COVID-19 Food Security Grant Program - Letter from the MA Urban Ag Coalition

June 5, 2020

Secretary Kathleen A. Theoharides
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge St., Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Sec. Theoharides,

The undersigned organizations that make up the Massachusetts Urban Agriculture Coalition, as well as funders that support urban agriculture, urge the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to include urban agriculture organizations when directing funds from the COVID-19 Food Security Grant Program.

Urban agriculture organizations provide much needed food and safe spaces for residents to grow their own food, as well as education about nutrition and the food system. During the COVID-19 pandemic our organizations have pivoted rapidly to respond to the overwhelming needs of our community members and have been adapting our programs to ensure we are delivering safe and essential services to our communities across the Commonwealth. Our organizations need immediate funding to support increased costs for staffing, supplies and PPE, and sanitation needs to operate community gardens, urban farms, mobile markets, CSAs, and food delivery services. We urge you to allow grant funds to support the increased staffing needs to effectively and safely deliver our food and services to residents who are struggling with food security and for us to develop resilience in our food system.

Supporting urban agriculture is a priority of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, which was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council. As stated in the Plan, urban agriculture organizations:

1. enable people to purchase healthy food through accepting SNAP and HIP at markets and farm stands (Food Access, Security, and Health - Goal 3);
2. increase the amount of local food that is available at local food pantries (Food Access, Security, and Health - Goal 6); and
3. increase the accessibility of local food through innovative retail strategies, mobile markets and affordable CSA programs (Food Access, Security, and Health - Goal 7). During this crisis these organizations need additional support to help them carry out these critical roles.

We appreciate your tremendous efforts to support the local food system in Massachusetts during this crisis. Our organizations are always available to provide additional information about urban agriculture activities and needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Backyard Growers, Gloucester
Boston Food Forest Coalition, Inc., Jamaica Plain
Conservation Law Foundation - Legal Food Hub, Boston
Eastie Farm, Boston
Everett Community Growers, Everett
Fertile Ground, Williamsburg
FoodCorps, Boston
Franklin County Food Council, Greenfield
Gardening the Community, Springfield
GreenRoots, Chelsea
Greenvitalize Urban Growers, Worcester
Groundwork Lawrence, Lawrence
Groundwork Somerville, Somerville
Growing Places, Leominster
Haley House - Thornton Street Farm, Roxbury
Just Roots Inc., Greenfield
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, Greenfield
Mill City Grows, Lowell
Nuestras Raices, Holyoke
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Beverly
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Mass. Chapter, Springfield
OASIS On Ballou Avenue Urban Farm c/o Codman Sq. Neighborhood Development Corp., Dorchester
Regeneration Mass, Shelburne Falls
Regional Environmental Council of Central MA (REC), Worcester
Roots Rising, Pittsfield
Seeds of Solidarity, Orange
The Food Project, Inc., Lincoln
The Trustees of Reservations, Boston
Urban Farming Institute, Mattapan
Victory Programs Inc., Revision Urban Farm, Boston
Worcester Roots, Worcester

Cedar Tree Foundation, Boston
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, Wellesley
Henry P. Kendall Foundation, Boston
Merck Family Fund, Milton
The John Merck Fund, Boston