

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Farms Fight for Food Security at Massachusetts State House

Lincoln, MA--March 2, 2018--On March 1, several members of The Food Project team visited the Massachusetts State House along with dozens of other farmers and food security advocates from across the state to fight for a better food system. On February 14, The Food Project and 200 other Massachusetts farms received an unhappy Valentine's Day letter from Massachusetts' Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) notifying us that the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) will be suspended as of April 15. This is a change that will affect almost 40,000 families in communities throughout Massachusetts.

The letter states that it is "Due to its overwhelming success and associated unanticipated funding demands" that HIP is to be suspended. The suspension of HIP is due to the program actually working and meeting the needs of Massachusetts residents. In 2017, the state funded HIP at \$1.35 million. The need proved to be more than double what was budgeted and the amount actually spent was \$3.2 million. That money went to help families purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for themselves and their children—food that they would not otherwise have been able to afford.

"The fact that so many needed HIP exposed an issue that we here at The Food Project know all too well," said J. Harrison, Executive Director of The Food Project. "Our own neighbors often quietly go hungry. Vital federal assistance programs like SNAP, and state-wide programs like HIP in particular, act as critical stop-gaps that provide access to much needed fruits and vegetables."

HIP was created to increase healthy eating by adding incentives for SNAP recipients to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. HIP provides an additional benefit (up to \$80/month depending on family size) for produce purchased at participating farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

HIP had the added benefit of helping over 200 Massachusetts farmers by increasing the number of customers purchasing fresh produce directly from the farmers who grow that produce. Farms who participate in HIP have already planned for the 2018 season and invested in seasonal farm workers and purchased the seeds and equipment needed to meet the increased HIP-driven demand seen in 2017. The sudden suspension of HIP economically jeopardizes those farmers.

\$6.2 million would be needed in order to adequately fund HIP in 2018. While this number seems high, it pales in comparison to the \$2.4 billion in annual costs here



in Massachusetts of managing diet-related illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. Additionally, this is money that helps drive the economy. Studies show that for every dollar spent at farmers markets and on CSA shares results in \$1.12 going back into the local economy.

The Healthy Incentives Program has proven to be an extremely effective way to alleviate hunger and increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables—all while boosting the local economy and creating jobs. As obesity and diet related illnesses rise, adequately funding HIP is a critical tool in our fight against poor nutrition.

About The Food Project

Since their founding in 1991, The Food Project has grown into a nationally-recognized non-profit organization that works at the intersection of youth, food, and community. For more than 26 years, The Food Project has brought youth and adults from diverse backgrounds together on their farms to produce healthy food for residents of the city and suburbs to build a local and sustainable food system. The organization believes that food is a unique vehicle for creating personal and social change. The Food Project aims to transform our food system into an equitable and inclusive model that is community-controlled and supports food justice for all.

#

Contact

Ross Condit

Director, Marketing & Communications

The Food Project

(P) 781-259-8621 x30

rcondit@thefoodproject.org

