



Date: April 27, 2026

To: Senator DiPalma, Chairman

CC: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Diane Lynch, Board member, Rhode Island Food Policy Council

RE: Senate Bill 3231 – FOR

Dear Senator DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC) is a nonprofit network whose purpose is to create a more economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and equitable food system in the Ocean State. Established in 2011, we represent a network of committed stakeholders from across the local food system.

We are writing to voice our strong support for SB 3231, which would add \$2 million in funding for farmland protection in Rhode Island to this year's Green Bond, as well as additional funding for protecting open space and forest management.

Despite the challenges of intense development pressure and the extraordinarily high costs of land, Rhode Island farms continue to provide powerful environmental, social and economic benefits to our state. And there is recent evidence from the USDA Census of Agriculture that the state's efforts to support farms are bearing fruit in terms of a growing number of farms, growing farm profitability and productivity, and growing farm ownership among new and beginning farmers. We need to keep supporting this momentum!

Some of the most important benefits that Rhode Island farms are providing to our state are as follows:

- RI farms that are managed with climate smart/soil regenerative methods sequester carbon
- RI farms provide hundreds of acres of stable, vegetatively protected soil that is capable of absorbing water runoff during extreme weather events and that also provide protected firebreaks between forested areas
- Most of our farms provide a mix of cultivated land and forest land, many also protect wetlands/water recharge areas/aquifers, and most contribute to needed biodiversity by supporting habitats for a wide range of insects and animals
- Produce from RI farms is locally/regionally consumed and has the shortest shipping distance and lowest fossil fuel use of any fresh produce when getting to market
- RI 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.

- 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 RI 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.

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. Current uncommitted funding available to the state Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) is less than \$2 million, which is not enough to last until the next round of potential bond funding in 2028. Regular bond funding for the 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.

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 member
RI Food Policy Council



Cell: 917-716-6519