

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700 fax: 617-626-1850 www.mass.gov/agr



Maura T. Healey
GOVERNOR

Kimberley Driscoll
LIEUTENANT
GOVERNOR

Rebecca L. Tepper
SECRETARY

Ashley E. Randle
COMMISSIONER

March 15, 2023

Dear Friends: I am pleased to be able to announce that in April and May, the Department will be conducting a series of listening sessions across the state as part of its triennial (every three years) review of the APR program. Please find included in this packet details of the meetings and a collection of existing guidance, policies, procedures and regulations relative to the management and oversight of the Program. I hope you will be able to review the materials and provide us with your input and comments.

It is hard to believe that it has been three years since we conducted our first ever series of triennial reviews of the program. When we held our listening sessions in January of 2020, we had no idea that in a matter of weeks our world would be changed dramatically by the pandemic. Much has happened since, but one thing that the pandemic underscored is the critical importance of maintaining our food security and the importance of Massachusetts agriculture.

In order to maintain our food security, we need to protect our agricultural land base and ensure that we have farmers with viable businesses to actually farm the land. The importance of land protection initiatives like the APR program, the Farm Viability Enhancement Program, and the great work of our land trust and non-profit community groups in the face of existential factors like pandemics and climate change, could not be greater.

Yet there are many challenges that persist and, while we have enjoyed many successes, despite our best efforts we are still losing agricultural land. Massachusetts is ranked 9th in the nation for risk of farmland conversion by the American Farmland Trust. At the same time, we have some of the most valuable farmland in the nation for food production. And there continue to be barriers to access for new and underserved farmers and ongoing concerns about food security.

The upcoming sessions are an opportunity for you to provide your input on any updates that are necessary to improve and modernize the management of the APR program. Our goal is to hear from you on the effectiveness of the program and our existing guidance, policies, procedures and regulations.

I look forward to seeing you at the meetings and hearing your valuable feedback. In the meantime, happy reading.

Best,

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

Ashley E. Randle,
Commissioner