



To: House Finance Committee

From: Diane Lynch, President, RI Food Policy Council
Nessa Richman, Network Director, RI Food Policy Council

Re: Bill H7123, Governor's FY 2023 Budget, Article 5, Question 3, Green Economy Bonds

Position: AGAINST the proposed budget

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

For the first time in many years, the Governor's proposed Green Bond budget does not include any funding dedicated to protecting Rhode Island farmland. If approved, this omission will effectively shut down the state's successful farmland protection program, leaving millions of matching federal and philanthropic dollars on the table. Further, it will starve out investment in our agricultural sector, which all of our state's economic and environmental plans and priorities agree is critical for our long term food security, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience.

When the state invests its own money in preserving farmland, we qualify for matching funds from federal agencies, land trusts and other philanthropies. Since the early 80s, federal matching funds have totaled close to \$25 million, and funds from other sources over \$30 million. This is money that would have been left on the table without state support for farmland preservation.

Rhode Island's farms are a vibrant and growing part of our state's economy and a key pillar of our summer tourism sector. During the decades before the RI Legislature made farmland preservation a priority, thousands of acres of prime land were lost to development. We cannot afford to go back to those days. Our farms are now contributing about \$240 million in direct revenues, 4000 jobs, and \$500 million in supporting and related business revenues to the state. Our local farms are a critical part of providing long term food security for our residents, they contribute to the preservation of beautiful open spaces and the environmental sustainability of our air and water, and they improve the culture and quality of life of many of our communities.

Development pressures on farmland owners are higher now than they have ever been, and there is a growing pipeline of farms that have applied for state-funded conservation easements to protect their farmland. Protecting a farm from future development is often a 1-2 year process, including farm viability and land appraisals and organizing multiple funders and legal documents. Without additional funding for farmland protection in the 2022 Green Bond, the remaining funds in the farmland protection program will be expended within the next 12-18 months and the program will effectively be shut down.

We strongly urge you to reverse the omission of farmland protection from the proposed Green Bond budget for 2022/23. The Green Bond should include a line item for \$3 million dedicated to the state's farmland preservation program (the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, or ALPC). This would be in line with Green Bond allocations over the last 10 years and would enable the state's farmland preservation program to successfully address the current pipeline of high priority farms.

Thank you for considering this request. We would be happy to respond to any requests for additional information about the state's farmland protection program.

Respectfully,

Diane Lynch

Nessa Richman