

April 28, 2026

Chairman Louis DiPalma
Senate Committee on Finance
State of RI General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cassidy Whipple, I'm a constituent from Richmond, Rhode Island and owner of Frontier Farm, a commercial vegetable farm in Westerly, Rhode Island. I'm writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 3231. Adding \$17.5 Million in additional conservation funding is essential for supporting the future of all Rhode Islanders.

For the last 11 years, I've worked in the commercial agriculture industry here in Rhode Island. After graduating from the University of Rhode Island, I spent 4 years learning all I could from the expertise and wisdom of other local farmers. Then, through a partnership with the Westerly Land Trust, I was able to lease land and start my own farm business. Since then, I've had the pleasure of feeding thousands of community members, creating a handful of jobs and internships, providing hundreds of children with the opportunity to experience a real, working farm, and contributing to our local economy by working with other local businesses. Not to mention the absolute dream come true it is to work the land every day.

I consider myself lucky to have secured a land lease with the Westerly Land Trust when I did. Rhode Island has many farmers like me - highly experienced and capable, eager to start their own farms - but with land access and capital as their limiting factors. As you may know, Rhode Island has the most expensive farmland in the United States, and the average age of the Rhode Island farmer is about 56 years old. In just a few short years, we'll be seeing many farmers prepare for retirement and the succession of their farms. The reality is that after a lifetime of service, many farmers still face retirement in debt. This leaves their farms incredibly vulnerable to development as a way to alleviate that burden for their families. No farmer wants to see their life's work erased, but it is often their only choice. We need to give them another choice. It's imperative that we protect farmland for the next generation of farmers to continue the important work of the farmers before them.

Rhode Island already has a strong network of farmers willing and able, and the \$2 Million for farmland preservation within S 3231 will continue to strengthen that network. A future with Rhode Island farmers able to access farmland and continue farming will be a future with a strong food system, fewer food insecure families, and more resilience against climate change. Therefore, I urge the Committee to support the additional funding in Senate Bill 3231.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cassidy Whipple". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cassidy Whipple