

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



## Department of Agricultural Resources

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January 8, 2025

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) <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ma-local-food-action-plan>.

Please accept this letter as the Council's 2025 Annual Report. Throughout the year, Council members continued to work towards the priorities and goals from the Plan, especially as the federal government shut down and reverberations of cuts to federal programs that support farmers and feeding people have led to uncertainty around markets, labor, and environmental protections. The recommendations continue to be foundational and very relevant. Climate-related weather events reinforced the important work to strengthen and build the resilience of the Massachusetts food system.

Meetings focused on mobilizing responses to federal cuts and those cuts' implications for racial equity, reducing hunger, food insecurity, the need for agricultural sector support including land access, and programs to address the wide range of challenges within the food system.

Council meetings during 2025 had strong participation as continued allowance of public meetings conducted through remote means allowed real-time public access. The hybrid annual meeting allowed both remote and in-person participation. The synergistic relationship between the Council, the MA Legislature's Food System Caucus, the MA Food System Collaborative, local food policy councils, and other stakeholders continue to be an asset to develop and support policy and program recommendations. Council communications and trusted relationships have been an advantage for efficiency in developing, continuing and advancing food system initiatives.

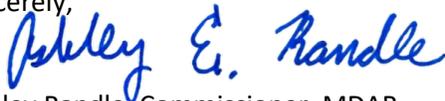
2025 highlights for the Council and its partners include:

- State organizations and partners worked to provide hunger relief support during the 43 days of the federal government shutdown.
- MDAR's Division of Food Security management of the Food Security Infrastructure Grant, launched in 2020, awarded \$22 million in grants to 113 local food producers and food system organizations to address food insecurity in Massachusetts. A five-year review of the program is in progress. The program helps to sustain Massachusetts' food production and distribution sectors, while working to ensure that fresh, healthy, local food is available to all residents.

- Council members participated in Governor Healy’s Anti-Hunger Task Force with other partners to develop recommendations for early 2026.
- Council members worked together with partners to support full funding of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). The program strengthens and amplifies the importance of policy that connects local food and communities that have historically been underserved by the food system. HIP program benefits SNAP shoppers with additional funds for nutritious local produce, and Massachusetts farmers through increased sales.
- Council members worked collaboratively with partners on options to fill in gaps when SNAP funds were halted during the government shutdown. They also worked with partners to identify strategies regarding the ending of Collaborative Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement (LFS), funded by USDA and coordinated by DESE, and the ending of the USDA funded Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program, funded by USDA and coordinated by MDAR.
- The launch of the Farmland Partnership Program grant, to help implement the Goals of the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.
- The second year of the Farmers Market Sustainability Grant Program awarded over \$194,000 to 17 farmers markets to expand their outreach to consumers.
- The renewal by the legislature and administration of a \$250,000 state Local Food Policy Council Grant Program for 2026.
- MDEP’s Massachusetts Gap Energy Grant awardees included food system operations.
- MDAR’s new ability to lease, buy and sell land through the State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program.
- Continued 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.

The Council respectfully acknowledges the Healey-Driscoll administration and the General Court for their continued support in 2025 of the Plan’s goals and the programs that work toward those goals and illustrate the connections between the food system and other policy issues. In addition, the Council appreciates the administration’s and the General Court’s ongoing support for a sustainable, equitable, and resilient food system. We ask that you give continued consideration for the Plan’s 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 details on opportunities to strengthen the Massachusetts food system or on the work of the Council. Electronic versions of this report and its attachments will also be provided to you.

Sincerely,



Ashley Randle, Commissioner, MDAR  
Chair, Massachusetts Food Policy Council

## 2025 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. An 18<sup>th</sup> member was added, created by the MA Healthy Soils Bill which was signed into law in January 2021. Pursuant to MGL Chapter 20 Section 6C, 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 2025, the MA Food Policy Council (FPC) focused on changes in funding from the federal government, environmental justice, and climate change, which served as guiding themes for the year. Throughout the year, Council members returned to review the priorities and goals from the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. With the Plan's recommendations continuing to be very relevant, the federal administration food system cuts and the ongoing 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 June 30, 2027, 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 meetings. 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 platform for this work.

**State Agency Members:** Ashley Randle, Commissioner, MDAR; Yvonne Hao, Secretary, EOHEd, (June) Secretary Eric Paley, Designee: Anne Gobi (Director of Rural Affairs); Robert Goldstein, Commissioner DPH, Designee: Jessica del Rosario; Bonnie Heiple, Commissioner, DEP, Designee: Bruce Hopper; Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner, DESE: Designee Robert Leshin; Commissioner Jeffrey McCue, DTA, (September) Acting Director Michael Cole, Designee: Shelly Varny.

**Legislative Members:** Senator Joanne Comerford (May) Senator Dylan Fernandes, Senator Ryan Fattman, Representative Daniel Donahue, Representative Hannah Kane.

**Industry Members** (appointed by the Governor): Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution; Dave Dumaresq, Farmer; Amanda Kinchla, M.S., Food Safety Extension Specialist, UMASS Amherst; Margaret Moulton, 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 2025. Each meeting included updates from the Massachusetts Legislature's Food System Caucus (Caucus) and the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative's (Collaborative) Executive Director Kristina Pechulis and Policy Director Becca Miller. Meetings were typically held from 9:30 – 11:30 AM. Attendance ranged from 35 – 72. The Advisory Committee and newly formed Advocacy Committee met several times.

The January, March, May, July, September, and December meetings were held remotely. The annual meeting is January 8, 2026, in Room 428 at the Massachusetts State House, thanks to Senator Fernandes and his staff.

### Meeting Summaries

**January 17, 2025** Chair Randle called the meeting to order. Congressman Jim McGovern discussed expected cuts in food and hunger discretionary spending programs. MDAR is expecting that cuts in the FDA cooperative agreement will impact on the state's produce safety program. Commissioner Randle thanked Congressman McGovern for USDA disaster relief funding news. An MDAR survey with 300 grower responses reported some \$60M in losses. MDAR is approaching the funding from a resiliency perspective. The MA Legislative Food System Caucus (Caucus) is lobbying for the 2025 supplemental budget to include the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). HIP Survey results showed some farmers with a 60% drop in sales. Farmers are seeking other sources of revenue or operating at a loss until the program returns. Priority bills have been refiled and include food literacy, an ag equity commission, HIP enabling legislation, a food donation tax credit, a food policy council coordinator, and working to support urban land being prioritized for urban farms and businesses. Ag Omnibus and PFAS bills are in progress. The MA Food System Collaborative (Collaborative) reported 300 attendees at the Forum, a record, which included a session by legislators about how to engage in public policy. The Advisory Committee is focused on uplifting HIP. MDAR announced a new Division of Food Security. DTA is transitioning to a new EBT vendor to be able to respond quicker to changes in households, and new and more secure chip technology. MDAR will host two agriculture resource fairs for state agencies, partners, growers, and members of the food system.

**March 14, 2025** Vice Chair Phoebe Walker called the meeting to order. The Caucus provided an update, including a focus on support for increasing the HIP monthly benefit. A Healthy Soils program background included strategies to mitigate climate change, and federal impacts. The Collaborative had strong attendance at HIP Day at the State House. The Collaborative will continue to advocate for the Food Safety Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) budget, MDAR admin funding, reinstating the Local Food Policy Council Grants, and other programs. Local Foods for Schools and Local Food Promotion Assistance (LFPA) was also terminated. The impacts of the program were quantified and transformative. The USDA-funded Regional Food Security Infrastructure (RFSI) program has been paused, though reimbursements and contracts will be honored. The Collaborative reviewed priority legislation including: An Act relative to urban farmland to support the conversion of vacant land in Environmental Justice areas with a trust fund

to support the work. Other bills have been refiled. The Advocacy Committee, representing non-agency Council appointees, plans to be more active in supporting legislation including HIP, the omnibus farm bill, and PFAS. The annual report was accepted. Community Servings shared an update. They offer 16 medically tailored meal tracks based on scratch cooking for patients with diet sensitive conditions, saving health care costs. Over 1.2 M meals were served to over 7,000 people last year. Several impact evaluations are underway. The wide range of funders and supporters was acknowledged.

**May 9, 2025** Chair Randle called the meeting to order. She welcomed Senator Dylan Fernandes, replacing Senator Jo Comerford on the Council. She was recognized for her continued food system leadership. The Caucus has 15 priority bills. A Summit of local food policy councils discussed food access, food waste, and ag literacy. The Collaborative is lobbying for full HIP funding in advance of the growing season, and other priority legislation. The uncertainty in the federal budget hugely affects the state system. The Farmland Partnership Program was announced. May is mental health awareness month. Funding was awarded to Buy Local organizations to support the farming community. Weekly meetings with federal partners are focused on disaster aid funding, expected to be \$220M for Massachusetts. The Advocacy Committee will generate letters of support, provided in advance and discussed during Council meetings. The Division of Marine Fisheries reported on the \$22B industry representing over 200,000 jobs. Their Seafood Marketing Program connects with partners to increase the state's consumption of seafood. The Quabbin Food Connector discussed their "Bridging the Gap for Fair Foods" program which links local food production and distribution, including language access and equity, while connecting people to local high-quality food. DESE reported that the child nutrition staff in the USDA FNS Northeast Regional Office has 40 staff members departing. DTA also reported staff reductions with key partners in the same office. The EBT conversion system was completed in April, with chips addressing theft issues and more flexibility to modify program benefits. The Advisory Committee reviewed legislative recommendations and will work with the Advocacy Committee.

**Friday, July 11, 2025** Chair Randle called the meeting to order. The Caucus will be lobbying for continued HIP support. The Collaborative noted HIP funds reverting to \$40, and other funding priorities. They coordinated a well-attended Agricultural Literacy Summit with Mass Ag in the Classroom. The Agricultural Equity Network is focused on a storytelling project. The Collaborative is starting a ten-year review of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. FSIG awards are being finalized. A consultant is conducting a five-year impact report. Disaster block grant support was announced through the USDA Farm Services Agency. MDAR's second edition of the Ice Cream Trail has been launched. Farmers Market, Urban Ag week and the 40<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Tomato Festival was held. Christopher Bosso, Professor of Public Policy and Political Science, Northeastern University, reviewed the first turbulent months of the new administration and its impact on the food system. The cuts are very significant. SNAP education is eliminated. SNAP cuts are significant in terms of retail and agricultural revenue and will have a ripple effect on state programs such as HIP and school meals, robbing funds. Agriculture groups have been meeting with HHS and the White House to be included in a final MAHA report. Efforts are ongoing to find a more balanced approach between the two sectors. MDAR's Environmental Justice and Stakeholder Engagement Team discussed their work including relationship building, engagement, technical assistance, internal training, language support, grants and data. A six-month Farmland Action Plan

update was shared. The abrupt ending of the LFPA grant funds was a huge loss. Participation in school meals continued to climb, the third year of state-supported universal free school meals.

**September 12, 2025** Chair Randle called the meeting to order. The Caucus reported highlights such as funding to mitigate effects of climate change and their priority bills. The Greater Boston Food Bank's new survey shows an increase in food insecurity. The Collaborative has been working closely with the Caucus to support HIP levels back to the original levels. MDAR's Youth Council, in its second year, aims to inspire young people to become involved in food system work and future leaders. Speakers included Cecy Yazwinski, Deerfield Academy High School. Through the Council, she has been exposed to farms adopting climate change. Bristol County Agriculture High School, Dighton, focuses on workforce development for the next generation of farmers. Lauren Decoste, senior Equine Science student, is an FFA leader and a student worker for the large animal science program. She has gained an appreciation for agricultural sustainability. The Food Project develops active leaders to support access to fresh affordable foods through youth leadership. Rex Tejada-Lemus, former Academic Root Crew Assistant Supervisor and senior at UMass Boston helped to supervise the building of a Food Project farm in Lynn. Eastie Farms, Boston, has an innovative CSA program. Vedant Ramesh, Eastie Farm Climate Core, East Boston Junior High, noted he thinks differently about how food is grown and distributed. The Anti-Hunger Task Force was formed in response to the devastating cuts to the food system. Targeted work groups are focusing on recommendations, due in January. The Local Food Count Project will gather data to understand how much local food is purchased in the state and in New England. The Advocacy Committee wrote letters of testimony for upcoming hearings. A Healthy Soils report noted that climate change impacts are worsening and putting additional stress on growers.

**December 3, 2025** Chair Randle presided over the meeting. The Caucus highlighted priority legislation. The MA Food System Collaborative also shared updates. State organizations and partners worked to provide hunger relief support during the 43 days of the federal government shutdown. Commissioner Randle provided an update on the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force, including the three working groups. Recommendations and a draft report are in progress to share with ANF and the Governor's office, with a goal of gaining budgetary support in January. The Advocacy and Advisory Committees are clarifying processes for their work. The Advocacy Committee is supporting several bills. November featured a first-time aquaculture proclamation event with DMF to support this fast-growing sector. A Green Week event to promote local Christmas trees generated strong publicity. Program highlights included Cultivating connection: Local Food Works in North Central Mass. HEAL collaborative, funded through MA in Motion, has been very impactful in work with regional organizations such as Growing Places and health care institutions, engaging the community for a sustainable effort with a food campus, a food processing center, and values-based purchasing. There was an update on the MDAR State-owned Land Leasing Program. Price isn't the main consideration. Making the licensing process efficient is a priority. The program supports land access and how to better support farmers on properties, including infrastructure improvements such as temporary fences and structures and wells for irrigation, an essential need. There was also a Healthy Soils and Farmland Action Plan update. Awards for the Farmland Partnership Program will be announced soon.

Addendums:

Massachusetts Legislative Food System Caucus  
Massachusetts Food Policy Council Advisory Committee  
Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



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

December 1, 2025

2025 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 2025, Senator Dylan Fernandes, Senator Ryan Fattman, Representative Hannah Kane, and Representative Dan Donahue served on the Council. This report outlines the work done in 2025 in the Legislature’s Food System Caucus.

**Overview:**

The Food System Caucus (FSC) is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative caucus focused on food access and food security, farmland preservation, and economic development. The co-chairs are Senators Comerford, DiDomenico, Tarr, and Fernandes, and Representatives Kane, Domb, Vargas, and Blais. The FSC includes 146 members of the Massachusetts Legislature.

**Food Security Accomplishments**

The FY26 budget includes funding for several Food System Caucus priorities. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) was funded at \$20,100,000, universal school meals at \$184,467,639, and the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) at \$50,575,000. The budget allocates \$250,000 to school wellness coaching, \$750,000 to the FRESH grant program, and \$250,000 for local Food Policy Councils. In addition, the FY26 budget provides \$750,000 to Buy Locals, \$500,000 to Hunger-Free Campus Grants, \$300,000 to the Massachusetts Food Trust, \$100,000 to the Cliff Effect Pilot Program, and \$100,000 to the Senior FarmShare Program. The Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program was moved from the annual operating budget to the FY2026-FY2030 Capital Investment Plan, with \$25 million allocated for FY26.

In addition to the funds allocated through the FY26 annual budget, H4150, the general deficiency supplemental budget for FY25, included \$7.5 million in HIP funding. Thanks to increased funding for HIP, the original benefit levels of \$40, \$60, and \$80 were restored on September 1st. After benefits were reduced to \$20 for all participating households in December 2024, food-insecure households lost access to fresh produce and Massachusetts farmers experienced financial challenges due to reduced sales. Reinstating the tiered benefit structure improved access to healthy, locally-grown food during a critical time for food-insecure households. The FSC is thankful for investments in HIP, as well as HIP clients’ and vendors’ strong public support for the program. The Caucus will continue to advocate for full funding for HIP so that this program can be a reliable source of support for both clients and farmers.

On October 30th, the FSC co-chairs sent a letter to President Trump to ask for direct funding of SNAP benefits during the government shutdown. 152 members of the Massachusetts Legislature signed on to this letter to advocate for food-insecure constituents and local farms. After the Trump administration's announcement that SNAP benefits would be suspended on November 1<sup>st</sup>, and throughout the subsequent court rulings and state-level actions to protect SNAP that followed, Caucus members worked to provide accurate and timely information to constituents about the state of SNAP funding in Massachusetts and other resources to access food. These events demonstrated the importance of partnerships between the Legislature, state-level executive agencies, and the nonprofit sector, as well as the value of shared commitment to food access and food security.

The FSC hosted and co-hosted several briefings in 2025 to educate members of the Legislature and staff on food policy issues. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, Representative Kane and Senator Comerford joined the MA Food System Collaborative and other advocates to host a briefing for newly elected members of the Legislature, and discussed the FSC's history, strategic goals, and policy priorities. Following cuts to federal agriculture and nutrition programs, the FSC hosted a briefing on April 11<sup>th</sup> alongside MDAR, DTA, GBFB, and Bardwell Farms on how cuts to the Local Food Purchase Agreement Program, Local Food for Schools, and the Emergency Food Assistance Program harmed food-insecure households, Massachusetts farms, and the emergency food network. The FSC and MLRI co-hosted a briefing on cuts and changes to SNAP included in H.R.1 on July 29<sup>th</sup> so that policymakers could understand the expected impacts to constituents and the Commonwealth's budget. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, the FSC, Zero Waste Caucus, and Spoonfuls presented a briefing on food waste and food recovery. These events provided attendees with important information and resources to navigate a rapidly changing food policy landscape.

### **Legislation and Policy**

The FSC selected seven priority bills and fifteen endorsed bills for the 194<sup>th</sup> legislative session. The FSC's priority bills are:

- S1043/S1141/H3154, *An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need* (Comerford, Edward Kennedy, Kane)
- S104/H222, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program* (Comerford, Domb, Vargas)
- S939/H1466, *An Act establishing the hunger free campus initiative* (Lovely, Vargas, Domb)
- S11/H71, *Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands* (Comerford, Blais, Kane)
- S61/H121, *An Act Relative to Urban Farmland* (Gomez, Duffy)
- S55/H112, *An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts* (Comerford, Blais)
- S2023/H3130, *An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture* (Edward Kennedy, Howard, Kane)

The full list of priority and endorsed bills can be found online at <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/>.

Each of the Caucus' priority and endorsed bills received a committee hearing in 2025. Thirteen bills are in either the House Ways and Means Committee or Senate Ways and Means Committee. H3130 was favorably reported out of the Joint Committee on Revenue and is currently in the House Committee on Bills in the Third Reading. H118 is pending in the House Committee on Rules, and S1616 is in the Joint

Committee on Rules. S11 was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Revenue. The remaining five bills have not yet been reported out of committee. The Food System Caucus will continue to advocate for these bills as they advance through the legislative process.

S2542, the Mass Ready Act, includes several provisions related to agriculture and food security. This bill includes bond authorizations in the amounts of \$125 million for FSIG, \$42 million for the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, and \$26 million for other grant programs supporting agricultural resilience and sustainability. S2542 also includes language from H4418, *An Act relative to the Massachusetts Food Policy Council*, a FSC endorsed bill that adds the Division of Marine Fisheries and Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment to the Food Policy Council. In addition, the bill gives MDAR right of first refusal if 61A land is being sold for commercial or residential development subordinate to a municipality's right of first refusal, allows the Milk Producers Security Fund to be used to support dairy farmers through existing MDAR grant programs, and establishes a special commission on flood risk and mitigation in the Connecticut River Valley. As the Mass Ready Act moves through the legislative process, the Food System Caucus will work to ensure that the bill addresses the needs of the Commonwealth's farmers, fishers, and their communities.

Representative Kane, Senator Comerford, and Senator DiDomenico were appointed to Governor Healey's Anti-Hunger Task Force. The Task Force, which was established following cuts to SNAP in July, is responsible for developing recommendations on mitigating the impact of cuts to federal nutrition programs, strengthening partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, finding opportunities to collaborate with other northeastern states, and providing long-term strategies to increase food security in Massachusetts. Additionally, the Task Force is divided into three working groups focused on access to food assistance, rural resiliency and local food systems, and maximizing funding supports. The Food System Caucus appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Anti-Hunger Task Force, and looks forward to continued collaboration with other members.

# Advisory Committee to the MA Food Policy Council

## 2025 Annual Progress Summary

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In 2025, the Advisory Committee (AC) to the MA Food Policy Council strengthened its role as a collaborative advisory body supporting statewide food system policy, planning, and advocacy. The Committee focused on deepening member engagement, educating members about food system issues related to equity and the environment, and aligning its work more closely with the MA Food Policy Council (FPC) and its Advocacy Committee.

Members engaged in discussions around farmland access and preservation, agricultural viability, and long-term land stewardship, informed by state-level planning efforts such as the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan. These conversations helped clarify the Advisory Committee’s role in translating on-the-ground perspectives into actionable policy considerations for the Food Policy Council. The Committee also made progress in shaping future legislative priorities related to the food system. Through collective review, discussion, and prioritization of proposed policy concepts, members identified shared areas of concern and opportunity. This work strengthened the Advisory Committee’s ability to provide informed, consensus-based input to the Food Policy Council on emerging and ongoing legislative issues.

Another advancement was the Advisory Committee’s increased coordination with the MA Food Policy Council Advocacy Committee. The Advisory Committee intentionally explored how its members’ expertise and lived experience could complement and enhance advocacy efforts.

Throughout the year, the Advisory Committee also focused on strengthening its internal structure and communication, including clarifying roles, discussing meeting cadence, and identifying opportunities for more effective participation. These efforts positioned the Committee to operate more efficiently and strategically moving forward.

### 2025 MA Food Policy Advisory Committee Membership

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization/Title</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Marcos Beleche	Four Corners Main Street, Dorchester	an organization engaged in developing new farm businesses, urban & community supported ag, community gardening, immigrant/refugee farming/ youth education through agriculture
Jessy Gill	World Farmers, Program & Policy Director	food distribution, processing and marketing interests
Mohammed Hannan	Organic Farmer, owner Hannan Healthy Foods Farm	an organization engaged in farmland protection and conservation
Jorge Marzuca Rosas	Whitemarz Farm, Manager	active farmers or who shall represent farmer associations

Angela Jagiello	UMASS Center for Ag, Food & the Environment	cooperative extension service at Umass Amherst
Meg Gennings	UMASS Agriculture Animal Science and MA Farm Bureau, Amherst	active farmers or who shall represent farmer associations
Miranda Jennings	HEAL Winchendon and Gardner, Director	anti-hunger organization
Danielle Collins	Worcester Public Schools, MBA, SNS, School Nutrition Director	a school of nutrition or public health
John Wang	The Food Project, Lynn, Deputy Director	community-based coalition or health care provider addressing obesity and chronic disease
Casey Burns	Greater Worcester Community Health Improvement Program	represent citizens in need of transitional assistance
Andy Varela	Maitland Mt Farm, Salem, Co-owner	an organization engaged in developing new farm businesses, urban & community supported ag, community gardening, immigrant/refugee farming/youth education through agriculture
Alisa Klein	Grow Food Northampton, Executive Director	an organization engaged in farmland protection and conservation

Thank You for Your Contributions,



Ayn Yeagle MS, RD  
 Growing Places, Executive Director  
 MA Food Policy Council, Member and Advisory Committee Liaison



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
**Executive Office of Health and Human Services**  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**

**MAURA T. HEALEY**  
GOVERNOR

**KIAME MAHANIAH, MD, MBA**  
SECRETARY

**KIMBERLEY DRISCOL**  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

**MICHAEL COLE**  
ACTING COMMISSIONER

January 12, 2026

**2025 MA Food Policy Council Annual Report**  
**MA Department of Transitional Assistance**

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is proud to contribute this report in support of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council's Annual Report. DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and support to help individuals and families achieve greater economic mobility, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. DTA serves one out of six people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, older adults, and people with disabilities. This year DTA experienced significant challenges stemming from federal SNAP policy changes, however it still contributed meaningfully toward food security in the Commonwealth.

**Federal Policy Changes following the One Big Beautiful Bill Act**

The passing of July 4th H.R. 1 the One Big Beautiful Bill Act made significant changes to SNAP eligibility policy and SNAP administration. The goal is to ensure clients and communities are aware of federal changes impacting eligibility and where to receive assistance. As required by the federal government, SNAP eligibility changes went into effect on November 1, 2025, and will impact households at their recertification period, or as a new household applies. The three significant SNAP eligibility changes are as follows:

- *Expanded Work Requirements:* Adults ages 18 through and including age 64 without dependents under 14 are now required to work 80 hours per month, unless they meet an exemption. The new rules remove previous exceptions for homeless individuals, veterans, and young adults who aged out of foster care.
- *Non-Citizen Eligibility:* SNAP eligibility for non-citizens is now limited to Legal Permanent Residents, Cuban -Haitian Entrants, and COFA citizens. Current SNAP participating households without an eligible member will have their SNAP cases closed and ineligible members will be removed from mixed-status households at recertification and new applicants must have an eligible immigration status to be approved for SNAP benefits.
- *Standard Utility Allowance:* SNAP households receiving energy assistance (HEAT/LIHEAP) that include an elderly or disabled member will continue to automatically qualify for the Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowance. However, households without elderly or disabled members must now verify utility expenses to qualify for the allowance.

### **MA SUN Bucks**

In 2025, DTA administered the second year of SUN Bucks, formerly Summer EBT. SUN Bucks was established in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (PL 117-328), a federally-funded program, which provides money for food to families with school-aged children during the summer. Families who qualify receive \$120 for each eligible child to assist with buying food when schools are closed for the summer. Families who don't qualify for automatic enrollment must apply for SUN Bucks either online at [MA DTA Connect](#) or submit a paper application at the child's school.

DTA, in collaboration with Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), successfully administered SUN Bucks for a second year. In 2025, [MA SUN Bucks](#) provided \$62.8M to 348,355 households to buy food for nearly 532,907 school-aged children and their families.

### **Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)**

The Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) increases low-income residents' access to healthy produce by adding state funds to SNAP purchases of fruits and vegetables at participating local farms. All SNAP households are automatically enrolled in HIP, with a monthly incentive limit.

In July 2025, DTA set the HIP incentive level to \$40 for all SNAP households, an increase from the \$20 cap that had been in place since December of the prior year due to limited funding. In August 2025, additional funds allowed a return to HIP's original tiered monthly incentive structure. The reinstated incentive levels ensured that larger families would receive proportionally higher incentives to support their greater produce purchasing needs: \$40 for households with 1-2 people, \$60 for 3-5 people, and \$80 for 6 or more people. Updated information and materials reflecting the tiered structure are available on [mass.gov/hip](https://mass.gov/hip), including updated HIP FAQs, instructional videos, and flyers in multiple languages.

This year, DTA made major improvements to HIP operations for both clients and vendors in response to stakeholder feedback solicited by the department. Most significantly, the "Single Swipe" functionality for HIP transactions now allows a customer to access up to their full HIP amount in a single eligible transaction as long as they have any remaining SNAP balance. This improvement eliminates extraneous transactions, streamlines processing at HIP points of sale, makes the program easier to use and understand, and supports a dignified experience for customers shopping with HIP. DTA also added the HIP available amount to client receipts, included HIP details on SNAP balance inquiries at HIP retailers, and improved customer service line wording. Each of these improvements better aligns the information DTA provides with what HIP shoppers expect. Finally, DTA procured a free HIP mobile device option that is available to eligible retailers.

As of June 2025, 213,000 households participated in HIP, stimulating the agricultural economy with over \$84 million of produce purchases from local farmers. DTA publishes monthly HIP reports that can be found at [HIP Fact Sheets](#).

### **Restaurant Meals Program (RMP)**

DTA operated the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) launched as a pilot program in Fall 2023. DTA is incredibly proud to have the distinction of making MA one of only 9 states to run this program. The RMP continues as a state policy option that enables older adults (60+), unhoused individuals, and people with disabilities to buy meals at authorized restaurants/food trucks using their SNAP EBT card. The RMP was created to support populations that typically encounter access barriers and challenges with being

able to buy, store and prepare food. Its goal is to increase the accessibility of SNAP by providing additional healthy meal choices to eligible SNAP recipients that may not be able to cook for themselves.

DTA continues to operate this program as is, and does not have any immediate plans to expand restaurant vendors. The Notice of Opportunity (NOO) that solicited vendors to first participate in the program in 2023 onboarded RMP vendors with a focus on serving priority communities and populations. The restaurants selected had to meet the following criteria: Locally- and privately-owned; Not part of a restaurant conglomerate or multi-unit chain (including franchises); and Provide counter-based service and payment.

For fiscal year 2025, Massachusetts clients completed a total of 7,489 transactions at approved restaurants. Massachusetts currently has 13 RMP vendors located across the Commonwealth; 11 restaurants and 2 food trucks. The average price for selected restaurant meal is \$11. Clients can find approved restaurants at [MA SNAP RMP](#) .

#### **Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card conversion-**

After more than a decade working with the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendor, Conduent, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) successfully signed a contract with Fidelity Information Services (FIS) to be Massachusetts' new EBT vendor in April 2025.

DTA issues approximately 96.5% of benefits onto EBT cards. Total EBT issuances include \$2.5 billion in SNAP, \$70 million in Summer EBT, and \$547 million in Cash benefits. In spring 2025, DTA successfully completed a strategic and critical EBT vendor conversion that will modernize access to food and cash assistance for over 665,000 low-income households and more than 1.1 million people. The conversion enhanced service delivery, protected benefit continuity, and prioritized equity and cost-efficiency.

While this effort spanned multiple years in procurement and planning activities, the actual transition itself involved an enormous data and systems conversion over the span of a weekend. This successful conversion was done with minimal disruption to service delivery that involved strategic planning, stakeholder communication, system testing, staff training, and user support. DTA's EBT conversion team, under Chief Financial Officer's leadership, steered a complex, high-impact project while focusing on the Commonwealth's long-lasting commitment to equity and access for vulnerable populations. For hundreds of thousands of households across Massachusetts, especially families, seniors, and people with disabilities, timely and secure access to benefits is more than convenience - it is a lifeline. This conversion will allow for DTA to implement chipped EBT cards, a step that will greatly enhance security, reduce fraud, and protect clients' benefits from theft.

#### **SNAP and the 2025 Federal Government Shutdown**

The federal government shutdown , October 1- November 12 threatened the Massachusetts SNAP program throughout the months of October and November 2025. While USDA allowed DTA to administer SNAP benefits for October 2025 on their normal schedule , there was significant fear and uncertainty of the impact of the federal government shutdown regarding future benefits given letters from USDA to states in October indicating potential lapse in funding. , The shutdown had significant consequences for SNAP participants and communities in November when SNAP benefits were delayed and the subject of federal threats, litigation, and confusion. . Across the state, families were unable to

purchase food due to federal actions, which in turn triggered unprecedented demand on emergency food systems.

Other DTA benefits, including TAFDC, EAEDC, and HIP, were unaffected by the shutdown. During this time, HIP was recognized as a valuable resource, as a state-funded food benefit program that remained fully operational and was available to SNAP participants with at least 1 cent remaining on their card. However, the emergency situation highlighted capacity limitations in the existing network of participating vendors, as well as the need for enhanced messaging around how to access HIP with a low SNAP balance.

DTA's priority was to remain in close communication with USDA and keep clients and stakeholders informed of changes. DTA was able to pivot efficiently and effectively regarding SNAP policy and dissemination of benefits to the clients. DTA remained in frequent, almost daily communication with clients, staff and key stakeholders and held several forums focused on MA SNAP updates through DTA Town Halls, Outreach Partners Meeting, SNAP Coalition Meeting and Central MA SNAP Coalition Meeting to answer questions and keep everyone informed. The SNAP website [www.mass.gov/snapupdates](http://www.mass.gov/snapupdates) was updated frequently with FAQs to serve as a resource to the clients. Because of DTA's preparedness, Massachusetts was one of the first states able to resume full SNAP benefit once permitted to do so.

Through a strong partnership, DTA's contract with **Project Bread Food Source Hotline** provided additional SNAP information and support to clients and the community during this time, with Project Bread fielding questions and serving as a resource to our clients. The call volume for all calls during the start of the shutdown (10/27-11/9), the hotline received 3,924 calls in comparison to post shutdown (11/24-12/6) 827 calls were received.

Other government partners, food security organizations, community-based organizations, and many others anticipated and supported the increase in need. Though the shutdown had profound impacts on the children, seniors, veterans, and persons with disabilities who depend on SNAP to put food on the table, the combined efforts of the Healey-Driscoll Administration, Attorney General Campbell, and partner organizations helped minimize disruption as much as possible.

Sincerely,



Michael Cole  
Acting Commissioner  
Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

## Department of Environmental Protection

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**Maura T. Healey**  
Governor

**Kim Driscoll**  
Lieutenant Governor

**Rebecca Tepper**  
Secretary

**Bonnie Heiple**  
Commissioner

### **2025 Massachusetts Food Policy Council Annual Report MA Department of Environmental Protection Addendum**

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is pleased to provide this report to supplement 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, and designee, Bruce Hopper, is one of six state agencies that sit on the Council pursuant to M.G.L., Chapter 6C(a). MassDEP actively works toward meeting its goals under the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, one of which is to reduce food waste. (Inputs Goals 1). In 2024, MassDEP also 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."

#### **Food Waste Ban**

In 2025, MassDEP's solid waste program and partners continued to provide educational programming support to the food and agricultural community on compliance with the state's waste ban regulatory program, in particular, implementation of the food waste disposal ban. Food waste is the single largest material in our solid waste stream; it accounts for approximately 21% of our solid waste stream, or roughly 930,000 tons per year and includes both commercial and residential sources. MassDEP's RecyclingWorks program has now assisted more than 750 Massachusetts businesses and institutions in understanding the food waste ban and adjusting operations to minimize food waste. MassDEP has also continued to invest in food waste reduction infrastructure, awarding \$1.7 million in grants and \$4.6 million in loans to support and expand this infrastructure to date.

MassDEP is also continuing to work with cities and towns to help grow food scrap collection programs for residents. Through our Recycling Dividends Program, MassDEP awards funds to municipalities to advance their recycling, composting and waste reduction programs. As of 2025, nearly 160 of the 352 municipalities have reported having some form of food waste collection program in place and MassDEP continues to work with additional more municipalities as they seek to establish these programs.

## **Gap Energy Grant**

MassDEP continues to engage the food and agricultural sector in its Gap Energy Grant Program (Gap Grant) by working with the food and agricultural nonprofits and small businesses. The extension of the Gap Energy Grant to the food and agricultural sector provides funds to invest in infrastructure development, both to facilities and for equipment for 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 by Gap Grant-supported projects. This effort accomplishes two objectives. The grants meet a need for additional financial assistance to these organizations and help reduce their energy usage and save on energy costs. These cost savings can then be reinvested into their organizations' mission and businesses. In addition, the investment will result in grant recipients reducing their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) which will contribute to the Commonwealth reaching its climate and GHG emissions reduction goals.

In 2025, the program saw the completion of two key food and agricultural projects. In May 2025, Farmer Dave's LLC, a small farming and agricultural business located in Dracut installed a 66.8kW DC rooftop solar photovoltaic array and a geothermal heating and cooling system on its farmstand and commercial kitchen. This clean energy improvement will generate approximately 66,800 kWh of clean energy annually, accounting for about 35% of the farm's total annual electrical usage. The Gap Energy Grant provided funding for installing two geothermal water source heat pumps and six air handlers that will be connected to the farm's existing geothermal well system. This expanded geothermal system will provide year-round heating and cooling for the new retail farmstand /commercial kitchen space building. This Gap III grant funded energy project enabled Farmer Dave's two facilities to be nearly net zero in carbon emissions.

In December 2025, the Townsend Ecumenical Outreach's (TEO) food pantry installed a 30.4 kW DC ground mounted solar array on its property. The array is estimated to generate 38,777 kWh annually and is expected to offset approximately 95% of TEO's historical energy usage. This clean energy project is estimated to offset 17.1 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) annually, the equivalent to 19,041 pounds of burned coal, or 39.6 barrels of oil consumed per year. The installation of this array will help TEO jump-start the conversion of its existing oil furnace to mini splits in 2026.

Based on the success of the Gap III Energy Grant to the food and agricultural sector, in August 2025, MassDEP offered its fourth round of Gap Energy Grants to this sector and received 14 applications for funding. Grant awards will be announced in early 2026.