

To the honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Brad Fesmire. My wife and I own Little State Flower Co, a specialty cut flower farm located in Tiverton, RI which has been around for 12 seasons. I am writing in support of House Bill H5534, An Act Related to Taxation, which would allow small and urban farms to receive the same tax exemptions that large farms receive in our state.

Little State started in 2014 on a variety of leased land. In 2018, we purchased 5 acres of what amounted to a junkyard due to the in-affordability and access of "true" farmland. We purchased this property because it was the only thing available at the time with multiple acres and a house. With that said, less than half of it is now farmable and the rest of the land is a glacial forest that is just large boulders, wetlands and scrub trees, which is not able to be farmed. We still lease other parcels of land in Tiverton and Portsmouth, RI to meet our market demands. Our property tax bill is larger than a neighboring town's hay farm, which is over 100 acres, with large buildings and 20 times our size!

I am also the Community Engagement and Program Director of SEMAP (the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership). At SEMAP, we work with farmers in RI and SE Massachusetts to help them in a myriad of ways to survive and thrive in what is an ever-challenging landscape. We speak with farmers around the region every single day and the single biggest concern they share is the access and affordability of farmland. Whether they are new to farming or mid-career like myself, the price and availability of land for agricultural purposes has increased to the point where it is unaffordable and unrealistic for most farmers to access. Even if they can afford it, the payments and taxes due on such a property makes it almost impossible to make the business make financial sense. People will only pay so much for a tomato, a potato, a cucumber or a flower.

Small farms are the only way producing locally available products here in RI and the region is viable. The larger farms of the past are no longer viable or available. With farmland prices triple the national average, the land available so scarce, the price of admission to farming is more expensive than ever. The cost of inputs for our farmers is also increasing to unsustainable levels. Seeds, compost, tools, machinery and everything else are costing so much more to our farmers, that even with the price increase of their products, they cannot make enough profit to make their business sustainable.

The time is now to support all of our farms and farmers...both big and small, young and old. I urge the committee to report on this bill favorably. If this bill and other support mechanisms like this do not pass immediately, we WILL not have the farms, the food and the working landscape that is so important to Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Brad Fesmire
487 East Rd
Tiverton, RI 02878

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Brad Fesmire (he/him)

Community Engagement and Program Director
SEMAP: Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership
(c) 401.743.7449
[semaponline](#)