



May 22nd, 2025

FOR HB-5536

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council, I am writing in strong support of HB5536: *Making an Appropriation of \$200,000 to be Used for Incentives for Fruits and Vegetables Sold at Participating Bonus Bucks Outlets in Rhode Island*. Our council is made up of close to 125 individuals committed to creating a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable Rhode Island food system. This bill and the Bonus Bucks program are vital to realizing that vision.

Since its inception in 2009, the Bonus Bucks program has been integral to food security in Rhode Island, increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables SNAP recipients are able to buy for their families while bringing revenue to local farms and ensuring viability of farmers' markets as resources for good nutrition in our communities. The program has brought over \$1.7M in local produce to Rhode Island families through purchases from local farms.

Rhode Island is the only state in New England that does not yet provide public funding for a program like Bonus Bucks to connect SNAP users to local farms. To date, the program has been supported by Farm Fresh Rhode Island's (FFRI's) fundraising efforts, including from USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). GusNIP requires a 1/1 funding match—funding support from the State will ensure that FFRI is able to keep providing this match, will enable FFRI to leverage more federal funding and will strengthen the impact of philanthropic support for the program.

The current federal environment has meant cuts in support to local farmers and viable threats to programs that support food insecure Rhode Islanders, including SNAP. It is especially important in this environment that we step up as a state to make sure that all Rhode Islanders are able to access high-quality food, and to support Rhode Island farms in providing that food. The Bonus Bucks program is a longstanding and successful model for that support and we urge you to vote in favor of this legislation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rachel Newman Greene".

Rachel Newman Greene
Associate Director for Network