

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



## Department of Agricultural Resources

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Thursday, March 6, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins, Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I appreciate you taking the time to address my colleagues and me at last week's National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) conference. As a fifth-generation dairy farmer and the first woman to lead the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), I share your commitment to fair regulations and to wisely targeted investments to help agriculture thrive. I also value your appreciation of farmers' resilience and understanding of the essential role they play in our nation's economy and security.

I recognize the importance of your new administration's role in carefully evaluating programs and funding opportunities to ensure alignment with priorities and values. Equally important is continuity of services and existing assurances to the communities you serve, to ensure both progress of current activities and long-term sustainability based on trust and shared commitment to success. I urge you to complete your review of USDA's work quickly, and to honor all outstanding contractual obligations to farmers and the organizations and institutions that support them.

Recent communications from USDA have left many Massachusetts farmers and stakeholder partners unclear on whether commitments will be honored or important services will continue. I know you are aware of the wide range of uncontrollable variables that farmers face in their work every day, and of the importance to farmers of knowing that a trusted partner will honor their word. In many cases farmers have made investments in services and capital projects based upon approved grants, only to find that they may not be reimbursed as promised. For some, not being able to count on those resources could be the difference between remaining sustainable and losing their farm. Even if funds are ultimately released at the conclusion of your review, the intervening suspension is harming farmers, and I encourage you to resume payments while you are conducting your analysis.

The loss of USDA staff has also left Massachusetts farmers without essential resources that have long been an important part of their success. Reduced staff at NRCS means a loss of expertise in soil and plant health, farm infrastructure, and conservation practices. Diminished capacity at our state FSA

office limits farmers' access to loans, insurance, and disaster relief. Due to the significant amount of Massachusetts farmland with agricultural easements held in part by USDA, in many cases this diminishment of services risks devaluing federal interests as well. I hope you will consider reinstating the lost positions.

My department itself is also facing shortfalls due to the ongoing suspension of funds. The Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) and Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) programs have been transformative for farmers and communities in Massachusetts, providing needed capital investments and market enhancements for farms of all sizes thanks to the USDA's implementation of these innovative initiatives. We continue to reimburse awardees under contract through these programs, but being unable to access the funds committed by USDA may lead to us having to reduce essential services elsewhere.

Massachusetts has long had strong partnerships with USDA. Together, we have permanently protected tens of thousands of acres of Massachusetts farmland, opened new markets for farmers, and developed and implemented produce and livestock safety programs that have served as a model for states around the country and kept our food supply safe. I hope you will visit us here in Massachusetts so you can see the impact this partnership has had on farms and the food system, and so we can continue the discussion about how to best help the sector thrive.

We look forward to continued cooperation with you and your team and stand ready to work with you as you complete your review quickly and honor the commitments made to Massachusetts farmers and stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Ashley E. Randle, Commissioner