

Chris O'Brien

From: Matt Tracy <mtracy@southsideclt.org>
Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 3:07 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: H7123 Article V: Full Funding for Farmland Preservation

Dear Committee Members,

I'm writing to express my strong support for continued and full funding of our state's farmland preservation program under the Green Economy Bond, which I believe is within Article V of the Governor's 2022 budget. It is my understanding that no funding was included in the budget as proposed. I believe many voters would share my view that full, dedicated funding would be a better choice for our state. A dedicated budget for this program in the amount of \$4,000,000 is absolutely necessary for the continued long term growth and success of our state's agricultural sector.

This RIDEM program plays an important role in the state of Rhode Island's land conservation efforts. It has been a key funding component for agricultural producers, land trusts, and communities as they work to keep prime working agricultural lands from being subdivided and developed, thereby providing much needed land access for the newest generation of farmers.

As we know, demand for, and support of local food and other farm products has grown impressively in the last decade. Demand for farmland is commensurately strong, for the simple reason that producers are attempting to meet demand created by the increased interest in their products. Among the historically underserved communities I work with, I hear from local people every week looking for land on which to expand their farm operation or to start a new farm project, but undeveloped parcels are hard to find and very costly when available. Saving what land we have is vital to meeting these needs, and Green Economy bond funds have allowed RIDEM to meet the task, one farm at a time.

Funds from the Farmland Preservation Program are often tied to agricultural easements which keep properties in private ownership but secure their use as working farms in perpetuity. Costs of these projects are often pooled with other conservation groups, federal programs, and landowners who would otherwise not have the capital to preserve the land on their own, so RIDEM is a truly valuable partner in saving our working lands for future Rhode Islanders to benefit from and enjoy.

Our soils and farmlands are an irreplaceable natural resource which have sustained us for generations. In our modern era, they are as important to our success and well-being as they have ever been, and perhaps more so as climate change brings the threat of increased food insecurity and instability to our region. Farms can and should play a key role in creating a resilient local food system, but will also serve as important tools in reducing atmospheric carbon, as advances in soil science have shown us in recent years. Full funding for the preservation of farmland is the right step to take in the face of these realities.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my opinion.

Sincerely,

Matthew Tracy
Land Access Manager

Southside Community Land Trust

--

Matthew Tracy

Land Access Program Manager

Southside Community Land Trust

109 Somerset St, Providence, RI 02907

Main Number: (401) 273-9419

My Cell: (401) 481-6115