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February 25, 2025

Chairman David Bennett
House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5342 –**Support for Agricultural Restricted Receipts Account at DEM**

Dear Chairman Bennett and Members of the Committee,

The RI Land Trust Council (the Council) is the state coalition of over 50 land trusts – community-based organizations formed to conserve the land and water resources that provide myriad benefits to our residents. Many of our land trusts preserve farmland and work directly with farmers. We are writing in strong support of House Bill 5342, which would establish an agricultural restricted receipt account within the Department of Environmental Management. This account would ensure that the many fees that are collected by the Division of Agriculture are directed back to the Division for use in supporting farmers through programs and services.

The fees collected by the Division of Agriculture generate between \$3.5 and \$4 Million each year. At present, these fees –collected from a variety of sources such as commercial fertilizer registrations, nursery worker licenses, soil amendments, deer damage permits, and commercial pesticide applicator licenses—are deposited into the general fund and do not benefit the Division of Agriculture directly. This contrasts with other divisions in the Department of Environmental Management, such as Forestry, which has its own restricted receipt account that allows it to utilize its collected fees for its programs. Given that both Forestry and Agriculture are housed within the same department, it is logical and fair that the Division of Agriculture should have access to its fee revenue as well.

In addition to the restricted receipt account, House Bill 5342 will create an advisory committee to assist in determining the most effective and impactful uses for these funds, ensuring that the resources are allocated to advance agricultural efforts in Rhode Island. With federal funding sources facing increasing uncertainty, and particularly with several programs now at risk, it is vital that we secure stable, dedicated funding for farmers. Programs supported by federal funds have been transformative, expanding our food system and enhancing support for farmers. Without consistent and reliable funding streams like those that would be generated through this bill, there is significant concern that these advancements may be lost.

The creation of an agricultural restricted receipt account is a bipartisan initiative, and we thank Leader Chippendale for leading this effort. This bill will help Rhode Island farmers and ensure the sustainability of our local food system. The Rhode Island Land Trust Council fully supports this bill and urges the committee to pass it.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Sayles", written over a light blue rectangular background.

Kate Sayles, Director, Rhode Island Land Trust Council