



5/14/2026

To: Rhode Island House Finance Committee

Re: **In Support:** H-7258 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$200,000 TO BE USED FOR INCENTIVES FOR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES SOLD AT PARTICIPATING BONUS BUCKS OUTLETS IN RHODE ISLAND

Dear Chairperson and Members of the House Finance Committee,

Rhode Island Food Policy Council submits this letter in strong support of H-7258 and continued state investment in Rhode Island's Bonus Bucks local produce incentive program.

The Bonus Bucks program is in strong alignment with our organization's mission to create a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in the State of Rhode Island.

At a time when many Rhode Islanders are facing growing economic hardship, strengthening food security programs is both a moral and economic necessity. Recent federal actions under H.R. 1 threaten to increase economic insecurity for low-income households across Rhode Island through reductions and instability in critical safety-net programs. As families face rising food, housing, healthcare, and utility costs, state-level support for nutrition assistance has become increasingly important.

Across the country, local produce incentive programs like Bonus Bucks help SNAP recipients purchase fresh fruits and vegetables while increasing revenue for local farmers, growers, retailers, and food businesses. These programs create a multiplier effect that keeps food dollars circulating within Rhode Island communities and supports the long-term viability of local agriculture.

Bonus Bucks is not a one-off program- It has successfully served the Rhode Island community since 2009. Through independent fundraising, Farm Fresh has distributed \$1.7M in produce to Rhode Island food shoppers- money that has gone directly into local farm businesses. This is a proven, efficient way to address food security challenges while simultaneously supporting Rhode Island farmers and strengthening Rhode Island's local food economy.

Supporting food security for low-income Rhode Islanders is vital to the overall economic stability of our state. When families can reliably access healthy food, they experience better health



outcomes, greater workforce stability, improved educational outcomes for children, and reduced strain on healthcare and emergency assistance systems. Food security is foundational to strong communities and a resilient economy.

Many states across the country have recognized the value of produce incentive programs and have established ongoing state support to sustain them. Rhode Island, despite its strong public health, agricultural and food communities, has not yet made a comparable long-term investment. H-7258 represents an important opportunity for our state to join national leaders in supporting nutrition security and local food systems together.

In the past, Bonus Bucks has relied heavily on federal funding sources such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), and on Farm Fresh's fundraising efforts to meet the GusNIP \$1 to \$1 match requirement. State Support is needed so Farm Fresh can continue accessing this important federal funding source and sustain the Bonus Bucks program. Additionally, federal funding is increasingly unstable and competitive. Rhode Island cannot depend solely on uncertain federal funding streams to sustain a program that so many residents and local businesses rely upon.

Ongoing state support for Bonus Bucks is essential to ensuring the continuation and stability of this valuable program. A dedicated state investment would provide consistency for participating families, farmers and community organizations while allowing the program to grow and serve more Rhode Islanders in need.

H- 7258 is a smart investment in public health, economic resilience, local agriculture, and food security. I respectfully urge the Committee to support and advance this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and for your support of an equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nessa Richman".

Nessa Richman
Executive Director