



Testimony before the Rhode Island State Legislature House Finance Committee
By Erinn Roberts, Conservation Implementation Specialist,
American Farmland Trust
February 25, 2026

RE: Amending H7127 Article 6 – Question 5 with Comments – FY27 Green Economy Bond

Dear Chairman Abney, First Vice-Chairman Slater, Second Vice-Chairman Marszalkowski, and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Erinn Roberts and I am a Conservation Implementation Specialist with the New England Program of American Farmland Trust and a fellow Rhode Islander. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of American Farmland Trust in **support** of Article 6 – Question 5—Green Economy Bond. We recommend including \$10 Million in additional conservation funding in the bond to ensure that there is funding to conserve important farmland, forests, open spaces, and recreational opportunities across Rhode Island.

AFT respectfully requests the following additions to Rhode Island’s Green Bond:

- \$2 Million for farmland preservation, through the work of the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, which is critical to preserving some of the last important farms in the state. RI DEM currently has a backlog of farms that are in various stages of appraisal or review. Leaving this program unfunded also leaves federal funding on the table.
- \$2 Million in Local Open Space Matching Grants to municipalities, land trusts, and non-profit conservation land organizations to preserve valuable open space in local communities across RI.
- \$3 Million for the State Open Space Program to acquire and conserve lands of statewide interest and significance, including ecologically valuable land that enhances DEM’s management areas, parks, and important forest lands.
- \$3 Million in Outdoor Recreation Grants for municipalities and Native American tribes to create playgrounds, conserve important parks and improve access to outdoor recreational opportunities.

Please note that our request echoes the Rhode Island Land Trust Council’s recommendation to increase funding levels for land conservation in the State’s Green Economy Bond.

AFT is the nation’s leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more.

Farmland is vital to the economy, character, and well-being of Rhode Islanders, but unfortunately, the state is on track to lose at least 8,100 acres of farmland by 2040, according to AFT’s Farms Under Threat 2040 research. This would represent nearly a 14% loss in farmland, \$8 million in farm output, and 600 jobs. With the most expensive farmland in the country, additional funding for the

Agricultural Land Preservation Commission is crucial to advancing farmland protection, keeping farmland productive and strengthening Rhode Island's food system.

More money in the Green Bond for open space preservation is a critical next step to protecting Rhode Island's remaining agricultural and forest lands, jobs, and community character—while securing the possibility of farming for a next generation of Rhode Island farmers and land stewards.

Therefore, I urge the committee to include \$10 Million in additional funding for the FY 2027 Green Economy Bond.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Article 6 – Question 5—Green Economy Bond. Protecting Rhode Island's beautiful working lands is one step towards creating a resilient future for all. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at eroberts@farmland.org or AFT New England's Sr. Manager for External Affairs, Andrea Solazzo (asolazzo@farmland.org).

Sincerely,

Erinn Roberts

Erinn Roberts

cc: A. Solazzo, AFT New England