Bee Informed"

May 9 - West Brookfield Town Hall, 2 East Main St., West Brookfield, MA - 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm - Presented by MA Association of Ag Commissions (MAAC). Facilitators: Frank DiLuna, Esq., Murtha Cullina, LLP, Legal Advisor for MAAC, MDAR Chief Apiary Inspector, Kim Skyrn, and Taryn LaScola, MDAR Acting Director of Crop and Pest Services Division. Discussions on disease, foraging, pesticides, and hive health. Two pesticide credits will be awarded. Free of charge. Email Steve at damons_of_gill@yahoo.com with questions.

Massachusetts Horticultural Society Seeks Products for Twilight Garden Party

June 2 - The Massachusetts Horticultural Society is hosting a [Twilight Garden Party](#) and seeks donated product. Participating growers and food businesses will be well recognized and promoted.

From P. Wayne Mezzit, Chairman, Board of Trustees, The Gardens at Elm Bank: "We are expecting about 300 attendees and will be sending the invitations to hundreds more. Our Honorary Committee includes a large number of supporters who helped build Elm Bank gardens and programs over the last 20 years. Our Mass Hort membership information tells us that the majority of members are over 50 years of age, appreciate many aspects of horticulture and are relatively affluent. This is a great demographic, most of whom are eager to know more about availability of locally-produced foods and beverages."

The party is being catered by [Peppers](#) and chef [John Lawrence](#) loves to use locally-sourced food and beverages. "Our efforts will focus on sourcing appropriate finger-type foods from as many Massachusetts producers as possible, emphasizing the "locavore" theme wherever appropriate. We're thinking that unique cheeses, wines, cider, beer, vegetables, small and large fruits, egg products, preserves, milk, cream and maple products could all be components of the evening. Depending upon what's provided, John can determine the best way to prepare and serve. Although there will be no opportunity that evening to sell the product, we'll make sure that each provider is recognized with signage and information about the producer, and other appropriate information." For more information on donation options, review the [Twilight Sponsorship materials](#), or for questions, contact Alicia.Cleary@gmail.com.

Save the Dates:

July 28 - The Summer [MFGA](#) - [MNLA](#) Meeting - Norfolk Agricultural and Technical High School, Walpole - details in May

August 12 - 14 – [NOFA Summer Conference](#) - UMass, Amherst

November 9 & 10 - [Northeast Greenhouse Conference & Expo](#) - Holiday Inn, Boxborough

*More events at MDAR's [Calendar](#). Culinary and Agricultural Events [here](#).

USDA NEWS

AMS Specialty Crops Offer Produce Safety Webinar

“Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption, i.e. the Produce Safety Regulation”

April 21 - 2:00 pm - Leanne Skelton, SCP's FDA Liaison teams up with Dr. Samir Assar, Director of the FDA's Division of Produce Safety MS offer a free live interactive webinar with updates on the FDA's Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) “Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption, i.e., the Produce Safety regulation”. In addition to the Produce Safety regulation, FDA is putting significant effort into strategies for implementation and compliance, training, and research. USDA is also leading a joint project with FDA to review its USDA GAPs program to ensure it aligns with the FDA Produce Safety regulation. [Details and registration here](#).

USDA Announces New GroupGAP Program for the Produce Industry

Helping Smaller Producers Reach New Markets - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) recently announced the official launch of GroupGAP, a new certification program that helps small and mid-sized growers and cooperatives meet retailers' on-farm food safety requirements.

After a robust three-year pilot, AMS will today begin accepting applications for enrollment in GroupGAP, which certifies that grower groups are following industry-recognized food safety practices. By leveraging economies of scale and increasing efficiencies, GroupGAP improves market access for small and mid-sized farmers and benefits the entire produce industry. The AMS Specialty Crops Inspection Division (SCI) performs Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits, which are voluntary audits to verify that farms are following industry-recognized food safety practices and recommendations from the Food and Drug Administration. Produce buyers, large and small, are increasingly requiring suppliers to be GAP certified. Under GroupGAP, farmers, food hubs, and cooperatives work together to obtain group certification. Their participation in the program in turn benefits retailers and other large-volume buyers, who are better able to meet the increasing demand for local foods and broaden their base of suppliers.

AMS GroupGAP audits include an analysis of the group's system of oversight, a site visit to ensure compliance with various procedures, and spot checks to verify appropriate on-farm implementation. For more information or to submit an application, visit the GroupGAP Website at www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap. You can learn more about the AMS GAP Audit Program at www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing.

USDA Announces \$260 million Available for Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Applications sought with a focus on environmental markets, conservation finance

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently announced the availability of up to \$260 million for partner proposals to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. The funding is being made available through NRCS' innovative [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#); applicants must be able to match the federal award with private or local funds.

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, RCPP investments of nearly \$600 million have already driven 199 partner-led projects, including three projects benefiting Massachusetts. The program encourages local partnerships, which can include private companies; state, municipal and tribal governments; universities; non-profits and other non-government partners, to work with farmers and forest landowners on landscape- and watershed-scale conservation solutions that work best for their region.

USDA is now accepting proposals for federal fiscal year 2017 RCPP funding. **Pre-proposals are due May 10.** For more information on applying, visit the [RCPP website](#).

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program

AMS has grant funding available to strengthen local and regional food systems through the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program. AMS is providing over \$26 million in competitive grants, divided equally between the [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) (FMPP) and the [Local Food Promotion Program](#) (LFPP). FMPP grants support direct producer-to-consumer marketing projects. LFPP funding supports projects, including farm to school projects, that develop, improve, and expand local and regional food business supply chain activities, including processing, distribution, aggregation, and storage of locally produced food products. Applications are due May 12, 2016.

USDA Commits \$20 Million to Innovative Conservation Projects

Up to \$20 million in competitive grants is available through the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program. The program aims to spark the development and adoption of cutting-edge conservation technologies and approaches for farmers, ranchers and other landowners. Proposals sought for water quality, outreach and conservation finance. Program aims to spark the development and adoption of cutting-edge conservation technologies and approaches for farmers, ranchers and other landowners.

Administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), CIG is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and is designed to focus on innovative conservation projects that promote science-based solutions to benefit both producers and the environment. Projects may include on-farm pilot projects and field demonstrations, and are funded to accelerate the transfer and adoption of promising technologies to landowners in order to address critical natural resource concerns.

Applications for CIG projects are due **by May 10, 2016**. More information is available on the [NRCS CIG website](#). This year's application process includes two other significant changes: an increase in the maximum award amount to \$2 million, up from \$1 million in 2015, and a streamlined single proposal process.

With USDA Microloans, Your Farming Idea Is Closer than You Think

Submitted by: SED Jon Niedzielski

Access to reliable credit has been an important issue for farmers long before President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Federal Farm Loan Act back in 1916. In fact, even a century later, with all of the financial options available today, one

of the biggest challenges to entering agriculture - or even growing an existing farming operation - still can be the cost of land and equipment. At the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), we believe starting or expanding a farm should never be out of reach, nor should it require buying thousands of acres of land, borrowing significant sums or committing to unreasonable interest rates.

That's why three years ago, FSA created a new microloan program tailored especially to borrowers who have small or medium-sized needs. With its streamlined paperwork, no mandatory minimum amount and up to \$50,000 in borrowing authority, microloans have become one of our most popular programs to date, providing \$25.8 million to more than 17,000 borrowers, with fully 70 percent of microloans having gone to new farmers and nearly 50 percent to first-time FSA customers.

These "farm operating microloans" can be used for tools, equipment, livestock, seed, fertilizer, utilities, even marketing, distribution and certification expenditures. But unlike conventional FSA farm operating loans, the microloan offers a simplified application process, and eligibility requirements have been modified to recognize new and smaller operations. This January, FSA expanded the microloan concept to now cover farm ownership expenses, such as land purchases, constructing or upgrading farm structures and even implementing soil and water conservation practices. With a "farm ownership microloan," no appraisals are needed, and eligibility has been expanded to include other important skills like experience with a non-farm business, military leadership or advanced education in an agricultural field.

So if you operate a truck farm with direct marketing and sales, if your farm uses hydroponics, aquaponics, organic or vertical growing methods, if you work a smaller number of acres and do business with farmers markets, restaurants or community-supported agriculture businesses, perhaps a microloan is just what you need to make your business succeed and grow! At FSA, we work each day to help farmers achieve their own version of the American Dream of brighter days for their farms, their families and their future. To learn more about how microloans can help you, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans or contact your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Import Reminders Regarding NAP

Growers are reminded of the importance of notifying your crop insurance agent or Farm Service Agency (FSA) when you suspect you may have crop losses due to a weather event. Your crop insurance policy and/or Non-Insure Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) require notification of potential losses within 72 hours of the initial discovery of damage.

For planted crops, it is extremely important to communicate the cause of loss, and your intentions to destroy the crop or take it to harvest. If you plan on to destroy a crop, be sure to make arrangements to have a crop loss adjuster appraise the damage prior to the crops destruction. Your cooperation with your crop insurance agent/FSA may help to insure a smooth claims process. Destruction of a damaged crop prior to an inspection may disqualify a farmer from receiving a crop loss indemnity payment. For more information, please visit www.rma.usda.gov or contact UMass Risk Management Specialists Paul Russell at pmrussell@umext.umass.edu or Tom Smiarowski at tsmiarowski@umext.umass.edu.

CLASSIFIED / BRIEFS / JOB OPPORTUNITIES

- [The MDAR Seeks Technical Support Consultants \(TSC\)](#) to serve as regionally based independent contractors to assist in the conduct of site audits as well as field deployed technical assistance, in support of the Department's Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) requirements. Requested support will be provided during the growing season, which has been identified as the months of May through October for the purposes of this RFR. The Department is seeking to contract for services through September 30, 2017. Please refer to the File Attachment listed [here \(click on CQP RFR\)](#).
- [Boston Entrepreneur Looking for Surplus Produce](#) - Does your farm often have surplus produce? Are you looking to move away from retail farmers markets? I partner with local farms to preserve their produce in a simple, shelf-stable format to help people eat locally grown food all year. Primarily looking for tomatoes, peaches and

pears for the first year — expanding to include a wide range of vegetables and other tree fruit in additional years. Opportunities to grow partnership significantly. Email Brian Milstone, brian.milstone@gmail.com, for more information.

- For Sale: Entire poultry production (no poultry). Housing, feeders, water bowls, 100' of no-climb fencing & T posts (Louis Page Fence Co), 2"X4" welded wire fencing, outside shelters & more. Coop, built in 2004, 10 nest boxes, custom roosts, insulated & wired for electric with lights and outlets. Rodent & predator proof. Excellent ventilation. Separate grain room. Channel lock metal roof (shed style). Needs minor repairs. Selling everything. Call 508-763-5901, leave message.
- The [Boston Public Market](#) is looking to fill their Greenway Farmers Market with an abundance of local growers and producers every Wednesday from 11 am to 6 pm from May 18 to November 16 along the Boston Public Market at 136 Blackstone Street. Looking for farmers, orchards, bakeries, and cheese makers. If you are interested in applying, please contact [Hannah Martin](#).
- The [Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association Offer Scholarship](#) – an award of up to \$4,000 depending on length of study. This scholarship is for \$1000 per year for up to 4 years for any horticultural program study at any college or university, 2 or 4 year program. [Click here for an application](#). Deadline May 15.
- Farmers' Markets Looking for Vendors: This is a list of new and existing markets looking for specific types of vendors. [Click here for list](#).

About the *Farm & Market Report*

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Next issue to be published for June / July. Please send news, calendar and/or classified information by June 1 to Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us. To unsubscribe or change your address, send an e-mail message to Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us or call 617-626-1759.



MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at mass.gov/agr, and/or follow at twitter.com/MDARCommish.