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April/May Farm & Market Report

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COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN



Greetings, Massachusetts Agriculture and all its friends!

It's Spring, and in typical fashion, it's developing in fits and starts! All the recent precipitation has really altered the [US Drought Monitor map](#)! It's great not to see any red areas (Extreme Drought) anymore, to now see some white (Normal) and everything else in the categories at the low end of the drought spectrum.

Just as agricultural activity increases as spring takes hold, it feels the same way here at MDAR, to the point that I don't know where to begin. I may be a little scattered here; I'm past deadline and Rick is patiently waiting for me so he can send out this edition of the F&M Report.

Last week was the annual Agriculture Day at the State House event. It is without exaggeration an event that almost everyone who works in the State House anticipates and enjoys. After an orientation, farmers busily went through the building meeting with legislators to discuss the issues that affect them individually and those that affect agriculture as a whole. That was

followed by a Preview Reception for legislators in the Great Hall. Everyone was very pleased that Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, and Secretary Beaton spent a good amount of time there meeting with participants. Next was the speaking program at which both Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito spoke about their appreciation of Mass. Agriculture. It was a treat to hear remarks from Bristol Aggie student, 4-H Dairy Ambassador Trevor Clapp of Norton. It's always very gratifying to hear what a poised, articulate future leader has to say. The final event was the "Taste of Massachusetts" Reception and Exhibits-what a great (and tasty) exhibition of so much of the best of our state!

I also need to mention that it was an honor, though a very sad one, to join with former MDAR Commissioners Doug Gillespie (current Farm Bureau Executive Director), Jay Healy and Scott Soares to honor the memory of former MDAR Assistant Commissioner Kent Lage as Farm Bureau made a presentation to Kent's wife Tami Nason.

Congratulations to Mass. Farm Bureau President Ed Davidian and the whole Farm Bureau team for organizing another successful Ag Day. MDAR is pleased to assist with pre-event planning and logistics, manning both the loading dock and the registration table, and providing other assistance as necessary.

I encourage you now a year out to please attend next year's Ag Day. It's a very powerful tool to emphasize to critical decision makers all the tangible and non-tangible benefits Mass. Agriculture provides to the residents of the Commonwealth.

Once again I have some personnel changes to report. We have added two new staff to our Food Safety team and filled the vacancy in our Dairy Promotion Board/Ag Markets Outreach position.

Alexandra Hachem joined our Produce Safety, Market Access-Certification Program team in February and brings with her knowledge of produce marketing, distribution and farm food safety from the buyer perspective. "Alex" will be managing all research, education and partnership initiatives for the program and will improve and leverage the program's existing continuum of education, technical assistance and grant sizing to support the state qualified program. Alex will also be managing the coordination of research activities, both in state and in the region, and will be working closely with the UMASS Food Science and Nutrition and Vegetable and Fruit Extension programs.

Alex has a Bachelor's degree in Nutrition and a Master's Degree in Food Technology and previously worked at Red Tomato.

Steven Pilis also joined MDAR's Produce Safety, Market Access-Certification Program team in February to manage operations for both the newly formed Produce Inspection Program as well as the Commonwealth Quality Program in support of the State's fruit and vegetable sectors. Steven will be assisting the team in the integration and management of the Produce Safety Rule (FSMA) and the FDA Cooperative agreement that establishes the framework for a state qualified program. Steven will also be the primary responsible for the maintenance of National and State performance measures and statistical analysis of data points for the program lifecycle.

Steven graduated from Northeastern University with a Master's Degree in Public Administration and has worked with the city of Newton's Department of Health and Human Services to conduct needs assessment and analysis of city programs and underserved communities.

Amanda Bruso joined the Division of Agricultural Markets in March as the new Massachusetts Dairy Promotion Board and Agricultural Markets Outreach Coordinator. Amanda comes to the Department with a retail background in natural and organic foods as well as experience with increasing access to healthy and sustainable food. Amanda's interests focus around nutrition and agriculture. Amanda is a member of the Massachusetts National Guard.

At the beginning of the month Governor Baker declared March as Massachusetts Maple Month. I attended the annual ceremonial tree tapping at Steve's Sugar Shack in Westhampton. To help promote the Mass. Maple Producers Association Maple Weekend, Assistant Commissioner Jason Wentworth and I visited seven sugarhouses in one day. We started together at the Hardwick Sugar House in Hardwick and then split up. Jason visited Johnson's Farm in Orange, Williams Farm in Deerfield, and the North Hadley Sugar Shack in North Hadley. I visited Ioka Valley Farm in Hancock, Just A Mere Tree Farm in Worthington, and Maple Corner in Granville. We both had a fun (and very sweet) day meeting with maple producers and learning new things about what has become an extremely high tech industry. I'm sure many know that cold nights and warm days are the ideal conditions, but I never knew before that barometric pressure and wind direction also influence sap flow.

Among my visits since last column were an opportunity to speak on Mass. Agriculture at Northeastern University's Open Classroom Series; attending SEMAP's (Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership) 10th Annual Agriculture and Food Conference at Bristol Aggie High School in Dighton; visiting Essex Aggie High School in Hathorne and Smith Voc-Ag High School in Northampton; attending the very successful Mass. Urban Farming Conference in Boston; SBN's Local Food Trade Show at Northeastern University; attended the Harvest New England Conference and met with all the NE Commissioners/Secretaries of the New England Departments of Agriculture; a stop at the Cambridge Winter Farmers Market with Secretary of Elder Affairs Alice Bonner and Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance Jeff McCue; and attending CISA's (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) Annual Meeting and Dinner in Holyoke.

When I joined MDAR I learned we had a Twitter account. I had no prior experience with Twitter but I've learned to use it (with a lot of help) and we now have over 2,000 people following our tweets. It surprised me that MDAR had Twitter but no Facebook as I think Facebook might be used by more people interested in what MDAR is doing. I'm happy to report that our Facebook page went live just a few weeks ago. We're using the same "handle" (address) for both to make things easier for all. Please join us online at @MassDeptAgr on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). We use both platforms to provide official news and notices and anything else we find appropriate or fun. Of course, please encourage anyone interested in Mass. Ag and MDAR to subscribe to these Farm and Market Reports may subscribe by emailing [Rick LeBlanc](#) at MDAR.

Lastly it is a tremendous honor to have received both the Mass. Association of Dairy Farmers' Agricultural Award at its Annual Meeting in Northampton and the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association's Government Service Award at its meeting in Plymouth, but I want to be very clear that any success for which I am recognized is due to the great team at MDAR. I am very fortunate that the Department has so many skilled and dedicated people; it's a privilege to represent them. As I told both organizations when I accepted their awards, I received them on behalf of our entire staff-the fabulous team in the Commissioner's Office, our skilled senior managers and supervisors, and our talented line personnel. Simply put, there is no "I" in MDAR!

Let's face it, 2016 was a tough year. Here's hoping we get some "releaf" in 2017 and everyone has a fantastic year!

That's all for now-I must get this to Rick.



John Lebeaux

FOREFRONT

Energy News

[Energy Audits](#) – The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program has funds to help farms cover audits, energy efficient projects, and select renewable energy projects. Contact for more information 413-727-3090, info@massfarmenergy.com or visit www.massfarmenergy.com, submit a "Request Form", and you will be contacted.

UPDATE - DOER Presents New Solar Incentive Program – SREC-II Extended to March 31, 2018 - "Dual Use of Land " Incentives to be Offered for Ground-Mounted Solar PV

From the DOER webpage: "In recognition of the time necessary to fully implement the new Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program and its obligation to have an orderly transition between the SREC II and SMART programs, DOER will grant good cause extension requests for projects that seek one." Please note SREC factors will be applied. For more information please see the [DOER webpage](#).

As importantly, included for the first time will be an incentive for installing “dual use of land” solar PV systems on agricultural land. This will be ground-mounted PV systems that demonstrate a continuous, optimization and balance of crop growth beneath the PV panels, thereby allowing both crop and energy production.

As noted in the last Farm & Market Report, the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) is in the process of designing a new solar incentive program pursuant to [Chapter 75 of the Acts of 2016 signed into law by Governor Baker on April 11, 2016](#). DOER is working to create a long-term sustainable solar incentive program to promote cost-effective solar development in the Commonwealth and this page is designed to provide an overview of past and planned public meetings, relevant documents, presentations, and reports related to the new program. DOER worked with a number of stakeholders in this process, including MDAR. Agricultural canopies are being incorporated for the first time as we try to incentivize simultaneous production of crops and energy on farmland, i.e. not taking any land out of agricultural production while still generating clean energy. As well, Energy Storage will also be presented as part of this program for the first time.

On January 31, 2017, DOER presented the final program design to stakeholders at the Federal Reserve Building in Boston. A copy of the presentation is found here: [Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target \(SMART\) Program \(.pdf\)](#) or audio: [January 31, 2017 Meeting](#)  file size 193MB

You can find out more about this effort www.mass.gov/eea/energy-utilities-clean-tech/renewable-energy/rps-aps/development-of-the-next-solar-incentive.html or contact Gerry Palano, Gerald.Palano@state.ma.us.

MDAR's Annual AgEnergy Grant Programs Soon to be Announced for FY2018

MDAR intends to post our annual AgEnergy Grant Programs for FY 2018 soon. Similar to FY2017, the AgEnergy Grant will consist of two grant programs – our “Traditional” agricultural energy grant program, now in its tenth year, which requests applications for a wide variety of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects; and a “Special Projects” grant, now for the second time, for very specific categories of clean energy technology applications.

MDAR is thankful and grateful to the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) for once again contributing significant funding toward both these grant programs in a partnership arrangement. This is all in an effort toward the goal of assisting our MA Agricultural sector in becoming more energy sustainable through energy efficiency and clean energy project implementation, while simultaneously achieving the MA goals of GHG reduction as well as those established our 2015 MA Food System Plan, the first since 1974.

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Application Period Open for Three Farm Viability Grant Programs

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) is accepting applications from farmers who wish to participate in these Department programs in Fiscal Year 2018. Interested farm operators are encouraged to review program information and applications on Department web pages found at www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/dacta-grants-lc.html. **Due date for applications for the following three programs is May 15, 2017.**

Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)

This popular business planning and technical assistance program provides management advice and grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 to implement farm growth and sustainability strategies. This is not a reimbursement program. Farm operators receive grant awards for signing a 5 or 10 year Agricultural Covenant. Typical uses of funds from the Farm Viability Program include building new or repairing farm structures, modernizing field equipment, purchasing delivery vehicles and tractors, and building or improving retail marketing structures or farm food processing facilities.

FVEP Applications and program information are available [here](#). If you would like an application mailed to you contact Craig Richov at 617-626-1725 or Craig.Richov@state.ma.us.

APR Improvement Program (AIP) – for APR farms

The APR Improvement Program (AIP) helps sustain active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. AIP provides business planning assistance to farmers selected to participate in the program and grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 may be available on a reimbursement basis to improve farm productivity and profitability of participating APR farms. AIP funds are used primarily for capital improvements, such as constructing or repairing barns, farm stands, livestock housing, or processing facilities; or land management, such as reseeding hay fields, pasture improvements, fencing, or establishing perennial crops.

AIP applications and program information are available [here](#). If you would like an application mailed to you contact Melissa Adams at 413-548-1904 or Melissa.L.Adams@state.ma.us.

Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) - for Beginning Farmers in MA

The Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) Program helps with business expansion on new and beginning farms. MEGA provides business planning assistance and grant funds of up to \$10,000 on a one to one matching cash reimbursement basis. It is the objective of the MEGA Program to assist beginning farmers in their first through fifth year of business who aspire to develop their farms into commercially viable operations. Funds are used for equipment, infrastructure or other capital improvements identified through the business planning process.

MEGA applications and program information are available [here](#). If you would like an application mailed to you contact Melissa Adams at 413-548-1904 or Melissa.L.Adams@state.ma.us.

Healthy Incentives Program Update



Beginning this month, the Departments of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Agricultural Resources (DAR) and Public Health (DPH) will gradually roll out the [Healthy Incentives Program \(HIP\)](#), a new SNAP matching program which will benefit both SNAP participants and local farmers for three years (until March 2020). SNAP is the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), formerly known as food stamps.

Last year, approximately \$1.2 billion dollars in SNAP benefits were redeemed at retailers in Massachusetts and one of the goals of this new program is to encourage increased purchases of healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables directly from Massachusetts farmers. Currently, over 769,000 Massachusetts residents receive SNAP benefits. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) will provide \$1.25 million in match to SNAP customers for purchases of fruits and vegetables at farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and CSAs. A broad coalition of community partners, including federal and state agencies, Buy Local organizations, food banks, and non-profits are working together to implement the program in Massachusetts.

How Will HIP Work?

- Fruit & Vegetable Farmers will process their own SNAP and HIP transactions at all locations.
- Incentives will be calculated and instantly applied directly to the SNAP recipient's EBT card, available immediately for any future SNAP eligible purchase.
- SNAP customers will be encouraged to spend their HIP benefits where they earn them.
- Payments to farmers made directly within 1-2 business days.
- More fresh, healthy, local food for hundreds of thousands of families receiving SNAP benefits who will receive a dollar-for-dollar match, up to a monthly cap, based on household size, on those purchases so they can buy more food.

How Can Farmers Participate?

DAR and DTA in cooperation with our program partners have been sponsoring in-person SNAP retailer sign-up events over the last few weeks. Dozens of farmers have already signed up. Several more dates are scheduled in April. If you cannot attend

in person, please get in touch with one of the contacts listed below for information on how to complete the applications on line.

- [SNAP Sign Up Events for Farmers and Market Managers](#)
- [Healthy Incentives Program Retailer Overview](#)

Program Contacts:

Frank Martinez Nocito, Department of Transitional Assistance, 413-772-3411 or Frank.Martineznocito@state.ma.us; Abby Getman, 413-772-3449 or Abby.Getman@state.ma.us; David Webber, Department of Agricultural Resources, 617-626-1754 or David.Webber@state.ma.us, or one of the HIP Regional Partner Contacts in your area:

1. Barnstable County: Cape Cod Buy Fresh, Buy Local care of Cape Cod Cooperative Extension Kim Concra at kconcra@barnstablecounty.org or 508-375-6884 and Gretel Norgeot, Sustainable CAPE, 508-237-9492
2. Berkshire County: Berkshire Grown, Jaime Paxton at jamie@berkshiregrown.org or 413-528-0041
3. Bristol, Norfolk, Plymouth Counties: SEMAP (Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership), Kendra Murray at Kmurray@semaponline.org or 508-971-7888
4. City of Boston: City of Boston, Office of Food Initiatives, Catalina Lopez-Ospina at catalina.lopez-ospina@boston.gov or 617-635-2841
5. Greater Boston Region: Mass Farmers Markets, at jeff@massfarmersmarkets.org or 781-893-8222
6. Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin Counties (or if your region is not listed): CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), Innocent Nwosu at innocent@buylocalfood.org or 413-665-7100
7. Middlesex and Essex Counties: Northeast Harvest, Joy Nowak at joy@topsfair.org or 978-887-5000
8. Worcester County: Central Mass Grown, Mackenzie May at mackenzie@centralmassgrown.org or 508-523-3463

[Farmers' Markets Seeking Vendors](#) (click back for updates throughout the season) – This includes new proposed markets, as well as existing ones.

The Market Corner

Announcements & Information from MDAR's Division of Agricultural Markets

New posters have arrived! As part of a recent "Massachusetts grown...and fresher" Specialty Crop Block Grant, four new posters have been created - Honey, Blueberries,



Bedding Plants, and Maple. Last month the posters were given to teachers and the public at the Boston Flower and Garden Show (thanks to Carolyn Weston, Show Coordinator for our featured display area). At the Show, the "Massgrown" booth was one of the "sweet" spots at the show. "March is Maple Month," was spotlighted with information and samples of maple candies. There were also dried cranberries and honey sticks to sample as well. At the Department booth, over 26 pages of emails were collected from people looking for more information on "Massgrown" products and events. It is important to keep sending us your top farm events to add to the [Massgrown Culinary and Agricultural Events Calendar](#). Next to the ["Massgrown" map](#), it is one of the most viewed "Massgrown" webpages. Between the "Plant Something" booth coordinated by the Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association, and the Department booth, many teachers found agricultural related materials and ideas for their classrooms! Thanks to all that collaborated and staffed on this joint booth effort: Bobbie Oles from MA Ag in the Classroom, Tina Bemis, Jessica Wozniak

and the “Plant Something” committee, Sustainable Business Network (SBN) Buy Local staff, Jim O’Brien and Joy Nowak of the Northeast Harvest Buy Local initiative.

If interested in posters for your farms, favorite teacher, or anyone else, [click here for order form](#). We still have our traditional posters (“Top 10”, apple, pumpkin, strawberries, and vegetables), as well as stickers, and price cards. It’s always good to remind the public the value of all we grow and produce in Massachusetts! Reminder this Spring to check your farm information on the “Massgrown” map. If any edits needed, send to Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us.

May 16th Deadline for Certification to Accept Farmers Market Nutrition Coupons



Participation in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits farmers by attracting a new base of customers to Farmers' Markets, thereby providing additional sales opportunities to participating farmers, allows farmers to capture a greater share of the consumer food dollar through direct marketing, and promotes diversification on small farms by encouraging the production of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Farmer participation in the program benefits coupon recipients as well. It provides participants with coupons redeemable for nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables, introduces families and others to Farmers' Markets, and supports nutrition education goals by encouraging the selection and preparation of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Click [here](#) to apply to become certified to accept Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupons. If you are a new farmer, contact Rebecca.Davidson@state.ma.us to receive training and to become certified.

2017 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Application Process – Reminder - First Phase due April 14th

MDAR is conducting a competitive bid process through a Request for Response (RFR) process to award an estimated \$350,000. MDAR'S Specialty Crop Block Grant Program has a two-phase application process. The first phase is the development of the SCBGP Application (“Form C”). All applicants must complete, and submit the required application (Form C). Any other format will not be accepted, and the application will be deemed ineligible for funding. The SCBGP application (form C) is due by April 14, 2017 by 4:30 pm. [Complete details here](#).

Massachusetts Dairy Promotion Board Solicits Proposals for Fiscal Year '18

The Massachusetts Dairy Promotion Board is pleased to announce that they are now accepting proposals from non-profit organizations for projects that advance the image, sales of, and demand for Massachusetts dairy products. Applications are being considered through a competitive Request for Response (RFR) process. Complete details and link to the [RFR here](#). For information on the Massachusetts Dairy Promotion Board, [click here](#). To learn more about Massachusetts dairy, please visit <http://massdairy.com/>.

Apiary Updates

Recently Lost a Colony and Not Sure Why?

MDAR is scheduling post mortem analysis inspections for dead outs/winter losses. If you are interested, please submit an [online inspection request](#) and an inspector will contact you to setup a visit. If you want to submit your own sample(s) of bees and/or frame samples for analysis, contact the [USDA ARS Bee Research Laboratory](#) for more details.

Want to Document Your Losses and/or Surviving Colony?

Are you experiencing more fall/winter losses than last year? Or similar levels? Or decreased levels? Please consider reporting it to the [MA Hive Loss Survey](#). This survey is a fantastic way for us to not only document overall local honey bee health, but also help us gauge the needs of beekeepers in the Commonwealth.

Interested In Learning More About Honey Bees, Their Health and Hive Management Techniques?

Join State Apiary Inspectors at the State Apiary location on the UMass Agricultural Learning Center Farm (911 North Pleasant St, Amherst, MA 01002) on Saturday, May 20th to get a tour of live working honey bee hives and an educational demonstration. This event is open to the public, but will focus on Spring Management for beekeepers. Participants must bring protective clothing (i.e. bee suit and/or bee veil with long pants and closed toed shoes) as it will not be provided and is required to enter the apiary.

Want To Learn About Managing Varroa Mites in Your Colonies?

Review the newly created [MDAR Varroa Mite Brochure](#) for biology, survey techniques and treatment options.

Pollinate New England

[New England Wild Flower Society](#) is now developing “Pollinate New England,” a multifaceted educational outreach program that includes building a network of model pollinator gardens throughout New England filled with diverse, systemic pesticide-free native plants. The program, supported by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, aims to remedy the drastic, dangerous drop in pollinator populations and help gardeners fight through a storm of misinformation and false advertising to select native plant species that genuinely benefit pollinators. Over the next two years, the Society will design and deliver a suite of free educational programs, including an online course, twelve pollinator garden workshops and installations across New England, and much more Fill out the [questionnaire](#) to get involved.

New updates have been made at the [MDAR Apiary Program](#) website, as well as dates for 2017 Honey Bee Education Days at State Apiary. Massachusetts honey producers wishing to be mapped on “Massgrown and fresher” map, click here for [Survey](#). 

What's Good About Tax Time?



What's good about tax time? It's a chance to help animals. Taxpayers can donate (any amount) on Line 33f of the Massachusetts Resident Income Tax Form. These donations are administered by the [Massachusetts Animal Fund](#) and are used to spay/neuter and vaccinate cats/dogs who are homeless or who live with families who cannot afford these procedures. Funds are also used to train

local animal control officers to ensure they are up-to-date on best practices. Through taxpayer donations the Fund has already helped 6,500 local cats and dogs in need across the Commonwealth, but there are many more are still waiting for assistance. You can learn more about this program at www.massanimalfund.com.

EPA Worker Protection Standard Train-the-Trainer Course for Organic and Non-Certified Pesticide Users

All farmworkers must be trained under the EPA Worker Protection Standard (WPS) if your farm uses any pesticides, including , those approved for organic production and other general use pesticides. The agricultural worker employer is responsible for complying with all components of WPS including the training of farmworkers. This training can only be provided by an individual who has a pesticide certification license or has attended an approved EPA WPS Train-the-Trainer workshop. The registration fee is \$60.00 per person. If you would like to register for these workshops via the mail using a check or money order [click here](#).

Below are links to the three EPA WPS Update and Train-the-Trainer Workshop. You may register online using a credit card for an additional fee of \$6.51.

- [Wednesday, April 19 in Taunton](#)
- [Wednesday, April 26 in Hadley](#)

- [Thursday, April 27 in Chelmsford](#)

Here is the link to the [EPA Worker Protection Standard "How to Comply" Manual for Employers](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

April 11 & 13 - CISA: Value-Added: Turning your Ideas into Action and Value-Added: Scaling Up and Marketing your Product - 5:30pm to 8:30pm - Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz St. Learn what it takes to launch a new value-added product, and get inspiration from seasoned producers. We will discuss key product considerations, regulations, and start-up costs, and a panel of producers will share their experiences assessing opportunities, refining recipes, getting funding, developing infrastructure, and more. CISA/Local Hero member cost is \$15 to attend just one workshop, or \$25 to attend both. RSVP by Monday, April 10th to [Kristen](#) at 413-665-7100, ext. 12.

April 12 - Fruit Twilight Meeting - 5:30 pm. Sunny Crest Orchards, 24 Hawkins Lane, Sterling MA. Bill Broderick will be our host. 1 pesticide credit will be offered. Light dinner (pizza/sandwiches) will be served. \$20 admission. Contact: Jon Clements, 413-478-7219. Pre-registration is not necessary.

April 17 – CISA Spring Farmer/Buyer Meet & Greet – 5-8pm - Real Pickles, 311 Wells Street, Greenfield. This networking event is all about showing off your goods and offering prepared samples of your products. Anything from meats and cheeses to spreads, beverages, and sliced produce. Buyers, bring your shopping list! Each attendee will have time for a two minute self-introduction before opening things up to sampling and schmoozing. Come hungry and bring an edible "conversation starter" to share with everyone - potluck style! This event is open to Local Hero farmers, and to any business interested in buying local farm products. RSVP by Wednesday, April 12 to Aja, aja@buylocalfood.org or 413-665-7100, ext. 24.

April 24 - Central Mass Grown Annual Meeting - 6-8pm - 3rd Annual Meeting to celebrate the achievements of Central Mass Grown as an organization and the great successes of its members. Executive Director, Mackenzie May, will present the exciting events CMG will be hosting in 2017. Join the meeting for a great potluck evening at Nashoba Valley Winery. [More here.](#)

April 25 - Fruit Twilight Meeting – 2 parts - Airblast Sprayer Calibration Demonstration at 3 pm, twilight meeting at 5:30 pm. Outlook Farm 136 Main Road, Westhampton, MA. Brad Morse will be our host. 1 pesticide credit will be offered for each part. Light dinner will be served for twilight, \$20 admission. Contact: Jon Clements, 413-478-7219. Pre-registration is not necessary.

April 28-29 - New England Meat Conference - The Radisson Manchester, NH - Join fellow farmers, processors, butchers, value-added producers and chefs at this year's New England Meat Conference. 2017 marks our third conference in what will be the industry event of the year for the region. Peers will be sharing their work in sustainable and local meat production. Look at growing the New England meat economies, continue developing robust infrastructure and foster business relationships. 25 educational sessions, hands-on workshops, and the illustrious Meat Ball. [More here.](#)

May 10 - Speed Trading + Stand Out from the Crowd! Workshops - 10-3pm - Union Station, Worcester - Marketing Workshop: Stand Out from the Crowd! How to Make Festivals & Events Work for You - Festivals are a great way to introduce people to your brand and your product. With festival season quickly approaching, The SBN of Massachusetts and Central Mass Grown have gathered a panel of Marketing Experts and Festival Producers to give you tips to help you convert attendees into customers. Speed Trading will encourage buyers and producers of local food to connect and form new relationships on a one on one level. [More here.](#)

May 11 - SEMAP Twilight Grower Education Workshop - 5:30 - 7:30 pm, Spring Season Extension in the Field, Langwater Farm, Easton. [Register here.](#)

May 19 - Massachusetts Food Policy Council - 9:30 am – 12:30 pm - MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough. Program: Deep dive into the local food infrastructure! From the MA Local Food Action Plan: "Support and

grow local food system infrastructure. The current focus is to target opportunities for growers, food processors and distributors to access capital, incentives, and technical assistance through agency partners and programs, private organizations, and universities.” The program will focus on Massachusetts Farm Infrastructure in relation to: Access to capital and business management; Product development and support for value-added food and ag businesses; Compliance with the Produce Safety Rule (FSMA); Farm energy. For more information, contact Bonita.Oehlke@state.ma.us.

USDA News

USDA Offers Help to Urban Farmers Looking to Extend the Growing Season While Protecting the Environment

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) now has financial assistance available through the [Agricultural Management Assistance \(AMA\)](#) program to help Massachusetts farmers install high tunnel systems. Urban areas will be given the highest priority in the application ranking process, followed by suburban areas, and other areas respectively.

The assistance is available to growers in counties where the urban population density is 50 percent or greater. All Massachusetts counties except Franklin County meet that criteria.

A high tunnel (also known as a hoop house) is a structure that modifies the growing climate, allowing farmers to grow vegetables, herbs, berries, and other crops beyond the normal growing season. High tunnels are constructed of metal bow frames with wood framed ends, at least six feet in height, and are covered with one or two layers of polyethylene. High tunnel systems provide many benefits: they can extend the growing season, improve plant and soil quality, improve air quality and reduce energy use.

Farmers may sign up for the program beginning immediately. Applications will be considered through a monthly batch ranking process on May 19, June 16, and continuing each third Friday until available financial assistance is expended. Eligible farmers may receive an incentive payment based on the statewide average cost for installing planned conservation practices. Socially disadvantaged, limited resource and beginning farmers are eligible for a higher payment rate.

A conservation plan must be completed before an application can be considered for funding, so farmers are encouraged to call or stop by their local NRCS field office as soon as possible. USDA Service Center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the Massachusetts NRCS website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

Census of Agriculture Countdown Begins for America’s Farmers and Ranchers

America’s farmers and ranchers will soon have the opportunity to strongly represent agriculture in their communities and industry by taking part in the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the census, to be mailed at the end of this year, is a complete count of all U.S. farms, ranches, and those who operate them.

“The Census of Agriculture remains the only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial agriculture data for every county in the nation,” said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. “As such, census results are relied upon heavily by those who serve farmers and rural communities, including federal, state and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations, extension educators, researchers, and farmers and ranchers themselves.”

The Census of Agriculture highlights land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures, and other topics. The 2012 Census of Agriculture revealed that over three million farmers operated more than two million farms, spanning over 914 million acres. This was a four percent decrease in the number of U.S. farms from the

previous census in 2007. However, agriculture sales, income, and expenses increased between 2007 and 2012. This telling information and thousands of other agriculture statistics are a direct result of responses to the Census of Agriculture.

“Today, when data are so important, there is strength in numbers,” said Hamer. “For farmers and ranchers, participation in the 2017 Census of Agriculture is their voice, their future, and their opportunity to shape American agriculture – its policies, services, and assistance programs – for years to come.”

Producers who are new to farming or did not receive a Census of Agriculture in 2012 still have time to sign up to receive the 2017 Census of Agriculture report form by visiting www.agcensus.usda.gov and clicking on the ‘Make Sure You Are Counted’ button through June. NASS defines a farm as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year (2017). For more information about the 2017 Census of Agriculture and to see how census data are used, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov or call (800) 727-9540.

Classified

- **Mixed Use Development Opportunity in Munson** – 256 acres for sale - adjacent to hundreds of acres of protected agriculture and rec land. Details at www.mass.gov/dcam/monson2017.
- **Position available** - Land For Good (LFG) is now accepting applications to fill its Massachusetts Field Agent position. LFG works throughout New England helping farmers access and transfer farms and farmland, and is one of the few U.S. groups focused on farmland access and transfer issues. LFG provides education, resources and direct services to farm seekers, established farmers, landowners, and community stakeholders in all six New England states. [Details here.](#)
- **Position available** - MA Food System Collaborative Seeking Communications Specialist. The MA Food System Collaborative was established in 2016 to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the MA Local Food Action Plan. The Collaborative works to encourage progress toward the goals of the Plan through education, networking, and advocacy. Learn more about the Collaborative at www.mafoodsystem.org. Position description: The Communications Specialist will work with the Director to plan and execute a communications strategy that amplifies the work of the Collaborative and its allies, encourages broad engagement in projects the Collaborative supports, and educates the general public about the value of a sustainable, equitable food system. [Details here.](#)
- **Position available** - Gardening the Community (GTC) seeks a Youth Program and Community Engagement Manager. Directly oversees youth participants and GTC’s youth development programs and coordinates all GTC community engagement activities. This includes organizing training and workshops related to food access and food justice, participating in community food justice coalitions and engaging neighborhood residents, coordinating GTC’s intern and volunteer programs and managing other community outreach activities. Applications are being accepted on-line until April 21. This is a 30 hour/week position with great benefits. [Apply online here.](#)
- **Agricultural Excavation – Grading Services** - provide earth moving, drainage, land/pasture reclamation, greenhouse preparation, and rock raking services. Includes but not limited to orchards/equine facilities/cranberry bogs/nurseries. Chris Merrill Excavating merrilltrucks@comcast.net, 978-897-9977.

About the *Farm & Market Report*

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Next issue to be published for early June. Please send news, calendar and/or classified information by May 31 to Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us. To unsubscribe or change your address, send an e-mail message to Richard.LeBlanc@state.ma.us or call 617-626-1759.

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.

