

HOUSE No. 860

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Natalie M. Blais

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act promoting equity in agriculture.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Natalie M. Blais</i>	<i>1st Franklin</i>	<i>2/10/2021</i>
<i>Hannah Kane</i>	<i>11th Worcester</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Joanne M. Comerford</i>	<i>Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Patricia A. Duffy</i>	<i>5th Hampden</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Smitty Pignatelli</i>	<i>4th Berkshire</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Lindsay N. Sabadosa</i>	<i>1st Hampshire</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Carmine Lawrence Gentile</i>	<i>13th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Brian W. Murray</i>	<i>10th Worcester</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Paul A. Schmid, III</i>	<i>8th Bristol</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>James J. O'Day</i>	<i>14th Worcester</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>James K. Hawkins</i>	<i>2nd Bristol</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Vanna Howard</i>	<i>17th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>David Henry Argosky LeBoeuf</i>	<i>17th Worcester</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Erika Uyterhoeven</i>	<i>27th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Sean Garballey</i>	<i>23rd Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Danillo A. Sena</i>	<i>37th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Peter Capano</i>	<i>11th Essex</i>	<i>3/2/2021</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>	<i>3/8/2021</i>

<i>Tram T. Nguyen</i>	<i>18th Essex</i>	<i>3/3/2021</i>
<i>Mindy Domb</i>	<i>3rd Hampshire</i>	<i>3/30/2021</i>
<i>Susannah M. Whipps</i>	<i>2nd Franklin</i>	<i>3/30/2021</i>
<i>Tami L. Gouveia</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>	<i>7/6/2021</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>	<i>9/3/2021</i>
<i>Kimberly N. Ferguson</i>	<i>1st Worcester</i>	<i>9/17/2021</i>
<i>Steven C. Owens</i>	<i>29th Middlesex</i>	<i>9/22/2021</i>
<i>Marcos A. Devers</i>	<i>16th Essex</i>	<i>9/22/2021</i>

HOUSE No. 860

By Ms. Blais of Sunderland, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 860) of Natalie M. Blais and others relative to racially equitable investments, policies, and practices to promote equity in agriculture. Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)**

An Act promoting equity in agriculture.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. (a) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context
2 clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:-

3 “Department”, the department of agricultural resources.

4 “socially disadvantaged groups”, people who have, or whose lineage has, been
5 historically been historically or systematically excluded from, or have had less access to
6 resources and opportunities based on cultural, racial, or ethnic prejudice based on their identity
7 as a member of a group rather than for their individual qualities. These groups include, but are
8 not limited to, African Americans, Cape Verdeans, Hispanics, Asians Americans, Pacific
9 Islanders, Caribbean Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.

10 (b) There shall be a commission on agricultural equity to develop recommendations for
11 supporting racially equitable investments, policies, and practices to promote equity in agriculture
12 in the commonwealth.

13 The commission shall consist of 17 members, including the commissioner of agricultural
14 resources or a designee; the House and Senate chairs of the committee on environment, natural
15 resources and agriculture or their designees; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the legislative food
16 system caucus, to be selected through an open nomination process under criteria developed by
17 the caucus; 2 of who shall represent nonprofit organizations whose primary purpose is working
18 with farmers from socially disadvantaged groups, to be selected by the commissioner through an
19 open nomination process under criteria developed by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen
20 by Buy Local organizations funded by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the
21 Massachusetts Food System Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the Massachusetts
22 Food System Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the commission on Indian affairs to
23 represent Native American farmers; 1 of whom shall be chosen by Massachusetts Farm Bureau
24 Federation; and 1 of whom shall be chosen by the University of Massachusetts Center for
25 Agriculture, Food and the Environment.

26 The commission shall be co-chaired by the commissioner of agricultural resources and a
27 member of the commission chosen by the members.

28 The commission shall hold 3 or more public hearings in various regions of the state,
29 including 1 in a rural area and 1 in an urban area with potential for increased urban agriculture.

30 (c) The commission shall investigate and study ways to increase equity in agriculture in
31 the commonwealth, and shall prepare a report that includes, but is not limited to:

32 (1) recommendations for data collection and dissemination, benchmark development,
33 targeting practices, and transparency for grantmaking to promote equitable access to grant
34 programs and equitable distribution of funds to socially disadvantaged groups;

35 (2) recommendations for how laws, regulations, and other policies that regulate and
36 support agriculture in the commonwealth could more equitably serve socially disadvantaged
37 groups;

38 (3) recommendations for how programs and services offered by the department,
39 including, but not limited to those programs regarding land access and protection, farmer
40 technical assistance and education, marketing, and others, could more equitably serve socially
41 disadvantaged groups;

42 (4) recommendations for how regulatory and other departmental decision-making
43 processes could more equitably serve socially disadvantaged groups;

44 (5) recommendations for the ongoing role of the commission or another representative
45 body in supporting implementation and monitoring of these goals; and

46 (6) a plan for implementation of these recommendations, including a timeline.

47 The department shall furnish reasonable staff and other support for the work of the
48 commission. Members may receive reimbursement for the reasonable expenses incurred in
49 carrying out their responsibilities as members of the commission under procedures established by
50 the department.

51 The department may fund the expenses of the commission from the Massachusetts
52 Farmer Equity Commission Fund, without further appropriation.

53 (d) The Commission shall, no later than 12 months following the date of enactment of
54 this act, report to the general court on the results of its investigation and study together with its
55 findings, recommendations, and drafts of legislation, if any, necessary to carry out those

56 recommendations. The report shall be posted on the web site of the department and shall be
57 submitted to the speaker of the house, the senate president, the house and senate committees on
58 ways and means and the committee on energy, natural resources and agriculture.

59 (e) There shall be established and set up on the books of the commonwealth a separate
60 fund, to be administered by the commissioner of the department of agricultural resources, which
61 shall be known as the Massachusetts Farmer Equity Commission Fund. The Fund shall consist of
62 all revenues from public and private sources as appropriations, gifts, grants, donations, and
63 grants-in-aid or other receipts to be disbursed by the commission to provide stipends for time
64 spent furthering the cause of the commission made by non-governmental members of the
65 commission.