



**Southeastern Massachusetts
Agricultural Partnership**
www.SEMAPonline.org

Re: House Bill 7127 Article 6, Section 5

Dear Chair of House Finance, Chairman Marvin Abney,

My name is Brad Fesmire and my wife and I own Little State Flower Co, a specialty cut flower farm located in Tiverton, RI. I am writing to address the critical need for \$10 million in additional conservation funding in the FY 2027 Green Economy Bond.

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, a house and something we could afford. 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. We know we are lucky to own something we can call our own and invest in the soil and infrastructure to make our farm successful. Most farmers we know do not have this privilege or opportunity.

I am also the Program Director at the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAG) where we work to create solutions for the myriad of issues facing our farming and food systems in SE Mass and RI. Through this work and our daily conversations with farmers, land access and affordability is by far the number one thing we hear is the barrier and issue our farmers are facing. I cannot stress enough the support needed to save what's left of Rhode Island's disappearing farms, its farmers and the community and sense of place these farms bring to the state. Beyond this, the importance of farms raising and growing nutrient dense food and products cannot be overstated to the issues of food security and health, now, and in the future. With the mounting pressures to farming due to a myriad of reasons, and the majority of our farmers at or beyond retirement age, we actually have a great opportunity here in Little Rhody! Though we might have a high percentage of retiring farmers, we have the highest percentage of young farmers in the country, ready to get to work, growing our food and getting their farms going! The issue still remains getting these young farmers on land they can actually afford and keep the rich history of farming alive in Rhode Island.

I am asking you to include \$10 Million to the Green Bond to ensure there is funding to conserve more forests, farmland and open spaces across Rhode Island, and that we can continue public recreation. I am most especially concerned that the \$2 million for farmland preservation is included in this bond. This is critically needed to help offset the extreme prices of farmland and make it accessible to new, young and mid-career farmers.

If we want to have any farms left for future generations, the time is now to make this investment and 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 and its natural beauty.

Sincerely,

Brad Fesmire
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