

April 5, 2016

Chairwoman Eileen Donoghue  
Chairman Joseph F. Wagner  
Joint Committee on Economic Development & Emerging Technologies  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**RE: Please support funding for the Massachusetts Food Trust Program within H3983**

Dear Chairwoman Donoghue and Chairman Wagner:

We are writing to ask for your support to authorize funds for the Massachusetts Food Trust Program as part of H3983. We thank you for your support for this program and your commitment to promoting economic development in all regions of the Commonwealth. In order to launch this important community-based economic development program, **we respectfully request that \$10 million in bond funds be authorized for the Food Trust Program over the five year life of the bill.**

The Food Trust Program, established in statute in 2014 within the Massachusetts Office of Business Development, is designed to provide flexible financing to address the needs of food sector businesses with loans, grants, and technical assistance. Such early money helps food retailers and other food sector businesses overcome the barriers to entry or expansion in low- and moderate-income communities. In doing so, the Food Trust Program can create community-based opportunities to drive economic development, improve health and wellness, and help alleviate poverty across the Commonwealth.

Reducing barriers to successful food sector businesses in low- and moderate-income communities will help the state reach the goals set by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to promote innovation, invest in infrastructure, and to make it easier to do business in Massachusetts. Across the country, financing programs similar to the Food Trust Program have successful track records of driving economic growth. **Programs in Pennsylvania and New York have leveraged \$9 to \$15 in private and federal funds for every \$1 of state seed funding.** Additionally, Illinois, California, Maryland, New Jersey, and Michigan have seen promising results through similar initiatives.

The Food Trust Program was developed because too many Massachusetts communities have poor access to healthy food and lack strong job opportunities. A 2010 study by the Massachusetts Grocery Access Task Force—a public-private partnership—found that more than one million Massachusetts residents, including 300,000 children, live in communities with limited access to grocery stores. Many of these same communities are struggling economically and lack job opportunities for local residents. Both of these problems can be addressed by supporting food sector entrepreneurs to open and expand businesses in Massachusetts.

Examples of what the Food Trust Program would do include:

- Provide loans to grocery store operators for land acquisition, construction, or renovation in underserved communities (i.e. food deserts);
- Provide grants and technical assistance to corner stores, farmers' markets, and mobile markets to address capital needs; and
- Provide working capital for community kitchens, food co-ops, indoor and outdoor greenhouses, and food distribution hubs; among other uses that advance the goals of the program.

Many communities are poised to benefit from funds when the Food Trust Program is implemented.

- In **Lowell**, Mill City Grows' mobile market sells fresh produce at health centers, senior facilities, parks and other locations where residents are limited by low income and low food access—but they are confined to a limited reach. With the assistance of the Massachusetts Food Trust Program, they will be able to buy more trucks and develop more market locations to make locally grown, fresh produce more available and affordable to Lowell residents.
- In the **Boston** neighborhood of Dorchester, the Dorchester Community Food Co-op has been working to create a community and worker owned grocery store that would employ 15 people in year one and sell fresh produce, bulk grains, and a variety of other groceries. As a grassroots organization, the Co-op is in the challenging process of raising the money to open the store. With assistance from the Massachusetts Food Trust, the Co-op would have financial help to create jobs and make better food available to the local community.
- The food desert in **Springfield's** Mason Square neighborhood could be filled with assistance from the Massachusetts Food Trust. Community organizations, residents, and advocates have been working for more than a decade to bring a grocery store to the neighborhood. Residents often have to take multiple buses to reach a full line grocery store, travelling outside their neighborhood, and sometimes outside of the city in order to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The financial incentive of the Massachusetts Food Trust could be the key to leveraging much needed private investment for a grocery store in Mason Square.
- **Franklin County** is home to the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center, the only one of its kind in Massachusetts. The Food Processing Center, operated by the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, is a host site for entrepreneurs looking to venture into the local food business. Many stable food businesses have grown up and out of the Center and they have hired employees, paid taxes, bought from local farms and contributed to the regional economy. With assistance from the Massachusetts Food Trust Program, this model could be replicated in other parts of the state in need of these resources, providing local projects with the support they need as they increase their capacity and outgrow incubator spaces.

*Deborah Dickerson, President*

*Rebekah Gewirtz, Executive Director*

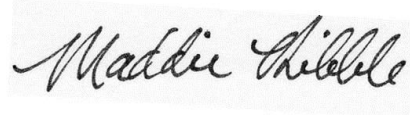
We respectfully ask for your support to authorize \$10 million over 5 years for this important program. Please see our language request attached to this letter.

Thank you for your ongoing support and your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Rebekah Gewirtz, Executive Director



Maddie Ribble, Director of Public Policy