



February 8, 2023

Dear Governor McKee,

We are writing to ask you to address an urgent need for funding in the state's farmland protection program, administered by the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC). Since 1981, this program has been funded through both Green Bond and Department of Environmental Management (DEM) funds, has deployed \$38 million in state funding, and has attracted an additional \$67 million in matching funds from private land trusts and both federal and municipal sources. In total, the ALPC has protected 8200 acres of Rhode Island's prime farmland, supporting farm businesses in every town and city and contributing to statewide farming revenues of approximately \$300 million.

Why is there an urgent need for funding NOW?

- The ALPC has only \$1.3 million in uncommitted funds left (as of January 2023), but there is a backlog of close to 50 farms that have been approved for protection and are awaiting further action
- The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 has made \$1.4 billion in additional funds for farmland protection available to all states in FY2023/24 through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), but a 50% match will be required
- The 2022 Green Bond broke a long-standing precedent of including dedicated farmland preservation funding in its budget formula, so no funds will be coming into ALPC coffers from bond funding for at least another 2 years
- DEM's FY2024 budget request of \$1.5 million to support farmland protection was NOT included in the Governor's FY2024 budget proposal

What level of additional funding for farmland protection is needed in FY2024, and what kind of impact and return can the state expect from this investment?

- While DEM requested \$1.5 million to keep the ALPC program from shutting down completely before the next green bond, this amount would likely only cover conservation activities for another 12-18 months
- An additional \$3.5 million is needed to move forward with plans to protect the next group of highest priority farms already approved for protection (these have the highest potential economic and environmental impacts, and represent roughly 800 acres of farmland)
- Total funding of \$5 million for ALPC protection activities in the FY2024 budget would bring another \$8-9 million into the state in FY2024/25 in matching funds from federal and other sources

- While farm revenues vary widely by products and markets served, the American Farmland Trust estimates that without ongoing farmland protection efforts, RI will LOSE another 8100 acres of farmland, representing around 200 farms and 600 jobs, by 2040
- In the last 10 years, protected farmland has supported an increasing number of NEW farm businesses in RI focusing on diversified vegetables, fruits, flowers, value-added products and pasture-raised meats. Increasing the amount of protected land available for lease and/or purchase at agricultural value will increase the number and size of these newer farm businesses

We urge you to amend your proposed FY2024 budget to include \$5 million for RI farmland protection. As a reminder, the ALPC program provides permanent protection of farmland, ensuring the land's status as open working land in perpetuity. The impacts of this investment will be felt for generations to come.

We will be hosting a (virtual) Legislative Roundtable on farmland protection on Wednesday March 8 at noon and would welcome participation by you or any of your staff. To RSVP, please email allison@rifoodcouncil.org and she will send you a Google Calendar invitation for this event. We are also happy to answer any questions about this issue as they arise.

Respectfully,



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