

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE • BOSTON, MA 02133
(617) 725-4000

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

June 1, 2012

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As you continue your work on the 2012 Farm Bill, I write to ask that you consider the importance of the following priorities, which, while not an exhaustive list, will help ensure that we continue to provide the most vulnerable Americans with access to healthy and affordable food, as well as strengthen our many diverse farms that are integral to the Commonwealth's environmental character and the economic viability of our food industry.

In Massachusetts, over 850,000 individuals are served by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 40 percent of whom are children. SNAP helps lift families out of poverty and works to bridge the gap so that struggling Americans can put food on the table. I urge you to

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Pat Roberts
The Honorable Frank Lucas
The Honorable Collin Peterson
June 1, 2012
Page Two

protect the overall integrity of SNAP and refrain from restricting eligibility, reducing benefits or funding for this critical program. Specifically, I urge you to protect the highly successful Heat and Eat state option. In Massachusetts over 100,000 households currently participate in this program and if it were eliminated they would see a decrease of about \$70 per month in their SNAP benefits. Eliminating or placing new burdensome requirements and restrictions on this successful state option will simply lead to increased food insecurity for more of our most vulnerable residents.

Additionally, program integrity is important for SNAP. Your committees can emphasize the importance of program integrity by increasing the percentage of administrative costs reimbursed by the federal government for those states that invest in efforts to improve program integrity, such as data sharing and mining software designed to identify household composition, income, assets and participation in other public assistance programs.

As we continue to combat childhood obesity and the increased risk of diabetes, we should do all we can to promote and provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables for our SNAP families. I therefore also urge you to authorize appropriate funding to promote the acceptance of EBT in all farmers' markets and other non-traditional produce vendors.

Bay State farmers have averaged \$469 million in cash receipts since 2005 and employ over 13,000 workers across hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland in active production. In Massachusetts, close to 80 percent of our farms are family-owned, making it all the more important to maintain an inventory of farmland for future generations. For this reason, I urge you to authorize robust funding for conservation programs in the 2012 Farm Bill, including the Farms and Ranchland Protection Program, which has helped the Commonwealth preserve and protect over 14,000 acres of farmland. I also urge you to provide adequate mandatory funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which helps our farmers plan and implement conservation practices to improve soil, water, plant and related resources, as well as Conservation Innovation Grants, which have directly

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Pat Roberts
The Honorable Frank Lucas
The Honorable Collin Peterson
June 1, 2012
Page Three

assisted the implementation of over 100 farm energy projects in Massachusetts, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.

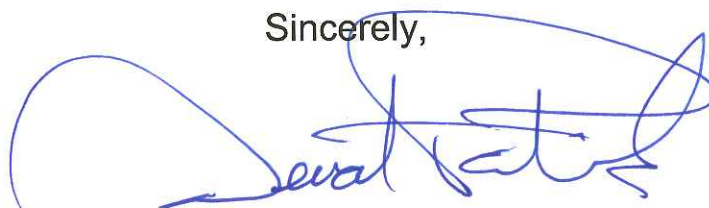
Further, programs funded under the Energy Title have been critical to helping Massachusetts farmers and rural business owners lower their energy bills through renewable energy installments and energy efficiency improvements. I urge you to authorize robust funding for the Rural Energy for America Program to help our farms continue to make key energy improvements.

The dairy industry generates over \$44 million in cash receipts from milk sales in Massachusetts and an effective-market driven supply management program is necessary to ensure the industry continues to thrive. Small dairy farms, which predominate in Massachusetts, are particularly vulnerable to wide fluctuations in market prices, making a supply management system crucial, and therefore I support the inclusion of an effective market stabilization program in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Finally, Specialty Crops Block Grant funding is critical to our agriculture economy, as specialty crops, including our vibrant cranberry bogs, make up a majority of our food crops. With over 400 growers producing close to 25 percent of the nation's cranberry supply, cranberries are the number one food crop in Massachusetts and have a crop value of \$104 million. I respectfully request that you authorize yearly funding for the Specialty Crops Block Grant at the FY2012 \$55 million level, at a minimum, to allow us to continue to enhance the competitiveness of our specialty crops.

As you continue to develop the Farm Bill I urge you to protect these important programs and vital benefits in order to provide certainty and stability for low-income families, our farmers and rural small businesses. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Debbie Stabenow", is written below the word "Sincerely,". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.