

## Lou Mansolillo

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**From:** Amelia Lopez <amelia@southsideclt.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 27, 2025 10:01 AM  
**To:** House Environment and Natural Resources Committee  
**Subject:** HB5342, Support for

Dear House Environment and Natural Resources Committee Members,

I am writing in support of Representative Chippendale's bill, **HB5342**, which would allow Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management to recycle money that is collected from our farming community back into our farming community.

Our small but strong farming sector continues to provide our state with jobs and revenues, fresh foods, environmental benefits, scenic beauty and cultural enrichment. However, our farmers face unprecedented challenges. According to the most recent 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, Rhode Island has the highest farm real estate values of any state in the country at \$24,059 per acre—more than six times the national average. This economic pressure results in smaller farm operations, with 36% of Rhode Island farms having fewer than 9 acres and 72% occupying fewer than 50 acres. Only 6% of our state's total land area has an agricultural use designation. The economic returns are concerning: 61% of farms in Rhode Island had revenues of less than \$10,000 in 2024.

At the same time, food insecurity affects one in three Rhode Islanders, according to the 2024 RI Community Food Bank's Status Report on Hunger. This number increases to 51% of all Black and Latino households. In our most vulnerable communities, 32.9% of residents live in low access census tracts, meaning they live more than a mile from a source of fresh food. In some areas, like where SCLT is headquartered, this figure rises to 83.5%. Additionally, 32.1% of residents in these communities were born outside the US, and 50.2% speak a language other than English at home, yet culturally familiar foods are overwhelmingly unavailable.

**Rep. Chippendale's bill does not add any costs or new taxes to our state budget but ensures that our farming community receives at least as much financial support as it gives to the state in annual fees.** This creates a sustainable funding mechanism that can help our farmers meet the growing demand for fresh produce while addressing critical food access issues in our communities.

We urge you to support **HB5342**. Especially now, with the freezing of many of the federal funding programs that have been supporting our farms, estimates of the amount of federal funding that is now at risk for RI farmers is in the millions.

With respect,

*Amelia and Southside Staff*

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