



Date: April 14, 2026

To: Chairman Marvin Abney, House Finance Committee
Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Diane Lynch, Board of Directors, Rhode Island Food Policy Council

Re: SUPPORT H8144

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC) is a nonprofit network whose purpose is to create a more equitable, environmentally sustainable, and economically vibrant food system in Rhode Island. Established in 2011, we maintain a network of committed volunteers from all parts of our food system – from farms to soup kitchens – who advocate for good food policies and work to improve our food landscape.

We are writing in support of Representative Cotter's bill, H8144, which amends the upcoming Green Bond include \$2 million in funding to support farmland conservation as well an additional \$8 million to support open space land conservation and outdoor recreation grants.

Despite the challenges of intense development pressure and the extraordinarily high costs of land, Rhode Island's 1500 farms continue to provide powerful environmental, social and economic benefits to our state. The most important of these benefits are:

- Rhode Island farms that are managed with climate smart/soil regenerative methods provide climate mitigation benefits to our state, from improving our soil's ability to sequester carbon to reducing transportation costs on the food we eat.
- Rhode Island farms provide thousands of acres of stable, vegetatively protected soil that is capable of absorbing water runoff during extreme weather events.
- Rhode Island farms provide hundreds of acres of protected firebreaks between forested areas. These firebreaks are a critical component of forest fire management in our state (a local farm provided the firebreak needed to stop the 2023 forest fire in Exeter).
- Most of our farms provide a mix of cultivated land and forest land, many also protect wetlands/water recharge areas/aquifers, and most provide a healthy environment for a range of insects and animals, thus contributing to needed biodiversity in the state.
- Rhode Island farms – including both food and nursery products – contribute around \$500 million in direct revenues to the state and employ over 4000 people (Sproul, URI). According to the latest (2022) USDA Census of Ag, the number of farms and the productivity of our farms has increased over the last five years, and Rhode Island is the only state in New England to have experienced growth in both areas since the 2017 Census of Ag.



- Farmers markets and agritourism have become a top component of our state's tourism industry and figure prominently in the tourism campaigns developed by CommerceRI.
- To date, state farmland protection investments have attracted over \$38 million in matching funds from the federal government.
- Over 1 million pounds of local farm produce has gone to RI hunger relief agencies since 2018.
- 35,000 Rhode Islanders per month are receiving fresh local produce from Rhode Island farms through emergency food sites.
- Dozens of Rhode Island urban farms are providing open space for learning and recreation in addition to providing fresh, local and culturally appropriate food in urban communities. Many of these farms are providing affordable food to families who are experiencing food insecurity. We estimate that there are around 80 urban farms currently operating in Rhode Island.

With all of these benefits being provided by Rhode Island farms, and with federal and philanthropic matching funds of \$1.70 for every state dollar, we urge the state to continue investing in farm preservation and protection in the upcoming Green Bond. Regular bond funding for the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) was the norm for several decades and is a practice that minimizes disruption in land acquisition planning and coordination, and avoids last minute, fire-drill style appropriation efforts to fill gaps.

The demand for farm protection has been steady state for years and does not look like it will disappear any time soon. Farmers who own land and want to keep their land in agriculture need the infusion of cash that conservation easements can provide. Even though the ALPC invests roughly \$1-1.5 million every year in farmland protection, there is still a backlog of close to 40 farms that have been approved for protection and are in a queue. A good portion of our new farmers are farming on land that was protected a generation ago and then put on the market at an agricultural value that was more affordable than unprotected land. This is a pattern that will keep happening as long as we continue to protect farms.

We would be happy to answer any questions about the information included here. Thank you for considering this request.

Best regards,

Diane Lynch

Diane Lynch
Board of Directors

