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## Food System Caucus Prioritizes Eight Bills and Endorses Twenty Bills in the 193<sup>rd</sup> Session

**BOSTON** – The Food System Caucus has prioritized eight pieces of legislation and endorsed twenty additional pieces of legislation for the 193<sup>rd</sup> session. Led by Co-Chairs Representative Kane, Representative Vargas, Representative Schmid, Representative Domb, Representative Donahue, Senator Comerford, and Senator DiDomenico, the Food System Caucus has based its priority and endorsed legislation on the three primary areas identified as priorities in the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council in 2015:

*Food access/insecurity: Reducing waste, hunger, and food insecurity while making available more fresh, healthy food to everyone who lives in the Commonwealth.*

*Farmland: Protecting the land and resources necessary to produce food while maximizing the environmental benefits of agriculture and fishing and the preservation of agricultural land.*

*Economic Development: Recognizing the significant impact to local, regional, and state economies, supporting the increase of production, sales, and consumption of Massachusetts-farmed food and seafood, and creating jobs and improving wages in the food, farming, and seafood industries.*

The Food System Caucus will be hosting an upcoming legislative briefing to highlight and summarize the caucus' priority legislation and answer any questions from members about the bills prior to August recess.

“Thank you to all of our fellow Legislators who submitted their important pieces of legislation to the Food System Caucus for priority consideration” said **the Food System Caucus Co-Chairs**. “We are excited to work together this session to propel these pieces of legislation forward.”

“I am pleased to be a founding member of the Food System Caucus,” said **Representative Kane (R-Shrewsbury)**. “The priority and endorsed legislation our Caucus has chosen this session will strengthen our local food system and help reduce food insecurity. I look forward to advocating with members to advance these bills this session.”

The House and Senate Clerks have now referred bills filed seasonably to the appropriate Joint Committee. All seasonably filed bills are guaranteed a public hearing before February of 2024, when Committees have a deadline to take action on bills heard by their Committees. Below is background on each of the priority and endorsed bills for the Food System Caucus.

The Food System Caucus includes 158 legislative members. For more information on the caucus, please visit our website: [www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com](http://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com)

## **Food System Caucus 193rd Session Priority Legislation**

### **Category: Food access/insecurity**

#### **H603/S261 An Act relative to universal school meals**

Sponsors: Representative Vargas, Senator DiDomenico

Purpose: This legislation aims to make school meals free for all public-school students permanently.

#### **H1594/S920/S1016 An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need**

Sponsors: Representative Kane, Senator Comerford, Senator Kennedy

Purpose: This legislation expands liability protections for food donations. It ensures that food donors can donate directly to needy individuals and still receive liability protections. It also creates a tax credit for farmers who donate crops to nonprofit organizations that distribute food to the needy.

#### **H1293/S835 An Act establishing the Massachusetts Hunger-Free Campus Initiative**

Sponsors: Representative Vargas, Representative Domb, Senator Lovely

Purpose: This bill aims to address the rate of student food insecurity on college campuses in Massachusetts by creating a grant program that would provide capacity building support and funding to allow 2- and 4-year public colleges to take steps to alleviate food insecurity on their campus.

#### **H150/S85 An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program**

Sponsors: Representative Domb, Senator Gobi

Purpose: This bill establishes the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) in statute. The HIP program provides a 1:1 dollar reimbursement when SNAP users buy fresh, locally grown produce directly from Massachusetts farmers at farm stands and farmers markets. HIP increases access to healthy food by increasing the resources SNAP users must purchase locally grown food, while supporting MA farmers

### **Category: Farmland**

#### **H88/S42 An Act strengthening Local Food Systems**

Sponsors: Representative Blais, Senator Comerford

Purpose: This bill makes a number of reforms to state law to support farms and farmers including establishing a state food system coordinator position, launching a program to provide hands-on training to new farmers, permitting farm stands to be included as agricultural land for tax purposes, and creating other initiatives to help strengthen the state's food systems and help farmers remain competitive and viable.

### **Category: Economic Development**

#### **H2852/S1855 An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture**

Sponsors: Representative Kane, Representative Howard, Senator Kennedy

Purpose: This bill allows cities to adopt an optional property tax break for land used for commercial urban agriculture.

## **Constitutional Amendment H41/S13 Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands**

Sponsors: Representative Schmid, Senator Comerford

Purpose: This amendment would remove the acreage requirement of Article 99 of the MA Constitution, which only applies to parcels larger than 5 acres currently, allowing smaller farms to be eligible for tax relief. Changes in management practices have made farming on smaller parcels more sustainable, the subdividing of large tracts of land means many farmers farm on multiple smaller parcels and rising land prices put larger parcels out of reach for many farmers, particularly beginning farmers and farmers of color.

## **H754 An Act supporting farm diversification and sustainability**

Sponsor: Representative Blais

Purpose: Under existing law, special permits are required to be issued by MDAR to allow non/quasi-agricultural activities on farms under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). This bill would give MDAR the flexibility to approve special permits for a period greater than 5 years.

### **Food System Caucus 193rd Session Endorsed Food Access/Insecurity Legislation**

**Category: Food access/insecurity**

## **H2201 An Act relative to the promotion of food donation**

Sponsors: Minority Leader Jones, Representative Kane

Purpose: This bill would require the Department of Public Health to issue guidance on food donation for businesses in the commonwealth, including information about liability protection and best practices for food donation.

## **S963 An Act relative to direct food donations**

Sponsor: Senator Fattman

Purpose: This bill would provide protections for food service entities and retailers and any person employed or under the control of said food service entities and retailers from civil damages, gross negligence, recklessness, or intentional misconduct for donating food directly to an individual.

## **H185 An Act relative to the healthy incentives program**

Sponsors: Minority Leader Jones, Representative Kane

Purpose: This bill would require a statewide survey to be conducted in order to collect feedback from farmers and clients regarding their experience with the Healthy Incentives Program in order to ensure the program is meeting the needs of consumers and farmers and to inform future outreach. The survey would be distributed to consumers and non-consumers of HIP.

## **H828/S507 An Act relative to establishing a food justice frontline**

Sponsors: Representative Howard, Senator Jehlen

Purpose: This bill establishes a Food Justice Frontline Program within MDAR. Provides for the Program to issue grants to nonprofit food security organizations in order to create jobs in disadvantaged communities and address food insecurity. Directs DTA and EOHED to establish a new program to increase public awareness of SNAP, HIP, and other food access programs for low-income and food-insecure residents.

## **H2205/S1390 An Act decreasing food waste by standardizing the date labeling of food**

Sponsors: Representative Kane, Senator Kennedy

Purpose: This legislation standardizes the date labeling of food (establishes a quality date and a safety date) in order to mitigate consumer confusion and thereby reduce food waste. The bill also eliminates restrictions on the sale or donation of products whose quality date has passed.

## **S127 An Act relative to establishing an emergency food assistance committee**

Sponsor: Senator Timilty

Purpose: This bill will establish a permanent emergency food assistance committee (state and private, non-profit food distribution partnership) under MDAR. While an Emergency Food Assistance Program has existed since 1995, this language codifies a committee, lists required members of the committee, and establishes annual reporting requirements.

## **S404 An Act relative to food stamp enrollment for seniors**

Sponsor: Senator Timilty

Purpose: This bill would require DTA to work with the Department of Elder Affairs and Councils on Aging to provide educational programs on the SNAP program. Additionally, it would require DTA, DEA and the COAs to do outreach to eligible participants over the age of 60 and assist them with enrolling in SNAP.

## **H3029/S2073 An Act establishing the Executive Office of Food Resources and Security**

Sponsors: Representative Ferrante, Representative Kane, Senator Tarr

Purpose: This legislation establishes the Executive Office of Food Resources and Security under the control of a secretary of food resources and security, appointed by the governor. The office will carry out policy relative to food production and in doing so will foster and support food producers, promote job creation and economic development in food production and local food distribution, develop and administer programs and incentives to improve nutrition and promote healthy eating habits, among a variety of other tasks and goals to strengthen the Commonwealth's food system.

### **Category: Farmland**

## **H92 An Act to supporting the Commonwealth's food system**

Sponsors: Representative Duffy, Representative Donahue

Purpose: This bill amends GL 20:6C (Massachusetts Food Policy Council) to direct said Council to appoint a food system coordinator; lists said coordinator's responsibilities.

## **H3130 An Act addressing the impact of climate change on farms and fisheries**

Sponsor: Representative Williams

Purpose: This bill establishes a new grant program, the Agriculture and Fishery Vulnerability Preparedness Grant Fund to support farms and fisheries in initiating and planning for climate change adaptation and resiliency. Modeled after the popular Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, this grant program will benefit these vital sectors who are on the frontline of the climate crisis.

### **H601/S310 An Act to promote food literacy**

Sponsors: Representative Vargas, Representative Domb, Senator Lewis

Purpose: This bill would establish an opt-in framework for schools to implement food systems awareness as part of their curriculum. Covers diet & nutrition, food systems, economic opportunities in the food system, local agriculture, and more.

### **H87/S41 An Act promoting equity in agriculture**

Sponsors: Representative Blais, Senator Comerford

Purpose: This bill establishes a Commission on Agricultural Equity to develop recommendations for supporting investments, policies, and practices that promote racial equity in agriculture in the Commonwealth.

### **H101/S39 An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination**

Sponsors: Representative Schmid, Senator Comerford

Purpose: PFAS in soil for growing crops contaminates the food grown and can be passed on to people consuming those products, especially through fertilizers made from treated wastewater, or sewage “sludge.” This bill calls for testing of sewage sludge warning labels on products containing PFAS, and funding to help farmers access alternatives to these products.

### **H843/S520 An Act to protect pollinator habitat**

Sponsors: Representative Keefe, Senator Lewis

Purpose: This bill establishes a special commission that focuses on identifying statewide opportunities for enhancing and expanding pollinator habitat in developed and natural areas such as farm field borders, forest borders, residential areas, parks, urban areas, industrial areas, energy transmission corridors, energy generating facilities, and transportation corridors.

### **Category: Economic Development**

### **H753/S490 An Act relative to agricultural disaster relief**

Sponsors: Representative Blais, Senator Gobi

Purpose: This bill establishes a Massachusetts Agricultural Disaster Relief Fund to assist farmers whose farms have suffered serious losses from unforeseen circumstances such as natural disasters.

### **H758/S553/S484 An Act to promote economic opportunities for cottage food entrepreneurs**

Sponsors: Representative Boldyga, Senator Oliveira, Senator Fattman

Purpose: The bill codifies the definition and labeling requirements of cottage foods from Massachusetts’ existing residential retail kitchen rules, exempting direct-to-consumer cottage food producers from licensing requirements, and creating a voluntary registration for cottage food businesses.

### **S43 An Act Regarding Raw Milk**

Sponsor: Senator Gobi

Purpose: This bill amends GL 94, governing food safety, to allow the sale of raw milk under certain contractual arrangements.

**H402/S229 Resolve providing for an investigation and study by a special commission relative to protein innovation in Massachusetts**

Sponsors: Representative Barber, Senator Jehlen

Purpose: This bill establishes a commission to study alternative protein sources and the economic growth in the industry, how the industry reduces greenhouse gasses, and other uses such as combating hunger.

**H93 An Act expanding agricultural preservation restrictions for hemp cultivation**

Sponsors: Representative Pignatelli, Representative Blais

Purpose: Farmers are diversifying crops in order to meet the demands of consumers and increase their bottom line. This bill authorizes local farmers to grow hemp on agricultural land designated for horticultural use or preserved for agricultural purposes under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), putting MGL on par with regulations established by the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture.

**S40 An Act promoting the growing and use of hemp and hemp products**

Sponsor: Senator Comerford

Purpose: Despite the increased popularity of hemp and CBD in nutrition supplements and personal care products, current Massachusetts law restricts the growing and use of locally produced hemp. This bill allows Massachusetts farmers to grow hemp products on land that is under an agricultural preservation restriction and allows Massachusetts grown hemp to be made into CBD products. The bill also allows land with hemp crops to be considered farmland for tax purposes and sets up a licensing system for hemp growers.