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## February/March Farm & Market Report

2/12/20

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#### UPCOMING EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

- February 13: [MDAR Farmer Grant Presentations](#) - Stockbridge Community Room
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- February 22: [2020 New England Campus Farmer Summit](#) - Stonehill College, Easton
- February 22: [Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commission's Annual Meeting](#) - Marlboro
- February 23: [SEMAP 13th Annual Agriculture & Food Conference](#) - Bristol County Agricultural HS
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- March 11: [Agricultural Composting Training](#) - New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Beverly
- March 11: [Northeast Harvest Agricultural Conference](#) - Coolidge Hall, Topsfield Fairgrounds
- March 13: [Neonics Scientific Literature Review Public Hearing](#) - Westborough
- March 14: [Making Sharp Farmstead Cheeses](#) - Gill
- March 19: [Adapting to the Changing Local Foods Market](#) - Stockbridge Community Room, Stockbridge
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## CLASSIFIED

### COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN



Greetings, Mass. Agriculture and all its friends,

I think we should start with the hot breaking news-the [Worcester Public Market](#) (WPM) held its Grand Opening/Ribbon Cutting on Thursday, February 6th and it was an amazing event!

All were delighted that Central MA resident and booster, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, could attend the festivities and speak on this exciting new facility, and the Commonwealth's support of WPM in particular (through a [\\$500,000 MDAR Food Ventures grant](#)); of Harding Green, the newly constructed residential/commercial building in which WPM is located through the support of [MassDevelopment](#); and of the area through [MassDOT's transportation improvements to Worcester's Kelley Square.](#)



Though I know those transportation improvements are critical to WPM, the neighborhood and the city, I admit I'm a little sad that the ultimate testing ground for all Central MA drivers is getting fixed. It was where parents would take their kids to see if they could really handle real-life traffic. For those of you who don't know it, seven streets including an interstate highway exit converge on Kelley Sq. with absolutely no rhyme or reason; the unwritten prevailing rule is "don't ever stop while you're in Kelley Square!" Don't get me wrong, the improvements are absolutely necessary and welcome with all the new activity, but there was always some sense of accomplishment for passing through without incident.

Another reason the transportation improvements are so important is that another project is ongoing in the neighborhood, namely the construction of Polar Park, the new home of the Red Sox AAA minor league team, the Worcester Red Sox. In a strong display of neighborhood support, both WooSox Chairman and Principal Owner Larry Lucchino and President Dr. Charles Steinberg attended the grand opening of the WPM.

I was born in Worcester and have been a proud Central MA resident most of my life. Though Worcester has been New England's second biggest city for many years (I bet that surprises many), and is a great place to live, it's not been much of a destination. For most of my life it has frequently been referred to as a "gritty mill town" or the region's "utility closet". Over the years I noticed that there were fewer and fewer reasons for suburban residents like me to go into the city. Well, that has all changed in recent years. Through a lot of great collaboration among the City, the Commonwealth, the non-profit community, and most importantly the private sector, Worcester is hot, and it just got hotter with the opening of the WPM in one of the centers of Worcester's renaissance, its Canal District!

The Grand Opening last Thursday was on a wet cold night, yet when Ashley and I arrived thirty minutes before the doors were to open, there were hundreds of people (no exaggeration) lined up on the street waiting to get in. When the doors opened, the place was full of happy, excited, and I think quite proud residents of the region, most of whom came ready to spend!

The market contains a mix of over twenty vendors providing a wide selection of locally produced products, and that includes a lot of food products including fresh, value added, and manufactured agricultural products. There are many places where one can sit and enjoy a snack or a meal while shopping, and also enjoy the beverages of WPM Anchor Tenant Wachusett Brewing Co. at the Wachusett Brew Yard!



Two Central MA farms are in the vendor mix: [Stillman's Farm](#) from New Braintree and [Smith's Country Cheese](#) from Winchendon. There is also [The Market Pantry](#) which WPM operates. It serves as an aggregator of products from numerous vendors who

may not be ready to take the plunge and rent a stall. This feature greatly increases the product mix at WPM and allows vendors to get a sense if they think a larger presence is warranted. A tip of the MDAR hat to WPM Director Edith Murnane for creating such an eclectic vendor and product mix!

Before I move on, I must try to properly acknowledge the visionary behind WPM, Founder/President Allen Fletcher. I've read about Allen for years, though I never met him until becoming involved with this project. He has been devoted to making Worcester a better place to live and do business for a long time, and he has consistently led by example in numerous projects. With regard to WPM, Allen has seen that a fundamental component of WPM is that, stating "The market will bring locally-grown healthy food to the residents of the City of Worcester and surrounding communities."

Things are slowly beginning to wake up in Ag, and I'm anxiously awaiting the unofficial beginning of the agricultural season-the ceremonial tapping of the first Sugar Maple to start the Maple harvest. This year it's at Sunrise Maple Farm, 24 Heath Branch Rd, Colrain at 10AM on Friday, March 6th. Hosted by the [MA Maple Producers Association](#), it's always a very sweet way to begin the season (though we never forget our livestock farmers who have many responsibilities every single day).

Honestly, I get itchy to get out of the suit and tie and into jeans and work shoes after Green Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, while I wait for the Maple Kickoff in March, so I can't wait!

But winter is a very good time for meetings, and there are plenty of them. Along with commodity groups' annual meetings, county Farm Bureau legislative breakfasts, and government meetings, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), our principal agricultural association, convenes to meet as well. At the invitation of then NASDA President, New Mexico Director/Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte, I joined NASDA's fourteen member Strategic Planning Task Force last August. After some work by phone and email, we held a very productive all day facilitated session in the Washington DC area in late January. Ashley and I will return to DC at the end of February for its annual Winter Policy Conference.

It's two full days of multiple meetings on a wide range of issues affecting the states, and an additional day of meetings with critical Administration and Congressional partners. Last summer, current NASDA President and North Dakota Ag Commissioner Doug Goehring appointed me as Vice Chair of NASDA's Food Systems and Nutrition Committee; serving on this committee will afford me greater insight into national perspectives about items that are very important to MA like Food Safety and how the MA Food System and Local Food Action Plan relates to other states. Our committee's Chair is California Ag Secretary Karen Ross. The opportunity to work side by side with my colleague from the largest Ag producing state in the nation is one that I expect can only help me serve MA farmers better.

There will also be a lengthy session on a subject that all NASDA members are working on: hemp.

In January, we completed five listening sessions held across the state to hear what farmers and interested parties have to say about the APR program. Firstly, I want to thank the dozens of people who joined Ashley and/or me in Amherst, Grafton, Pittsfield, Dighton, and Danvers, and also to those who submitted written testimony. I recall similar sessions at the Farm Bureau Annual meeting in 2015 or 2016, and a similar series of listening sessions in 2018. I think all parties would agree that the tone of these interactions has changed dramatically, and all for the better! I credit legislation introduced by Sen. Rodrigues, and changes to regulations and policy for the improvement. I'm very pleased that these adjustments to the program have strengthened its ability to carry out its mission to perpetually protect MA farmland!

Two new APR publications are in final stages of development: an APR Program Guide and a related Resource Guide. I've been reviewing the drafts, and I'm very excited that these documents will give all interested parties a very comprehensive, but easy to read and understand reference into the entire APR process, from acquisition to stewardship.

For those of you wondering, essentially not a day has gone by since last July when we are not working on our Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV) response plan. This effort has required a tremendous amount of work hours within MDAR, and with our numerous partners including the Departments of Conservation and Recreation, Environmental Protection, Fish and Game, and Public Health, along with the Executive Offices of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and Health and Human Services, the Mosquito Control Projects/Districts, municipal boards of health, along with multiple interested non-government partners.

Our EEEV team is led by Deputy Commissioner Alisha Bouchard who has extensive experience in mosquito control. Alisha served as the Executive Director of the State Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board prior to joining the Commissioner's Office as Chief of Staff in 2015.

I should also direct your attention to the first edition of Deputy's Dialogue which appears later in this *Farm and Market Report* in which Ashley provides some insight into what our Policy and Legislative Director has on her radar. Please check it out!

Lastly, I want to note a couple changes of the guard at the Food Policy Council (FPC). Member and Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Commissioner Jeff McCue was a regular attendee. DTA is the lead agency administering the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). Jeff thought it important to attend FPC meetings himself to hear about the program's interaction with the Ag community. He heard the good and the bad unfiltered, and I think everyone respected him greatly for that.

Congratulations are in order as Jeff recently was promoted to a well deserved new position as Assistant Secretary at Administration and Finance and Chief Human Resources Officer for the Commonwealth. I shall miss him not only for his service on the FPC and our frequent interactions about HIP, but will also miss him as someone who by example helped me better understand how to be a state agency head. (I won't miss his 6 AM or sometimes earlier phone calls, though.)

Jeff's successor at DTA, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, followed in her former boss's footsteps, attended her first FPC meeting, and heard firsthand what people are thinking about HIP.

Another change at FPC leads us to thank Jeff Cole, who served as the Direct to Consumer member for many years, for his service on the FPC. Jeff was a very engaged member and also served as the FPC's Secretary and unofficial Parliamentarian. Jeff has been very active in the Ag space over time and will continue to interact with the FPC in connection with his work at the MA Food System Collaborative. Many thanks, Jeff.

The FPC welcomes Mackenzie May, Executive Director of Central Mass Grown, as the FPC Direct to Consumer member.

On a personal note, this week marks my fifth anniversary as MDAR Commissioner. It is a tremendous privilege and honor to serve the community in which my family made its living for three generations. I remain enormously grateful to Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, former Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matt Beaton, and EEA Secretary Kathleen Theoharides for their confidence in me. I wasn't exactly sure what I was signing on to when I started, but I quickly came to love this job! I remain indebted every single day to the wonderful, hardworking, dedicated people of MDAR on whom I rely and from whom I've learned so much.

And that brings us to the end of another column. We all enter spring as our individual operations dictate. When I was in the nursery business, at the beginning of March we were still in winter mode; by the end of the month we were moving at warp speed-it's quite a transformation.

Here's hoping you all have a smooth transition from winter to spring, a season of favorable weather, and all the business you can handle!

Best regards,



John Lebeaux

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# Deputy's Dialogue

By Ashley Randle

Having the opportunity to serve in my role since October of 2018, I have amassed many memories, gathered insights, and worked to foster and strengthen relationships within our farming community across the state. I feel both humbled and grateful to be able to work with farmers, businesses, industry organizations, legislators, the administration, and my fellow colleagues in furthering the mission of preserving and promoting agriculture in the Commonwealth. I look forward to continuing to strengthen these partnerships and build upon these efforts in 2020 and beyond.

In reflecting on the Department's work over the past year and a half, as well as topics that have impacted the industry, I wanted to highlight the areas that will remain relevant and guide our work in 2020.

**APR:** After the APR regulations were promulgated in July of 2019, our team has been working to engage with our constituents to update them on the programmatic changes, listen to their input regarding what has worked well and what the program can improve on, and engage in strategic planning to position the program to meet the needs of present and future APR owners. Education and outreach remain a top priority, and we will continue to improve upon that in 2020 with more print and digital media publications slated to be released.

**Bees:** Our apiary program continues to grow in interest from commercial and hobby beekeepers, as well as in requests for state apiaries. Pollinator health is on the top of everyone's minds as we hear and read about potential impacts to native bees from pesticides, pests, weather, and other factors. Our team recently concluded work with an outside contractor, as directed by an earmark sponsored by Representative Dykema, to conduct a scientific literature review regarding neonics and their impacts on pollinators. A public hearing has been scheduled for March 13<sup>th</sup> in Westborough, and a pesticide subcommittee meeting to review and solicit feedback regarding the review will follow.

**Climate change:** A priority area of the administration and MDAR, we are continuing to incorporate more climate change metrics into our suite of grants, resources, and programs. With increasing temperatures, precipitation, drought, and variability, farming in the Commonwealth and across the country faces new challenges each year. In addition to technical assistance, our team has worked to develop grant programs that provide funding to alleviate the impacts of climate change, including the ACRE, AEEP, and Ag Energy. This month, we are also convening a Climate Change Workgroup at MDAR to address how the Department can expand our efforts related to climate resiliency on farms and serve as a model for other agencies.

**Diversification:** From agritourism activities to value-added products, farms are continuing to diversify their portfolios. The legislature passed a bill in early 2019 establishing an Agritourism Study Commission, sponsored by former Representative Stephen Kulik that is in the process of being constituted. Once formed, the Commission will meet to define agritourism and take a deep dive into what barriers and opportunities exist for farms and businesses operating in the state. In regard to value-added production, shared-use kitchens have proven to be a valuable incubator for businesses developing new product lines.

**Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE):** 2019 was an unprecedented year in terms of managing for, and mitigating the impacts of, EEE in the Commonwealth. Since our last aerial spray occurred on September 24<sup>th</sup>, we have been meeting weekly to plan and prepare for the 2020 season. We are collaborating with our partners at

DPH, DEP, DFW, EOEAA, and the Governor's Office to develop a proactive approach that addresses concerns from constituents and provides a timely and meaningful response when faced with another EEE outbreak.

**Food:** From the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) inspections to the first of its kind Food System Caucus established at the State House, discussions around food safety, food access/equity, and food systems planning were ever present in 2019. As we look ahead in 2020, funding and program framework for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) will be part of our discussions with DTA as we work to have more farms onboarded and create a consistent model for both program participants and farmers.

**Grants:** As access to capital remains a challenge, and farms work to comply with an ever-changing regulatory landscape, MDAR continues to evaluate our suite of [grants](#) and funding opportunities for farmers. At the MFBF Annual Meeting, as well as commodity group annual meetings, we have been educating farmers about the grants currently available and which grants may best meet their needs. We have heard from agricultural fairs about the need for infrastructure improvements as well as interest in revitalizing the Agricultural Innovation Center grant program. As we look ahead to budget planning for FY21, we will communicate these requests and welcome feedback about what the greatest needs are in terms of grant programs.

**Hemp:** With USDA releasing its interim final hemp rule in October 2019, the Department has worked to update our program to align with the rule and is awaiting approval of our State Plan from USDA. This will be our second full growing season in 2020, and the industry continues to evolve in terms of harvesting practices, market conditions, pesticides, and variability in seed quality/genetics. As of this issue, hemp is still not legal to be grown on APRs and awaits passage by the legislature.

**Innovation:** As our world continues to evolve and innovate, agriculture is no exception. With more farms utilizing GPS-driven technologies, drones, robotic milking systems, and cutting-edge technology to both address challenges and opportunities on their farms, the next decade will provide more ways in which business models will change. Hydroponic growing, freight farming, and vertical growth models are just a few examples.

**Job creation:** Massachusetts' agricultural industry directly provides employment to 25,920 individuals. As we look to the health and vibrancy of our economy and communities, this number is often overlooked. Farms play a critical role in offering job opportunities to families, friends, youth, neighbors, and foreign and domestic laborers. Moreover, many farms offer a competitive wage far above the \$8.00 agricultural minimum wage, with several paying the prevailing minimum wage and above. These figures need to be discussed more often as farms face challenges in recruiting and maintaining a stable, reliable workforce.

**Kefir...**as well as kimchi and kombucha are more visible in stores, demonstrating that the fermented foods movement is continuing to grow in popularity and demand. [Real Pickles](#), a Western MA-based company that started production out of the Franklin County Community Development Corporation before outgrowing the incubator facility, is just one example of businesses that have tapped into this rising market. Kefir has proven to be a successful value-added dairy product as fluid milk sales have declined and farmers look to diversify their product lines. More consumers are trying fermented foods for their microbial benefits and as an important source of antioxidants and nutrients. While they may be an acquired taste for some, I for one am a huge fan of Real Pickle's sauerkraut and red cabbage. If you're looking to add these foods to your diet, look no further than local businesses producing these tasty items.

**Legislation:** The 191<sup>st</sup> session of the legislature has been an active one, with several bills filed regarding agricultural commission input onboard of health regulations, pesticide regulation, climate change initiatives, nutrition programs, and animal welfare to highlight just a few. We are also waiting for the Senate to act on

hemp-related bills, including the incorporation of hemp into the Chap. 61(a) definition and removing the barrier from hemp being grown on APRs. Joint Rule 10, the first Wednesday in February, in which all bills must be moved out of committee to stay active, saw a flurry of bills move forward and I am closely monitoring them for impacts to MDAR.

**Medicine**, as in, [Food is Medicine](#). The report, published in June 2019, outlines the ways in which food can aid in chronic disease prevention, management, and treatment. With the recent expansion of Community Servings in Jamaica Plain that offers medically tailored meals, to the connections that farmers are making with hospitals, workplaces, and businesses to offer more wholesome, healthy options in their dining programs, there is a great deal of work taking place across the state. Most recently, Jessica O’Neill of Just Roots co-authored a report published by the American Public Health Association that researched subsidizing CSAs in the workplace; I’m excited to dive into the report and look at how we can assist with incorporating this model. Other successful efforts to get more healthy options to consumers include Breakfast After the Bell, the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), and the work of our food banks and food access organizations. As HIP continues to be analyzed in terms of a sustainable model, we look forward to being a part of the dialogue.

**National outlook:** While it may be said that we are operating in a divisive environment on the federal level, there are several key pieces of agricultural legislation that are moving forward in Congress. Standards of identity regarding plant-based beverages are again a top priority for newly appointed FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn (see [DAIRY PRIDE Act](#)). The [Farm Workforce Modernization Act](#) provides for agricultural labor reform to help farms meet their labor needs and compete in a global market. FDA continues to review the legalization of CBD products and the need for further science-based research and data. EPA recently released a list of pesticides with labels approved for applications on hemp. Commissioner Lebeaux and I head to D.C. at the end of the month for the NASDA Winter Policy Conference and will bring back updates on state and national initiatives.

**Overtime ruling:** In March 2019, the MA Supreme Judicial Court (“SJC”), in the case of [Arias-Villano v. Chang & Sons Enterprises, Inc.](#), held that Plaintiffs, who worked for Defendants’ company that grew, harvested, packaged, and distributed bean sprouts, were entitled to overtime pay for the hours they worked over forty (40) each week under the overtime statute, Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 151, 1A. The agricultural exemption was determined to not apply in this case and the case established a new precedent for farms operating in the Commonwealth. The Attorney General’s Office is now formally tasked with enforcing the regulation, with the Department of Labor Standards (“DLS”) responsible for consulting with, and providing formal guidance to, the AG’s office and agricultural stakeholders. While the MA Department of Agricultural Resources (“MDAR”) does not have jurisdiction over the matter, the impacts to the agricultural community may be detrimental to farms’ short and long-term viability. We continue to work with DLS, MFBF, and legislative officials regarding the impacts of the ruling, compliance, and in the development of guidance documents.

**Partnerships:** We are fortunate in Massachusetts to have engaged and forward-thinking organizations that are committed to the mission of promoting and preserving agriculture across the state. From our Buy Locals working to educate and connect consumers with local farms and food to MFBF lobbying for farmers’ interests to NOFA providing a vibrant network for organic growers (to name a few), there is an organization for every farmer’s needs and interests. With every organization having a seat at the table, we can identify challenges, mitigate impacts, and brainstorm ways in which Massachusetts agriculture cannot only survive, but thrive, in a global economy.

**Quality:** Massachusetts farms are revered for the high-quality produce, livestock, and value-added products they grow and process. Our quality assurance programs in the state, including the Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP), have helped farmers differentiate from competing states’ products because of the reputation



the program has earned with retailers and distributors. If we continue to see more foodborne illness outbreaks as we did in 2019, our farmers will be a step ahead as they have committed to the protocols and standards of CQP, FSMA, and diligence in ensuring that their products are of the highest quality and safe for consumption.

**Renewable energy:** Our farms are producing so much more than just food today, they're also producing energy. With dual-use solar projects coming online in 2019, we continue to see increased interest and ingenuity when it comes to aligning food and crop production with solar power. Massachusetts is also a leader in terms of anaerobic digesters, with the highest number of digesters per capita in the country. Digesters have helped in finding a viable avenue for food waste while allowing more farms to become self-sufficient in terms of energy needs. I anticipate 2020 will see several more dual-use solar project proposals and additional anaerobic digesters being built, as well as continued discussions about other avenues for renewable energy usage on farms.

**Soil health:** Soil health and management is critical not only to the success of our crops and ability to produce an abundant, stable food supply, but to the overall quality of our environment and livelihood. [S.2404](#), An Act promoting healthy soils for reducing greenhouse gases and the effects of climate change in the commonwealth, would increase the number of members on the Food Policy Council to 18 and add a seat for an expert in healthy soils practices. Additionally, Chap. 21, Sect. 20 is amended to include healthy soils program development by the State commission for conservation of soil, water and related resources, as well as establishment of a "Healthy Soils Program Fund" to implement, administer, and develop healthy soils practices.

**Theoharides:** Pronounced, THEO-HARE-E-DEES, the Commonwealth welcomed Secretary Kathleen (Katie) Theoharides to her new role at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs in May 2019. Since assuming her position, Secretary Theoharides has been very engaged on issues impacting the agricultural sector and maintains two-way communications with MDAR. She has taken a boots-on-the-ground approach and has visited cranberry country, participated in our Green Friday tree cutting, engaged in discussions involving hemp, APRs, renewable energy, among many other important Department subjects. With roots in Western MA and a strong understanding of the importance of agriculture to rural economies, MDAR anticipates further discussions regarding the overlap between climate change and agriculture and ways in which we can move the industry forward together.

**Urban Ag:** Interest in urban agriculture continues to grow across the Commonwealth as more consumers become interested in growing and producing their own food. Rooftop and community gardens can be found across the city of Boston, and successful models such as the partnership between [UMass-Lowell](#) and [Mill City Grows](#) have demonstrated that through collaboration, producing healthy, nutritious food in urban environments is possible.

**Viability:** While protecting your land in perpetuity through the APR program is a lofty decision for any farmer, MDAR's [Farm Viability Enhancement Program \(FVEP\)](#) can offer you an experience with land protection/conservation planning. Participants selected to participate in FVEP may be offered grant funds of \$25,000 to \$125,000 to implement strategies identified during the planning process in return for signing an agricultural covenant on the farm property to keep it in agricultural use for a 5 or 10-year term. Viability means different things to each farm, and FVEP provides business training and technical assistance to determine what is best for your operation. Applications will soon be available to apply for FY21, stay tuned.

**Women:** Female farmers represent 44% of all principal operators in Massachusetts vs. 36% on average in the US. We have witnessed women taking active leadership roles on farms, in organizations, and establishing

successful agricultural-based businesses across the state. I predict this number will continue to grow and am excited to work with these passionate individuals as they continue to foster and develop their farms and businesses.

**X-ray vision:** While we can't predict the future, farmers are becoming more and more progressive in order to meet a changing consumer base and compete in the marketplace. The ability to predict what the next trend or hot food item (cauliflower rice, zoodles, Swiss chard, just to name a few) will be on the minds of farmers as they order seeds, buy feed, and make their plans for the 2020 season. Our farmers are forward-thinking and must continue to pay attention to consumer trends on a local, state, and national and international level.

**Young farmers:** From 4-H and FFA members to students graduating from one of our four state agricultural high schools, the future is bright. The interest in careers in agriculture continues to increase and have evolved from traditional farm management to engineering, robotics, animal and veterinary science, drone operators, and biotechnology. I have had the opportunity to tour our agricultural high schools and continue to be impressed by the students' passion and drive towards pursuing a career in agriculture.

**Zero emissions/waste:** Food waste reduction takes many forms in the state, through the growth of anaerobic digesters, agricultural composting projects, and farms donating food to their local food bank or pantry. A reduction in emissions is also a priority of farms, as they install renewable energy sources on their farms and find more sustainable avenues to get their products to market. The recently filed climate policy package includes setting a statewide greenhouse gas limit for the year 2050 of net-zero emissions. We recognize that our state and agricultural sector is ahead of many others in meeting this goal, but there is still much work to be done to improve upon our existing work.

While these topics are just a sampling of the ongoing work at MDAR, we are always mindful of the individual and localized challenges that farms may also be facing and want to hear from you. Just as you need to react at a moment's notice to a broken piece of machinery or sick animal requiring aid, we must also adjust our direction at times to be responsive to the most pressing needs of our farmers.

I often say that we have moved from "precision agriculture" to a time of "decision agriculture" as farmers are focused on succession planning, diversification, and the future viability of their businesses. Difficult decisions are being made daily and it is not without long deliberations, emotions, and careful thought. Yet, I remain hopeful that our current and future generations are better equipped with the knowledge, tools, and experiences to bring new life to our state's agricultural economy. I look forward to being a part of the evolution of agriculture in the Commonwealth and the role that MDAR will play as a resource and partner to our farming community.

Locally grown and proud,

Ashley

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## FOREFRONT

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### Energy News

Mid-Fiscal Year 2020 AgEnergy Grant - MDAR is now accepting applications from agricultural operations who wish to participate in the Department's grant program made possible by recent MA Legislation as part of the

MA Supplemental Budget. Funding will be provided for agricultural energy projects that are geared toward (i) capital infrastructure improvements that promote energy efficiency; (ii) the purchase or expanded use of renewable energy technologies; (iii) tools to address barriers to economic growth, including business management technical assistance and the purchase of more efficient equipment and technology; or (iv) tools and technologies to facilitate sustainability and new product development; all in an effort to improve energy efficiency and to expand the use of renewable energy technologies.

**Agricultural Energy Grant FY2020 (ENER)** - Reimbursement grants are available for the following priority energy efficiency and renewable energy categories and projects, meeting the recent legislation scope:

- Heat Recovery for Anaerobic Digesters (ADs)
- New High Efficiency, Single or Multi Temperature, Walk-In Coolers
- Agricultural Solar Tariff Generation Unit (ASTGU) Research Projects
- Zero Net Energy Greenhouse
- Zero Net Energy New or Renovated Building Construction
- Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy Projects Utilizing Eligible Technologies

Grant applications are due February 28, 2020 and awarded projects must be completed by June 30, 2020 – please see the Request for Responses (RFR) for more details on the completion timeline.

Grant maximum amounts vary by project category and vary from \$25,000 to \$100,000. For more information contact Gerry Palano at 617-626-1706 or at [Gerald.Palano@mass.gov](mailto:Gerald.Palano@mass.gov).

The links to the Agricultural Energy Grant FY2020 are at Commbuys:

[www.commbuys.com/bso/external/bidAck.sdo?bidId=BD-20-1002-1003-001-47487&parentUrl=activeBids](http://www.commbuys.com/bso/external/bidAck.sdo?bidId=BD-20-1002-1003-001-47487&parentUrl=activeBids) or MDAR website: [www.mass.gov/service-details/agricultural-energy-grant-program-ener](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/agricultural-energy-grant-program-ener).

## **[MDAR's MA Farm Energy Program \(MFEP\)](#) - Energy Audits - Technical Assistance – Be Prepared: Energy Grant Season A-Coming - Now is a BUSY time!**

**Energy Audits** - MDAR's Massachusetts Farm Energy Program (MFEP) has funds to help farms cover audits, energy efficient projects, and select renewable energy projects.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Now is the time to have a technical assessment completed for any energy project you are considering in preparation for upcoming energy grants! You will need a technical assessment to file an energy grant application whether with MDAR or USDA. So start planning now; if you wait until applications come out you may not be able to have one scheduled in time! Remember our MFEP pays 75% of the technical assessment, first come, first served.

Contact MFEP now for more information through the Center for EcoTechnology (CET), our partner carrying out the MFEP. 413-727-3090, [info@massfarmenergy.com](mailto:info@massfarmenergy.com), or visit [www.massfarmenergy.com](http://www.massfarmenergy.com), submit a *Request Form*, and then you will be contacted.

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## **Exploring the Small Farm Dream Course – *Tuesday evenings February 25 – March 24, 2020 in Amherst***

The next session of the Exploring the Small Farm Dream course is coming up! The course is a 5-week program designed to guide aspiring farmers through the decision-making process of starting a farm. It will be held Tuesday evenings from 6-9:00pm beginning on February 25<sup>th</sup> and ending March 24<sup>th</sup> at the Bangs Community

Center in Amherst. Participants will learn about the many aspects of starting a farm business. They will assess their skills, knowledge, and available resources. Throughout the course, participants will analyze the feasibility of their small farm dream and clarify their farming vision. Cost is \$100 per enterprise.

**HOW TO APPLY:** Please fill out the an Exploring the Small Farm Dream course application found on our website [www.mass.gov/service-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp) and send it to Deanna Levanti at: [BeginningFarmerCoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:BeginningFarmerCoordinator@gmail.com) Applications will be accepted on a first come, first serve basis until the course is filled.

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## Agricultural Composting Training

MDAR is conducting a no-cost training workshop for registered agricultural composters and other farms interested in agricultural composting (larger than backyard composting). Space is limited, and first preference will be given to farms already registered in the MDAR [Agricultural Composting Program](#). These workshops will meet the upcoming regulatory requirement for farmers who are currently registered in MDAR's Agricultural Composting Program to attend a state approved training program in order to continue to maintain a composting registration. Topics include:

- Principles of Composting
- Site Selection, Layout and Maintenance
- Compost Recipe Development
- Monitoring, Troubleshooting, and Development of Odor Management Plan
- On-Farm Compost Use
- Updates to MDAR Agricultural Composting Program Regulations



These **one-day** trainings will run from 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, lunch is provided. Locations and dates are:

- **February 27** - Berkshire Athenaeum, One Wendell Avenue, Pittsfield
- **March 5** - Community Harvest Project, 37 Wheeler Road, North Grafton
- **March 11** - New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, 733 Cabot Street, Beverly
- **March 19** - UMass Cranberry Experiment Station, 1 State Bog Road, East Wareham

**Registration:** Email [Dorothy.Du@mass.gov](mailto:Dorothy.Du@mass.gov) with your Name, Farm Name, address, phone number, and Date/Location you wish to attend. Questions? Contact MDAR Agricultural Composting Coordinator Sean Bowen at 617-626-1724, [Sean.Bowen@mass.gov](mailto:Sean.Bowen@mass.gov).

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## Grant Announcement: Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs (SARA)

The Department invites responses from Massachusetts farmers who own or operate farm land under the Agricultural Preservation Restriction ("APR") Program who wish to participate in Round 9 of the [Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs Program](#) ("Program"). The purpose of the Program is to address stewardship or restoration issues on farmland resources in order to maximize productive agricultural use of the protected resource.

Funding of up to \$25,000, with a 15% match, may be available for identified improvements that will help restore or enhance the protected land resources on an APR farm property.

Eligible uses of funds include contracted labor or equipment rental costs to clear land or reclaim inactive fields back to active cropland use such as: clearing vegetation, removing rocks or stumps, cutting back grown in field edges, or reseeding or applying soil or crop amendments to inactive cropland or pastureland to bring it back into production. Funding may also be used to restore farm resources that have been negatively impacted by flooding, erosion, storms, tornadoes and other natural disasters.

**The deadline for applications is April 3, 2020 by 4 pm, and all projects must be completed by June 30, 2021. [Click here for application.](#)**

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## **Agricultural Preservation Restriction Stewardship Update**

The APR Program no longer requires approval for roof-mounted solar energy systems. Before the Department adopted this policy, approval was needed for roof-mounted systems. Public comments on the solar policy resulted in this change. Ground-mounted-solar and other renewable-energy projects do require approval to ensure continued protection and preservation of agricultural lands. A project must meet prerequisites listed in the renewable energy policy at [www.mass.gov/doc/apr-renewable-energy-policy-2018](http://www.mass.gov/doc/apr-renewable-energy-policy-2018)

Contact Gerry Palano for energy grant/funding info: [Gerald.Palano@mass.gov](mailto:Gerald.Palano@mass.gov), 617-626-1706,  
Contact stewardship staff for approval and policy information:

- For East Region, (Eastern Worcester County and East): Delia Delongchamp, 617-626-1737, [delia.delongchamp@mass.gov](mailto:delia.delongchamp@mass.gov)
- For North/Central Region (Western Worcester and Franklin Counties): Caroline Raisler, 413-726-2006, [caroline.raisler@mass.gov](mailto:caroline.raisler@mass.gov)
- For Western Region (Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire Counties): Currently Vacant, Contact: Ron Hall, APR Program Coordinator, 413-726-2002, [ronald.hall@mass.gov](mailto:ronald.hall@mass.gov)

APR Program *Looking Forward: Farmlands Forever* - In the month of January, MDAR conducted 5 listening sessions throughout the state, focused on the APR program. If you did not make it to a listening session but would like to add your input, MDAR is accepting public comments until February 14th at this site: [www.mass.gov/forms/the-apr-program-2020-looking-forward-online-form](http://www.mass.gov/forms/the-apr-program-2020-looking-forward-online-form).

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## **MDAR Seeks Applications for the Massachusetts Building at The Big E**

MDAR invites Massachusetts businesses and organizations to apply for the opportunity to exhibit in the Massachusetts State Exposition Building at [The Big E](#), September 18 – October 4, 2020. The mission of the Massachusetts State Exposition Building is to showcase Massachusetts agriculture, culture, commerce and tourism through informational, educational, promotional and retail exhibits. It is an opportunity to showcase and sell to over a million attendees that come through the Massachusetts Building.

Interested applicants are encouraged to review the exhibitor guidelines and application, and submit a completed application by 4 pm on Friday, March 13, 2020.

For more information, please contact Fran Pearson, Building Manager at [Frances.Pearson@mass.gov](mailto:Frances.Pearson@mass.gov) at 617-655-3511 (cell) or 617-626-1748 (Boston Office). Applications are available on the MDAR website: [www.mass.gov/massachusetts-state-exposition-building-0](http://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-state-exposition-building-0)

## Apiary Program Updates

**Voluntarily Register Your Apiary** - The Apiary Registration Process is easier than ever with the online form: [www.mass.gov/forms/apiary-and-colony-registration-form](http://www.mass.gov/forms/apiary-and-colony-registration-form). A total of 352 beekeepers have registered their apiaries with MDAR since April, 2017 when this online form became available. Please consider taking a quick second to register your apiary today so that the MDAR Apiary Program Bee Team can better inform beekeepers about health related concerns in the vicinity of their apiary.

**Join the Apiary Program Mailing List** - We recently added the option for folks to receive email alerts and program updates: [www.mass.gov/forms/join-the-apiary-program-mailing-list](http://www.mass.gov/forms/join-the-apiary-program-mailing-list). There are currently 291 people on the list. Please consider signing up now to stay up to date on our efforts to improve honey bee health in Massachusetts.

**Request Your 2020 Live Hive Apiary Inspection Requests** - Given the inclement winter weather, we are no longer performing inspections of live honey bee hives, but will continue to visit for Dead-Out or expired hives, as needed, until normal health inspections resume during Spring 2020. Please consider taking a quick second to request your inspection for 2020 today to assist the MDAR Apiary Program Bee Team in planning to meet your needs in the upcoming bee season: [www.mass.gov/forms/mdar-apiary-inspection-request-form](http://www.mass.gov/forms/mdar-apiary-inspection-request-form).

More apiary news in the [2020 Mass Bee Spring newsletter](#).

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## HIP Schedule for Spring 2020

Please note the following HIP operations schedule for Spring 2020 – Information from the Department of Transitional Assistance:

- The last day for clients to earn the HIP incentive this winter will be **February 23, 2020**.
- HIP will resume on **May 15, 2020**.

Flyers in thirteen additional languages are available at [mass.gov/hip](http://mass.gov/hip). Clients will be also notified of the HIP pause by robocall, notification through the DTA Connect mobile app, a recording on the DTA Assistance Line, and a notice banner on [www.mass.gov/dta](http://www.mass.gov/dta). For more information, please contact [DTA.HIP@state.ma.us](mailto:DTA.HIP@state.ma.us).

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## USDA Funded Research Study Looking for Input from Massachusetts Dairy Farmers

### **Looking for Input from Massachusetts Dairy Farmers on processing opportunities in Massachusetts**

MDAR is currently enrolling Massachusetts dairy farmers for a study researching processing opportunities in Massachusetts. The purpose of this research is to explore the opportunities, barriers and limitations associated with shared-use processing. Some options include:

- A shared facility that had equipment for making value-added products, such as cheese or yogurt
- A cooperatively-owned business that would process the milk of its members into value-added products

What are the characteristics of the facility that could work for dairy farmers? What are the most important factors impacting a dairy farmer's ability to process value-added products? What kind of plant ownership will work for dairy farmers? MDAR wants to find out more details about what type of processing would work for your business.

Those enrolled will complete a 90-minute interview. Refreshments will be provided during the interview. If you are interested in participating, please contact Rebecca Davidson at [Rebecca.Davidson@Mass.gov](mailto:Rebecca.Davidson@Mass.gov).

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## File Taxes. Help Animals.



Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources is encouraging Massachusetts taxpayers to help animals in need by donating to the Massachusetts Animal Fund on Line 33f of their income tax returns for homeless animal prevention and care. Since the Fund's inception in 2014, the Mass Animal Fund has spent over \$1.5 million dollars to sterilize and vaccinate over 12,000 local animals in over 310 municipalities. The Voucher Program turns donations into a resource that local animal control officers (ACO) can utilize to get assistance for animals in their community. The Mass Animal Fund also provides free training opportunities and support to Massachusetts ACOs so they can

provide uniform enforcement of animal control laws. Follow the Fund on Facebook

([www.facebook.com/massanimalfund](http://www.facebook.com/massanimalfund)) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/line33f>) for the most up-to-date information about ending animal homelessness in the Commonwealth.

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## Farm Labor Management Workshops by CISA

Are you a new manager, an aspiring manager or middle manager, or an experienced farmer looking to improve your management skills? This year's winter workshop series will develop your skills for improving workplace culture and communication, giving effective feedback to those you manage, managing across cultures with dexterity and humility, setting clear performance expectations, resolving conflict in the workplace, and achieving workplace respect. Workshop examples and legal information will be geared toward farms, but much of the content can also benefit non-farm businesses.

You may attend workshops individually or register for the whole series at the discounted rate of \$65 for Local Hero members or \$95 for non-members. Scholarships are available if cost is a barrier to attending. Childcare, Spanish language interpretation, or other accommodations will be provided upon request whenever possible. See workshop details below, and contact [Kristen Wilmer](mailto:Kristen.Wilmer) at 413-665-7100, ext. 12 with any questions.

### Workshop Descriptions:

- February 12 - **Conflict resolution skills for supervisors** - 5-8pm, HCC Kittredge Center, Room 303, 303 Homestead Avenue, Holyoke
- February 27 - **Performance management - set it, manage it, measure it!** - 12:30-4:30pm, The Food Bank of Western MA, 97 North Hatfield Road, Hatfield
- March 5 - **Improving your farm's employee policies and management systems** - 12-5pm (snow day March 6) - The Food Bank of Western MA, Hatfield

- March 10 - **Building a positive workplace culture through active bystander training** - 2-4:30pm - - The Food Bank of Western MA, 97 N. Hatfield Road, Hatfield
- March 17 - **Leadership strategies for achieving workplace respect** - 12:30-4:30pm, ServiceNet, 21 Olander Drive, Northampton

This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2015-49200-24225 and by individual contributors and CISA Local Hero members. [Please click here to register.](#)

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## Nutrition's Role in Sustainable Livestock Production Practices

These workshops are part of the USDA/NESARE Professional Development Program grant: Nutrition's Role in Sustainable Livestock Production Practices, a joint project among the Universities of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. This is a workshop series on pasture management and infrastructure and the nutritional needs of livestock raised on pasture.

All workshops held in the training room at: Farm Credit East, 240 S Rd., Enfield, CT

- March 23 - **Grazing Systems** - Introduction and overview to grazing systems, in-depth discussion of different types of grazing systems and multi-species grazing. 8:30 am to 1 pm
- April 6 - **Extending the Grazing Season** - Spring, summer and fall grazing, stockpiling, no till planting to extend the grazing season, grazing cover crops and crop residues - 8:30 am to 1 pm

Register for any of the workshops at <https://forms.gle/Q6MuG7xyyUH9y98x9> or email [jean.king@uconn.edu](mailto:jean.king@uconn.edu).

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## Opportunity at the New England Food Show

Are you a local business or farm that would like to connect with and sell to restaurants and chefs in New England? If so, this is the perfect opportunity to help create a unique advantage for you. The [New England Food Show](#) is working to support and promote a "Tasting Pavilion" where local businesses and farms will be featured. New England Food Show, held at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, draws 7,000+ foodservice professionals each year and these buyers are always looking for new and local products to incorporate into their menus. If you are interested, please contact [stephanie@expodevco.com](mailto:stephanie@expodevco.com).

This opportunity will be available for approximately \$300 - \$750 depending on initial interest and will include the following for all who participate:

- Dedicated exhibit/display space for 3 days of the show within the pavilion
- Carpet, One 6 foot draped table, Booth ID Sign
- Wastebasket, Daily Cleaning
- Listing in the online exhibitor directory and the onsite printed directory
- Reefer Storage, Onsite material handling (max 500 lbs)

For full details on the show, visit [www.NewEnglandFoodShow.com](http://www.NewEnglandFoodShow.com).

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## Legal Food Hub Offers Webinars and Resources

Legal Food Hub is excited to announce two Legal Food Hub resources that we hope you'll find useful. Are you a farmer, food business, or nonprofit with legal questions about starting your business, acquiring land, entering into contracts, or other essential business matters? The Legal Food Hub Resource Library provides answers to common legal questions.

**WINTER WEBINARS:** Free Winter Webinar Series continues thru February and March. All webinars run 12-1pm. Subjects include: trade secrets, coop law, food safety, and more. Please visit: [www.legalfoodhub.org/services/education](http://www.legalfoodhub.org/services/education) for more information and free registration.

**LEGAL RESOURCE LIBRARY:** New Resource Library has launched! Check out handy legal guides on common legal questions for farms and food businesses. [www.legalfoodhub.org/resource-library/](http://www.legalfoodhub.org/resource-library/)

As always, do not hesitate to reach out. Details and contacts: [legalfoodhub@clf.org](mailto:legalfoodhub@clf.org), [www.legalfoodhub.org](http://www.legalfoodhub.org).

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## U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Service Releases New Version of Form I-9

Reminder: The U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Service released a new version of Form I-9 on January 31, 2020. You should start using the new form right away for all new hires, download it here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-9>.

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## Are You Now a Century Farm in 2020?



Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) wants to know if you have a Century Farm! [MFBF](#) and the [Massachusetts Grange](#) are partnering once again to celebrate Massachusetts farms that have been family-owned and operated for 100+ years. The program recognizes those farms and farm families that have done so much to contribute to our rural heritage and traditions.

All qualifying farms will be recognized in a commemorative book, and those that are new to the program will receive a sign to display at their farm.

There's no cost to participate; just complete the [Century Farm application](#) or if you prefer to fill it out by hand, [click here](#) for a printable .pdf application and be sure to [return it by May 31, 2020](#).

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## UPCOMING EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

**February 13: MDAR Farmer Grant Presentations** - 4:30 - 6:00 pm, Stockbridge Community Room. Do you have a project to help your farm adapt to climate change or improve energy efficiency? Would you like to implement new conservation practices or upgrade your food safety measures? Are you a beginning farmer seeking funds for capital improvements to help your business grow? MDAR's Melissa Adams and Mike Parker will share details on the range of grant programs. [Details here](#), or contact [Margaret@berkshiregrow.org](mailto:Margaret@berkshiregrow.org).

**February 20: Getting It Right: Pricing Strategies** – 4:00 - 6:00 pm - online workshop. What's the right price for your products? You may look at what others are charging to set your prices but if you don't know your cost of production, then you may not be charging enough. Julia Shanks from The Farmer's Office & Julia Shanks Food Consulting will lead this interactive online workshop to help you understand the factors involved in setting the right price, from understanding your costs, to knowing what makes your product special, to understanding the competition. [Details here](#), or contact [Margaret@berkshiregrown.org](mailto:Margaret@berkshiregrown.org).

**February 22: 2020 New England Campus Farmer Summit**, Stonehill College, Easton. Campus farmers, students, and representatives from non-profits and agencies connect in person about what makes campus farms successful. This forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders working at the intersection of food justice, environmental sustainability, food access, and healthy eating to discuss challenges and opportunities. [Details here](#).

**February 22: Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commission's Annual Meeting** - 9:00 am – 4:00 pm Holiday Inn, Marlboro. Celebrating 10 years. Sessions include: *Let's Talk About Glyphosates*, *"REAL" Local Produce*, *a Conversation on Produce Traceability*, *Hemp Updates*, *Regulations and Legislation*, *Working with Municipalities*. [Details here](#).

**February 23: SEMAP 13th Annual Agriculture & Food Conference** – 8:00 am - 4:30 pm - Bristol County Agricultural High School, 135 Center St. Dighton. Farmers, gardeners, homesteaders, advocates, and foodies: join SEMAP for their 13th Annual Conference. Includes 20+ engaging workshops, a resource fair, a keynote address, and an always tasty locally-sourced lunch. Early-bird discount is available until January 31st. [Details here](#).

**February 24: Berkshire Grown's Annual Networking Event** – 3:00 – 6:00 pm, Hancock Shaker Village. Annual gathering of buyer and producer members of Berkshire Grown is a great place to make and renew connections with your colleagues, customers, and vendors. [Updates here](#).

**February 25 & 26: MNLA's 5th Annual Winter Forum & Trade Show** - Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel & Trade Center, Marlborough. [Details here](#). **Green Industry Job Fair** – Free for those looking for a career in Environmental Horticulture! The MNLA Green Industry Job Fair is where landscape, nursery and greenhouse companies will connect with individuals looking for jobs in the green industry. This is a win/win opportunity for employers and job seekers. Register [online here](#). Visit to register for the job fair. Job fair registration is free but does not include access to our Winter Forum educational program. Visit [here](#) to learn more.

**February 26: Pollinators In Our Landscapes Conference** – 9:00 am - 3:30 pm, Doubletree Hotel, Milford. UMass Extension's Landscape, Nursery, and Urban Forestry Program seeks to encourage communication between Green Industry professionals including landscapers, land managers, arborists, licensed pesticide applicators, and other landscape practitioners with professional beekeepers, researchers, and state officials who share the common goal of maintaining and encouraging pollinator health in Mass. [Details here](#).

**February 27: Agricultural Composting Training** - 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield. MDAR's No-Cost training workshop for registered agricultural composters and other farms interested in ag composting (larger than backyard composting). Sessions include: Principles of Composting, Site Selection, Layout and Maintenance, Compost Recipe Development, Monitoring, Troubleshooting, and Development of Odor Management Plan, On-Farm Compost Use, Updates to MDAR

Agricultural Composting Program Regulations. Register w/[Dorothy.du@mass.gov](mailto:Dorothy.du@mass.gov). Questions, contact Sean Bowen: 617-626-1724, [Sean.Bowen@mass.gov](mailto:Sean.Bowen@mass.gov).

**February 28: 11th Annual Hop Conference** - Delta Hotels Burlington (Trader Dukes), South Burlington, VT. [Register here](#). Conference Sponsors and/or Exhibitors [register here](#).

**March 4: SBN's Local Food & Specialty Crop Trade Show** - Northeastern University - The 9th Annual Trade Show offers one-stop shopping for food buyers seeking to expand their offering of local food, including specialty crops, value-added products, meat, dairy and seafood. Buyers and local food businesses can [register here](#) as either a specialty food producer (*free registration!*) or food producer or buyer. [More here](#).

**March 5: Agricultural Composting Training** - 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, Community Harvest Project, N. Grafton. MDAR's No-Cost training workshop for registered ag composters and other farms interested in ag composting (larger than backyard composting). Register w/[Dorothy.Du@mass.gov](mailto:Dorothy.Du@mass.gov). Questions, contact Sean Bowen: 617-626-1724, [Sean.Bowen@mass.gov](mailto:Sean.Bowen@mass.gov).

**March 10: 41<sup>st</sup> Annual UMass Community Tree Conference** - 8:45 am - 3:30 pm, Stockbridge Hall, UMass. Designed for tree care professionals, volunteers, and enthusiasts including arborists, tree wardens, urban foresters, foresters, landscape architects and shade tree committee members. This year's conference will present updates on safety (ANSI Z133 revision), pest management, research, and i-Tree as well as managing invasives in Springfield. [Details here](#).

**March 11: Agricultural Composting Training** - 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Beverly. MDAR's No-Cost training workshop for registered ag composters and other farms interested in ag composting (larger than backyard composting). Register w/[Dorothy.Du@mass.gov](mailto:Dorothy.Du@mass.gov). Questions, contact Sean Bowen: 617-626-1724, [Sean.Bowen@mass.gov](mailto:Sean.Bowen@mass.gov).

**March 11: Northeast Harvest Agricultural Conference** - 9:00 am - 2:00 pm, Coolidge Hall, Topsfield Fairgrounds. [Details here](#).

**March 13: Neonics Scientific Literature Review Public Hearing** – 2:00 - 4:00 pm, MA Div. of Fish & Wildlife, Westborough. [Details here](#).

**March 14: Making Sharp Farmstead Cheeses** - 8:00 am - 5:00 pm, Gill. Join NOFA/Mass at Upinngil Farm for a day-long, hands-on cheese making workshop, farm tour and lots of cheese. This workshop is suited to beginners as well as experienced cheesemakers. [Details here](#).

**March 19: Adapting to the Changing Local Foods Market** – 3:00 - 6:00 pm, Stockbridge Community Room, Stockbridge. As the local foods market matures and competition increases, it's becoming harder for experienced farmers to maintain market share and new farmers to break in. Learn tools and techniques to help your farm adapt to market trends, differentiate yourself and stay relevant. [Details here](#).

**March 19: Agricultural Composting Training** - 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, UMass Cranberry Experiment Station, E. Wareham. MDAR's No-Cost training workshop for registered ag composters and other farms interested in agricultural composting (larger than backyard composting). Register w/[Dorothy.Du@mass.gov](mailto:Dorothy.Du@mass.gov). Questions, contact Sean Bowen: 617-626-1724, [Sean.Bowen@mass.gov](mailto:Sean.Bowen@mass.gov).

**March 25: Agriculture Day at the Statehouse** - Boston

**March 26: Spring Kickoff for Landscapers: UMass Extension's Landscape Education Day** - 9:00 am - 3:15 pm, Topsfield Fairgrounds. Topics include: how to deal with nuisance wildlife and effective ways to attract and support pollinators in managed landscapes, troubleshooting common diseases of perennials in the landscape, taming the top troublesome insect and mite pests of woody landscape plants, and early season weed management. [Details here.](#)

**March 27: Massachusetts Food Policy Meeting** - 9:30 am - 12:30 pm, MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough. [Details here.](#)

[MDAR Calendar](#)

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## USDA News

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### Deadline to Purchase Federal Crop Insurance

Recent growing seasons have seen hail, drought, excess moisture and freeze across Massachusetts. If you're concerned with extreme weather events and the impact they can have on your farm, you should consider purchasing some level of coverage on your insured crops. [The deadline to purchase coverage for spring-seeded crops and the Whole Farm Revenue Program is March 16, 2020.](#)

#### **Individual Crop Policies:**

Growers can purchase Federal Crop Insurance on corn (silage/grain), fresh market sweet corn, potatoes and cigar binder tobacco. Availability to purchase coverage on potatoes is limited to Franklin and Hampshire Counties and for cigar binder tobacco in Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. These are yield-based policies and are based on a producer's historical crop yields.

#### **Whole Farm Revenue Program (WFRP):**

WFRP provides growers with revenue protection from weather related or market losses rather than yield based policies and are based on a five-year revenue history (in some instances as long as a producer has 3 years of records they may purchase a WFRP policy)

\*Individual crop policies and the WFRP policy are sold through private Federal Crop Insurance Agents. Use the following link to contact an agent: [www.rma.usda.gov/Information-Tools/Agent-Locator-Page](http://www.rma.usda.gov/Information-Tools/Agent-Locator-Page)

#### **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP):**

NAP is available on all annual crops not insured by Federal Crop Insurance. Check with your local USDA - [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\) Office](#), which administers NAP. Beginning, historically underserved, and limited resource farmers receive a waiver of the NAP administrative fee.

For more information, please visit [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov) or contact UMass Risk Management Specialists Paul Russell at [pmrussell@umext.umass.edu](mailto:pmrussell@umext.umass.edu) or Tom Smiarowski at [tsmiarowski@umext.umass.edu](mailto:tsmiarowski@umext.umass.edu).

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## Value Added Producer Grants

The USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service is accepting applications for the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program. The VAPG program helps agricultural producers enter into value-added activities related to the processing and marketing of new products. The goals of this program are to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities and increase producer income.

You may receive priority if you are a beginning farmer or rancher, a socially-disadvantaged farmer or rancher, a small or medium-sized farm or ranch structured as a family farm, a farmer or rancher cooperative or are proposing a mid-tier value chain.

### How may funds be used?

Grant and matching funds can be used for planning activities or for working capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product. Examples of planning activities include conducting feasibility studies and developing business plans for processing and marketing the proposed value-added product. Examples of working capital expenses include:

- Processing costs
- Marketing and advertising expenses
- Some inventory and salary expenses

Available Total Funding: \$37 million. Maximum Award Amount: Planning—\$75,000; Working Capital—\$250,000. Project Period: Up to 36 months depending on the complexity of the project. Anticipated Award Date: July 31, 2020.

Details at [www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/value-added-producer-grants](http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/value-added-producer-grants).

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## Classified

- **Job Posting:** MDAR is hiring an Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program Stewardship Planner. This person will be part of a team of four responsible for all aspects of stewardship for MDAR's Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, and will be based in the West Springfield office. Job description listing and details is [here](#).

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### About the *Farm & Market Report*

Published bi-monthly by MDAR:

<p><u>Boston Office:</u> 251 Causeway St., Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114-2151 617-626-1700</p>	<p><u>West Springfield:</u> 138 Memorial Avenue, Suite 42 West Springfield, MA 01089</p>	<p><u>Lakeville:</u> 30 Riverside Drive, Suite 202, Lakeville, MA 02347 774-419-1800</p>
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- John Lebeaux, Commissioner, [John.Lebeaux@mass.gov](mailto:John.Lebeaux@mass.gov)
- Ashley Sears Randle, Assistant Commissioner, [Ashley.Randle@mass.gov](mailto:Ashley.Randle@mass.gov)
- Alisha Bouchard, Chief of Staff, [Alisha.Bouchard@mass.gov](mailto:Alisha.Bouchard@mass.gov)
- Margaret Callanan, General Counsel, [Margaret.Callanan@mass.gov](mailto:Margaret.Callanan@mass.gov)
- Cullen Roberts, Chief Financial Officer, Administration, [Cullen.Roberts2@mass.gov](mailto:Cullen.Roberts2@mass.gov)

### Division Directors

- Michael Cahill, Director of Animal Health, [Michael.Cahill@mass.gov](mailto:Michael.Cahill@mass.gov)
- Mary Jordan, Director of Agricultural Markets, [Mary.Jordan@mass.gov](mailto:Mary.Jordan@mass.gov)
- Gerard Kennedy, Director of Agricultural Conservation and Technical Assistance, [Gerard.Kennedy@mass.gov](mailto:Gerard.Kennedy@mass.gov)
- Taryn LaScola-Miner, Director of Crop and Pest Services (C&PS) Division, [Taryn.LaScola@mass.gov](mailto:Taryn.LaScola@mass.gov)

Complete staff directory [here](#). Next issue to be published in April. Please send news, events, or classified information by April 3<sup>rd</sup> to [Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov](mailto:Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov). To unsubscribe, or change your email address, contact [Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov](mailto:Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov) or call 617-626-1759.

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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 [www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr).

