



February 26, 2025

Dear Chairman Bennett and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council strongly supports Representative Chippendale's bill, HB5342, which would allow DEM to use the fees that are collected from our farm businesses to fund programs and services that support the financial viability, growth and success of these farm businesses. DEM has a long history of successfully using restricted receipt funds to support important forestry and fish and wildlife projects. Creating a similar restricted receipt fund for agriculture would finally allow DEM to adequately support our farming sector, which includes thousands of small businesses and jobs and provides so many environmental and cultural benefits to our residents.

This bill could not have been introduced at a more critical time. The freezing of federal funds that has taken place since January 20 has put millions of dollars of support for Rhode Island's farms on hold. An article in yesterday's Providence Journal chronicled the devastating impact of this funding freeze on many of our local farmers. Even though the freeze is being challenged in the courts, it is now clear that it will take months or years for the legal system to sort through the lawsuits. And there are no guarantees which, if any, funding streams will be reinstated.

In 1981 the Rhode Island legislature created Right to Farm and Farmland Conservation bills because they recognized the importance of preserving what was left of our farming sector. Given the impacts of climate change and ongoing disruptions to the global food supply chain, protecting that farming sector is even more important today than it was in 1981. Our farms are too important to our public health, our environmental health, and our cultural heritage to let them shrink and wither away.

Finally, this bill does not require any new taxes or any new budget line items. We hope you will vote to support its passage.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Lynch".

Diane Lynch

President

Rhode Island Food Policy Council