

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



## Department of Agricultural Resources

100 Cambridge Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02114  
[www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr)



Maura T. Healey  
GOVERNOR

Kimberley Driscoll  
LIEUTENANT  
GOVERNOR

Rebecca L. Tepper  
SECRETARY

Ashley E. Randle  
COMMISSIONER

March 15, 2024

Governor Maura Healey  
Massachusetts State House, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("Council"), I am pleased to provide this Annual Report pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 20, Section 6C(e) on the Council's ongoing work related to the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan ("Plan") (<http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/>).

Please accept this letter as the Council's 2023 Annual Report. Throughout the year, Council members continued to work towards the priorities and goals from the Plan. With the Plan's recommendations continuing to be very relevant, issues including climate-related weather disasters and continued reverberations from the pandemic challenged the Council and partners to support the Massachusetts food system. Topics focused on racial equity, reducing hunger, food insecurity, agricultural sector support, and programs to address the wide range of challenges within the food system.

Council meetings during 2023 had strong participation as continued allowance of public meetings conducted through remote means allowed real-time public access. Hybrid meetings with remote and in-person participation were also held. The collaborative relationship between the Council, the MA Legislature's Food System Caucus, the MA Food System Collaborative, local food policy councils, and other stakeholders continues to be an asset to develop and support policy and program recommendations. Having Council communications and relationships in place has been an asset for efficiency in continuing and advancing new food system initiatives.

The Council respectfully acknowledges the Healey-Driscoll Administration and the General Court for their continued support in 2023 of the Plan's broad goals and the programs that link those goals to larger policy issues. In addition, the Council appreciates the Healey-Driscoll Administration's and the General Court's ongoing support since Plan acceptance in 2015 of the Plan's vision of a sustainable and equitable food system. We ask that you give continued consideration to Plan recommendations and goals as relevant legislative and regulatory actions are developed. As always, members of the Council would be happy to meet with you or your staff to offer further detail on support for the Massachusetts food system or our work to implement the Plan. Electronic versions of this Report and its attachments will also be provided to you forthwith.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley E. Randle".

Ashley Randle, Commissioner  
Chair, Massachusetts Food Policy Council

## 2023 Annual Report of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council

An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Food Policy Council was signed into law on November 7, 2010, which created the 17-member Council that was tasked with developing recommendations for food system goals for the Commonwealth. Pursuant to Section 6C(e) of Chapter 277 of the Acts of 2010, the Council must submit an annual report outlining its findings, conclusions, proposals, recommendations, and progress towards reaching the goals that have been set forth.

In 2023, the MA Food Policy Council (FPC) continued to focus on environmental justice and climate change, forming the meeting themes for the year. Throughout the year, Council members continued to review the priorities and goals from the Plan. With the Plan's recommendations continuing to be very relevant, the continued reverberations from the 2019 coronavirus outbreak and the dramatic climate events affecting agriculture challenged the Council and partners to support the Massachusetts food system. Topics focused on reducing hunger, food insecurity, racial equity, agricultural sector support, and programs to address the wide range of challenges within the food system. Detailed minutes of all meetings throughout the year are available at: <https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-food-policycouncil>.

Meetings continued to be held remotely in accordance with An Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations ("Act"), which was signed by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022. This Act extends the expiration of certain provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025, allowing a public body to continue holding meetings remotely without a quorum physically present at a meeting location as long as it provides "adequate, alternative" access to remote meeting. Hybrid meetings were also held, with in-person and remote participation.

The MA Local Food Action Plan (Plan) accepted by the FPC on December 10, 2015, continues to be pertinent. The Plan was designed to increase the production and consumption of MA-grown food; create jobs and improve wages in food and farming; protect the land and water needed to produce food; ensure food safety; reduce food waste; and reduce food insecurity while making fresh and healthy food more accessible for the residents of the Commonwealth. The Plan offers recommendations for the public and private sectors to see these goals through to fruition and continues to be an important foundation for this work.

2023 was a banner year for the Council and its members, with accomplishments including:

- A first-time state Local Food Policy Council Grant Program.
- The beginning of a partnership between the Council and Project Bread, to develop a road map to end hunger in the state by 2030.
- Climate change-related weather events continued to have unpredictable impacts on food production, prompting rapid public sector response to agricultural natural disasters, including a direct payment program to farmers suffering losses.
- Release of a statewide Farmland Action Plan.
- The Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program was made permanent.
- The launch of second round of the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program.
- Initiatives to promote and integrate environmental justice considerations across programs, policies, and activities to ensure the equal access and meaningful involvement of all people residing in the Commonwealth.

**State Agency Members:** Ashley Randle, Commissioner, MDAR; Yvonne Hao, Secretary, MEOHED, Designee: Anne Gobi (Massachusetts Director of Rural Affairs); Margret R. Cooke, Commissioner MPH, Designee: Jessica del Rosario; Bonnie Heiple, Commissioner, MDEP, Designee: Danah Tench; Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner, MDESE,

Designee: Robert Leshin; Commissioner Jeffrey McCue, MDTA, Designee: Associate Commissioner Brittany Mangini.

**Legislative members:**

Senator Joanne Comerford, Senator Ryan Fattman, Representative Dan Donahue, Representative Hannah Kane.

**Industry Members** (appointed by the Governor): Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution; Amanda Kinchla, M.S., Food Safety Extension Specialist, UMASS Amherst; John Lee, Allandale Farm (stepped down in 2023), Farmer; Mackenzie May, Direct to consumer; Phoebe Walker, Local boards of Health; John Waite, Food processor and handler; Ayn Yeagle, Public health.

EEA Secretary appointed member: Caro Roszell, Soil Health.

Contact: Bonita Oehlke, MDAR, [Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov](mailto:Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov)

**ATTACHMENT A:**

Six meetings were held in 2023 and each included updates from the Massachusetts Legislature's Food System Caucus and the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. Meetings were typically held from 9:30 – 11:30 AM.

The January, March, July, and September meetings were held remotely. Hybrid meetings were also held, with in-person and remote participation, in May and December. The December hybrid annual meeting was held in Room 428 at the Massachusetts State house, thanks to Senator Comerford and her staff.

On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws, declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus ("COVID-19"). In accordance with the State of Emergency, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("MFPC") meetings are being conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access. The law was updated with an Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations ("Act"), which was signed by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022. This Act extends the expiration of certain provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2023, allowing a public body to continue holding meetings remotely without a quorum physically present at a meeting location as long as it provides "adequate, alternative" access to remote meeting. In accordance with these laws, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("MFPC") meetings are being conducted through both remote and hybrid (remote and in-person) options to allow real-time public access.

**December 7, 2023** Council Chair and Commissioner Ashley Randle presided over the hybrid meeting held in-person and remotely at the Massachusetts State House. She welcomed participating legislators and staff to introduce themselves. She expressed gratitude to legislators, their staff, and Rachel Klein from Senator Comerford's office for their support. Senator Comerford of the MA Legislative Food System Caucus highlighted the progress of priority bills, recognizing the role of the Agricultural Committee Co-Chair, Representative Paul Schmidt. The meeting covered updates from the MA Food System Collaborative and local Food Policy Council grant awardees including the Southcoast Food Policy Council, Cape Cod Cooperative Extension, and Hampshire County Food Policy Council. Council member agencies reported on projects including DPH's Root Cause Solutions Exchange, DESE's Impact of Funding on Farm to School, and DEP's Gap Energy Grant awards that included six food system businesses for the first time. A slate for the open Advisory Committee positions, and a slate for the Bylaw Committee were accepted. The meeting was followed by MA Grown & Fresher Networking, taking advantage of in-person participation to re-connect over refreshments.

**September 22, 2023** Commissioner Ashley Randle chaired the remote meeting which addressed critical issues in the state's food system and resilience efforts. Senator Comerford reported on the Legislative Food System Caucus,

highlighting the intersection with the 21st Century Agriculture Commission and a focus on priority bills. The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, represented by Rebecca Miller, discussed ongoing efforts with the New England Feeding New England initiative and concerns about the full funding of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). Officer reports included updates on natural disaster relief programs, the Farm Resiliency Fund, and upcoming initiatives including a farmers market language access course in Spanish. Local Food Policy Council grant recipients including Just Roots, Salem Food for All, and the City of Lynn shared progress and outcomes of their projects. The meeting also included a presentation by Council member Phoebe Walker emphasizing the role of local boards of health in the food system and the state's Public Health Excellence Grant Program. The intersection of public health standards, licensing, and inspections within the food system was discussed.

**July 21, 2023** The remote meeting focused on addressing the aftermath of recent devastating floods affecting local farms. The meeting, chaired by Commissioner Ashley Randle, began with updates on the current crisis. She shared estimated losses exceeding \$15 million and the launch of the Massachusetts Farm Resiliency fund to provide relief. Discussions included the challenges faced by farmers, concerns about mycotoxins affecting livestock, and the collaborative efforts to distribute funds efficiently and equitably. The meeting also shared updates from the Council's strategic planning subcommittee to address broader food security issues. A presentation on the New England Feeding New England initiative discussed exploring a regional approach to food system resilience. The presentation covered various aspects, including the challenges of climate change, the economic impact of food production, and strategies to achieve the goal of sourcing 30% of food locally by 2030. Local Food Policy Council grant awardees on the agenda included Cambridge Food & Fitness, City of Everett, and Hilltown CDC. They showcased projects supporting local farmers and fostering community engagement.

**May 12, 2023** The hybrid meeting included both in-person and remote attendance. Acting Chair Mackenzie May led the meeting. Commissioner Ashley Randle was nominated and accepted as the new Chair. There was a special vote established a Nominating Committee to fill open positions on the Advisory Committee. The meeting also featured updates from the MA Legislative Food System Caucus from Representative Kane, a comprehensive program discussing the Council's role in advocating for food system legislation, and the formation of a subcommittee to develop a two-year strategic plan. EEA and MDAR Environmental Justice initiatives were discussed by Undersecretary Marian Belen Power and MDAR's Rebecca Davidson. A food literacy campaign funded at \$1M was discussed by Brittany Peats from the MA Food System Collaborative. Local Food Policy Grants awarded to 17 organizations were discussed. There was an update on the USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program. Brittany Mangini from DTA addressed the SNAP skimming issue. Commissioner Randle solicited candidates for the Council's open farmer position.

**March 17, 2023** The remote FPC meeting was led by Acting Chair Mackenzie May. Longtime Council member John Lee, representing farmers, announced his resignation. The Council's annual report, submitted in February, was reviewed. An election for a new chair will take place at the next meeting. Updates from the MA Food System Collaborative and information about Agriculture Day at the State House were provided. A program on understanding and preparing for the Farm Bill with a focus on equity and climate change was presented by Professor Christopher Bosso from Northeastern University. Council members expressed support for a hybrid meeting format, with every other meeting allowing live member participation. The Advisory Committee proposed legislative focuses related to climate change and equity, including amendments to the enabling legislation to offer stipends and the addition of a fisheries seat. Council members also received updates on the Healthy Soils Action Plan, Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, and Universal Free School Meals. Newly appointed Commissioner Ashley Randle highlighted USDA-supported programs resulting from the Farm Bill, emphasizing their impact on the state's agricultural and food systems.

**January 27, 2023** Chaired by Commissioner John Lebeaux, the remote meeting featured Congressman James McGovern's remarks on the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to reduce hunger by 2030. The Congressman urged action at both state and federal

levels, emphasizing the importance of making universal meals permanent, addressing food insecurity among college students, and involving local farmers in discussions. There were updates on the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program survey results and legislative initiatives. The FSIG survey, presented by Shannon Emmett, Research Director, MA Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, highlighted the program's positive outcomes with Commissioner Lebeaux emphasizing its role as a game-changer for local food system resilience. Legislative initiatives discussed included bills focused on food literacy, protecting soil and farms from PFAS contamination, strengthening local food systems, promoting equity in agriculture, supporting the Healthy Incentives Program, coordinating the state's food system efforts, and encouraging food donations. There were also updates on the Local Food Policy Council grant program, MassGrown Wellness, and the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative's legislative efforts. Commissioner Lebeaux expressing gratitude for the Council's ongoing work and support during the administration transition.

## **Addendums**

Massachusetts Food System Caucus

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

December 22, 2023

2023 Massachusetts Food Policy Council Annual Report

Food System Caucus – Massachusetts State Legislature. Four members of the legislature are voting members of the MA Food Policy Council. In 2023, Senator Jo Comerford, Senator Ryan Fattman, Representative Hannah Kane, and Representative Dan Donahue served on the Council. This report outlines the work done in 2023 in the Legislature’s Food System Caucus.

**Overview:**

The Food System Caucus (FSC) is a bipartisan, bicameral caucus that advances policy and legislation to support the Commonwealth’s food system. The caucus has 158 members, making it the legislature’s second-largest caucus after the Democratic Caucus. The FSC is chaired by Senator Comerford, Senator DiDomenico, Senator Tarr, Representative Kane, Representative Donahue, Representative Vargas, Representative Domb, and Representative Schmid. Areas of focus include food access and food insecurity, farmland, and economic development.

**Food Security Accomplishments**

The Food System Caucus’ advocacy secured funding for several important programs in the FY24 budget. Universal school meals, a priority for the Caucus and the Healey-Driscoll administration, received \$172 million in permanent state funding to provide free school meals for K-12 students. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) received \$5 million with a \$8.8 million carryover from the previous year. \$36.4 million went to the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP), \$25.1 million to the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program, and \$300,000 to the Massachusetts Food Trust Program. The supplemental budget also included \$6 million to provide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to migrants present under the color of law and \$1 million to reimburse SNAP clients who lost payments due to fraud.

In response to the deep freeze, frost, and flooding that caused millions in damage to farms in Central and Western Massachusetts, MDAR established the Natural Disaster Recovery Program for Agriculture to provide financial assistance to the affected farms. As of December 11<sup>th</sup>, MDAR awarded \$20 million to 347 farms to help farms recover and rebuild. As climate change intensifies, natural disasters that impact the Commonwealth’s food system are expected to increase in frequency and severity. These funds will not only help farms survive damage caused by the year’s natural disasters, but also allow farms to improve resiliency against future disasters.

## Legislation and Policy

At the beginning of the 2023-2024 session, the Food System Caucus conducted a rigorous process to choose priority and endorsed bills for the current session. The FSC chairs solicited submissions from legislators and then worked with members to select the final slate.

The Food System Caucus prioritized 8 bills and endorsed 20, all of which were heard in 2023. The Caucus submitted written testimony for each bill. The Caucus's priority bills in the 2023-2024 session are:

- S13/H41, *Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands* (Comerford/Schmid)
- H754, *An Act supporting farm diversification and sustainability* (Blais)
- S1855/H2852, *An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture* (E. Kennedy/Kane/Howard)
- S42/H88, *An Act strengthening local food systems* (Comerford/Blais)
- S261/H603, *An Act relative to universal school meals* (DiDomenico/Vargas)
- S920/S1016/H1594, *An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need* (Comerford/E. Kennedy/Kane)
- S835/H1293, *An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative* (Lovely/Vargas/Domb)
- S85/H150, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program* (Gobi/Domb)

The full list of FSC priority and endorsed bills can be found on the Caucus's website at <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/>.

S13/H41, *Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands*, was reported favorably from the Joint Committee on Revenue and placed on file with the Constitutional Convention, a joint session was held in October and recessed to April 10, 2024. H754, *An Act supporting farm diversification and sustainability*, was reported favorably from the Joint Committee on Agriculture and sent to the House. As of today, the remaining six priority bills wait for a report from their committees.

In 2023, the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture was split into the Joint Committee on Agriculture and the Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Environment. The new Agriculture committee is chaired by Representative Paul Schmid, with Senator Jo Comerford serving as acting chair for the Senate.

The Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which was initially authorized for 2020, was revived in 2023 and is chaired by Speaker Pro Tempore Hogan and Senator Jo Comerford. The purpose of this Commission is to investigate the needs of agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21st century, with a focus on viability, efficiency, climate resiliency, education and workforce development, technical assistance, and energy needs. As of November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Commission held five public hearings on these subjects, with more hearings scheduled to take place in early 2024. The Commission is expected to issue its report by December 31, 2024. The Commission's

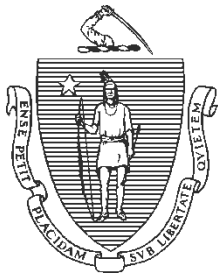
website is linked here and includes a list of members, hearing recordings, and more:  
<https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/524>.

The 2023 Food System Forum was held on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in Worcester, Massachusetts. Food system stakeholders, including several FSC members, participated in this opportunity to learn more about the challenges and opportunities farms faced in 2023 and discuss the future of agriculture in Massachusetts.

In September 2022, the Biden Administration hosted the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health and set a goal to end hunger in the United States by 2030 and tackle preventable, nutrition-related diseases. Representatives Mindy Domb, Andy Vargas, and Hannah Kane, and Senators Sal DiDomenico and Jo Comerford attended the conference. Project Bread is facilitating a broad group of stakeholders - including individuals with lived experience, nonprofits, government agency officials, businesses, and legislators - to create a Massachusetts roadmap. Representatives Hannah Kane and Andy Vargas and Senators Sal DiDomenico and Jo Comerford will participate on the steering committee of this initiative.

The Caucus looks forward to work in 2024 to pass meaningful food and agriculture legislation and to continue working with the Food Policy Council to build and support a strong, equitable, and resilient food system in the commonwealth.





Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

# **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

135 Santilli Highway, Everett, Massachusetts 02149-1962

Telephone: (781) 338-3000  
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

January 9, 2024

## **One Time Funding Sparks Historic Growth in Farm to School Meal Programs**

In July 2023, the state legislature approved funding for universal free school meals, making Massachusetts the eighth state to make universal free meals permanent. In August 2023, \$1 million was made available in the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget for programs and resources to support food system literacy. In September 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released an [Educational Vision and Catalog of Aligned Supports](#) in time for the 2023-2024 school year (SY 23-24), centering school meals in DESE's Strategic Objective One: Cultivate systems to support the whole student and foster joyful, healthy, and supportive learning environments so that all students feel valued, connected, nourished, and ready to learn.

In 2023, DESE received \$3.5 million dollars through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s [Local Food for Schools](#) (LFS) program. This funding is being distributed by DESE's Office for Food and Nutrition Programs (FNP) under Northeast Food for School (NFS) providing funds to 234 school districts across the Commonwealth. NFS funds are being spent on unprocessed or minimally processed foods that were grown, raised, or caught within four hundred miles of the respective school. In the first full month during which school districts could spend this funding, \$178,000 was invested in over forty Massachusetts farms and food businesses. Almost 60% of these purchases to date have been brokered through a Massachusetts food hub, which according to the [USDA's Regional Food Hub Resource Guide](#), is a "business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand." This surge of business for some Massachusetts food hubs due to NFS funding has resulted in numerous investments in infrastructure, employees, and transportation capacity. Food hubs also play a role in addressing a unique challenge for School Meal Programs: the storage of seasonally grown Massachusetts produce for the operating calendar of School Meal Programs. With most School Meal Programs operating in the off season of Massachusetts's most productive growing season, robust statewide facilities are necessary to process (freeze, dry, preserve, etc.) and store seasonally grown Massachusetts produce for year-round access for School Meal Programs to allow for the integration of local foods into long-term procurement strategy.

Despite School Meal Programs' growing investment in food hubs and Massachusetts farmers, both entities must be strategic in considering what the future of this business looks like, as NFS is one-time, temporary USDA funding. With no current structure in place for a future local purchasing incentive program for School Meal Programs, FNP continues to provide resources, technical assistance, and communication emphasizing the importance of investing in local purchasing but recognizes that the absence of funding can make local food cost prohibitive for many Massachusetts School Meal Programs.

In addition to future funding limitations, local food vendors, farmers, and distributors face transportation and delivery barriers in reaching our School Meal Programs in smaller, rural communities. For other School Meal Programs, expanding the capacity of local processing facilities to make available lightly processed (cut/peeled) fruits and vegetables from local producers would make cooking with raw, local ingredients more accessible.

Lastly, as set out as a priority of NFS, School Meal Programs are eager to identify and work effectively with Massachusetts farmers of color as well as woman-owned food business and farms qualified under the USDA's definition of "[socially disadvantaged farmers](#)." Specifically, School Meal Programs are seeking further technical assistance and professional development to ensure that requests for quotes and formal solicitation processes are accessible to all Massachusetts farmers and foster sustainable, long-term procurement relationships with interested socially disadvantaged farmers.

In conjunction with the ambitious 2023 local procurement investments of School Meal Programs leveraging universal free school meals across the Commonwealth, FNP piloted a statewide farm to school competitive grant program to ensure K-12 schools and early education programs had the resources necessary to amplify the importance of food literacy in the classroom, cafeteria, and community: [Massachusetts Farming Reinforces Education and Student Health](#) (MA FRESH), made possible through allocated American Rescue Plan Act funds. In MA FRESH's first call for applications in school year 2022-2023, FNP received a total of 59 submissions, with requests of over \$1.6 million. Sixteen projects, five early education programs, and eleven K-12 programs, were awarded nearly \$500,000 to fund such activities as the installation of indoor and outdoor garden infrastructure, the support of educators working to integrate food, nutrition, and agricultural curriculum into the classroom, the delivery of experiential educational opportunities such as farm field trips, and the training of school nutrition staff in local procurement, preparation, and promotion.

MA FRESH not only influenced the meal programs of grantees (60% of grantees reported that the implementation of their MA FRESH proposal changed the way they prepared and served meals and 66% of grantees reported an increase in meal participation) but over 6,000 students across the Commonwealth received relevant, real-world, interactive learning experiences because of the funding, aligning with DESE's Educational Vision. In SY2024, MA FRESH's capacity to fund farm to school projects will grow through the leveraging of a portion of the \$1 million allocated in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget for programs and resources to support food system literacy. As of December 2023, FNP has recommended that 23 MA FRESH applicants be awarded funding in the grant's second of tentatively three funding cycles.

Complimentary to the MA FRESH program, DESE's [Center for Instructional Support](#) – through the support of the \$1 million FY24 State Budget 7010-1192 Educational Improvement Project Earmarks – will be developing a food system literacy professional learning program designed to support Massachusetts educators in enhancing their understanding of the standards and instructional routines that promote deeper food literacy learning. Working in tandem, both programs address an important challenge for Massachusetts's local food economy: fostering awareness of and job readiness for a wide range of career opportunities in the field of agriculture and school nutrition.

Universal free school meals, in conjunction with the execution of state and federal local food purchasing and farm to school programs, have sustained the health of school nutrition programs in SY2024, spurred growth in the purchasing of local food, and kept a high standard of nutritional quality for breakfast and lunch. Ultimately, universal free school breakfast and lunch are more than a meal; they are a return on investment to our local economy that fosters a more resilient Massachusetts food system.

Sincerely,



Robert M Leshin, Director,  
Office of Food and Nutrition Programs  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

# Department of Environmental Protection

100 Cambridge Street Suite 900 Boston, MA 02114 • 617-292-5500

Maura T. Healey  
Governor

Kimberley Driscoll  
Lieutenant Governor

Rebecca L. Tepper  
Secretary

Bonnie Heiple  
Commissioner

## 2023 Massachusetts Food Policy Council Annual Report MA Department of Environmental Protection

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is pleased to provide this report of its activities for the Massachusetts Food Policy Council's (Council) Annual Report pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 20, Section 6C(e). MassDEP through its Commissioner, Bonnie Heiple, is one of six state agencies that sits on the Council pursuant to M.G.L., Chapter 6C(a). The agency actively works toward meeting the goals of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, one of which is to reduce food waste. (Inputs Goals 1.) In 2023 MassDEP provided financial assistance to support efforts outlined in Goal 2 of the MA Local Food Action Plan, "funding infrastructure improvements" and Goal 3, "increasing energy efficiency and sustainable food practices."

On January 3, 2023, MassDEP announced the recipients of its Gap III Energy Grant Program (Gap Energy Grant) awards to provide energy efficiency and clean energy funding to nonprofit agricultural/food producing organizations and to small businesses engaged in food distribution and processing, as well as water utilities. Ten awards were given to nonprofit and small businesses to invest in infrastructure development, both to facilities and for equipment for these agricultural and food entities, supporting Goal 2 of the Local Food Action Plan. The third goal of the MA Local Food Action Plan, to increase energy efficiency and sustainable food production, will also be advanced with these grants. The extension of the Gap Energy Grant to this new sector was made available through a streamlined on-line application process that allowed potential applicants to provide basic information on their energy usage, and potential savings to be made by their grant proposal.

MassDEP gave in total approximately \$500,000 dollars to four food pantries (Cambridge Community Center, Catholic Charities of Worcester, Stratford Street United Church, West Roxbury, and the Townsend Ecumenical Food Pantry), three nonprofit farms (Dismas House, Oakham, Natick Community Organic Farm, and The Farm School, Athol) and three small businesses (Elliot Farm, Lakeville, Farmer Dave's, Dracut, and We Grow Microgreens, Hyde Park). These grantee projects are estimated to save annually 657,947 kilowatt hours (kWh) in electrical and other fuel savings, and account for 200 tons of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) annually.

These funds will assist farmers and other agricultural businesses in upgrading their buildings and equipment to be more energy efficient and for some, to provide a clean source of renewable energy for their business and organizations. This effort accomplishes two objectives. The grants will meet a need for additional financial assistance to these organizations and allow them to reduce their energy usage and save on energy costs. These cost savings can be reinvested into their organizations' mission and businesses. In addition, the investment will result in grant recipients reducing their greenhouse gas

This information is available in alternate format. Please contact Melixza Esenyie at 617-626-1282.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370  
MassDEP Website: [www.mass.gov/dep](http://www.mass.gov/dep)

Printed on Recycled Paper

emissions (GHG) which will contribute to the Commonwealth reaching its GHG emissions reduction goals. EEOEA's Climate Protection and Mitigation Expendable Trust funded the Gap Energy Grant.

In FY23, MassDEP continued to implement the **2030 Solid Waste Master Plan – Working Together Toward Zero Waste**. The 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan and regulations set new, aggressive state-level waste reduction goals that align with our carbon emission reduction programs, invest in innovation, and enhance ongoing engagement with communities across the Commonwealth. Key disposal and recycling goals include:

- Reduce disposal statewide by 30 percent by 2030 (from 5.7 million tons in 2018 to 4 million tons), and
- Achieve a 90 percent reduction in disposal by 2050 (from 5.7 million tons to 570,000 tons).

The Plan, accompanied by regulatory changes, also expands landfill disposal waste bans for certain materials, setting a lower threshold for landfill disposal of organic materials, including food waste, and establishing new bans on disposal of mattresses and textiles. Enforcement of the organic materials waste bans is an important part of the Plan's implementation. The Plan also includes initiatives to strengthen engagement with and support of environmental justice communities, including:

- increasing engagement with environmental justice populations in all phases of MassDEP's regulatory process;
- improving recycling grant evaluation criteria to recognize environmental justice community issues;
- promoting small-scale composting assistance to enable composting at community gardens in environmental justice areas;
- and promoting and encouraging the use of electric and hybrid trash and recycling collection vehicles in environmental justice communities.

Finally, the Plan addresses increasingly constrained disposal capacity in the state and region, as well as tight capacity at materials recovery facilities, and supports waste reduction strategies including anaerobic digestion and composting. MassDEP will continue to focus on helping municipalities confront a recycling market that has changed significantly in recent years, through a variety of technical and financial assistance programs. MassDEP awarded \$4.5 million in grants, technical assistance, and education services to municipalities to advance recycling and \$2 million in technical assistance and grants to advance business recycling and support/expand the recycling industry in Massachusetts.

Additional information on the Plan is on the MassDEP website here:

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/solid-waste-master-plan>