



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Massachusetts Farm to School Holds Policy Briefing for State Legislature on Bill to Establish a Statewide Farm to School Grant Program

**Boston, MA** - October 19, 2021. [Massachusetts Farm to School](#) and the [Massachusetts Food for Massachusetts Kids Coalition](#) hosted a policy briefing on October 19th for state policymakers to hear about the bill to establish a Massachusetts Farm to School Grant Program ([S.349](#) and [H.686](#)). The establishment of this grant program within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would provide eligible schools as well as early education and care programs the critical funds needed to start up or expand farm to school activities such as, renovating kitchen facilities, training staff, establishing direct market systems for local farmers, and providing garden-based and other outdoor learning opportunities for students.

State Senator Eric Lesser and State Representative Smitty Pignatelli co-hosted the briefing as sponsors of the bill, and attendees heard from Massachusetts Farm to School staff, and a diverse panel including a farmer, school nutrition director, and educator who shared their perspectives on the power of farm to school. During his opening remarks, Senator Lesser said, "One dollar spent at a local farm stays in Massachusetts to buy seed, repair a tractor at a local mechanic, to pay a worker. So that dollar gets circulated in our local communities many times over in a way that you don't get if you buy processed food that is shipped in from other places." Senator Lesser continued, "This will help our farmers, our local agricultural economy, our kids getting access to healthy, nutritious food, improve outcomes in our schools and across the board. And it's the right thing to do." Representative Pignatelli also showed his support by stating, "Establishing a Farm to School Grant program in the Commonwealth would be instrumental for not only the health and well-being of our students, but for the agricultural sector as well. I believe that this type of program would be a game-changer for communities across the state, and I'm grateful to be working with Sen. Lesser and Mass. Farm to School to move this legislation forward."

The panel discussed the impact that the grant program could have on access to healthy, local school meals and experiential food and garden based education for all Massachusetts students. Ellen Nysten, Food Service Director at Webster Public Schools shared that, "Farm to School means fresh, minimally processed foods for our students. It means scratch cooking with a wide variety of vegetables in particular. Farm to School also means connecting students with where food comes from as well as to agriculture, gardening, science, and nature." Nysten also spoke to the recent issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, "School food service is faced with a supply-chain crisis. As I sit here today, we are waiting for a delivery truck which was supposed to arrive yesterday, which was already a week late and still has not arrived. These are real logistical challenges that we are managing."

The Farm to School movement builds a local food and farm culture that nourishes children's health, cultivates viable farms and builds vibrant communities. "We are committed to the vision of robust farm to school programming throughout Massachusetts. As schools continue to adapt to the changing educational landscape caused by COVID-19, offering opportunities for staff upskilling and safe outdoor learning spaces, Farm to School will be a critical part of the recovery. Farm to school helps students build lasting connections with locally grown food, farms, and more," states Lisa Damon, Co-Director of Massachusetts Farm to School.



64% percent of Massachusetts schools incorporate farm to school programming in their cafeterias and classrooms. In 2019, food service directors spent \$11.4 million dollars on local foods purchased for cafeteria meals. Farm to School is changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early childhood settings, which results in positive regional economic impacts through new and expanded market opportunities for farmers.

[Massachusetts Farm to School](#) provides leadership, coordination, and advocacy to advance new and existing farm to school efforts in Massachusetts classrooms, cafeterias, and communities and is an active member of [Massachusetts Food for Massachusetts Kids](#), a collaborative effort of individuals and organizations who believe all students deserve healthy, high quality meals and engaging food education at school.

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