

SENATE No. 502

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Joanne M. Comerford

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:	
<i>Joanne M. Comerford</i>	<i>Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester</i>	
<i>Hannah Kane</i>	<i>11th Worcester</i>	<i>2/22/2021</i>
<i>Brendan P. Crighton</i>	<i>Third Essex</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Brian W. Murray</i>	<i>10th Worcester</i>	<i>2/24/2021</i>
<i>Paul A. Schmid, III</i>	<i>8th Bristol</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>John C. Velis</i>	<i>Second Hampden and Hampshire</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Erika Uytterhoeven</i>	<i>27th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>	<i>3/1/2021</i>
<i>Michael O. Moore</i>	<i>Second Worcester</i>	<i>3/2/2021</i>
<i>Joan B. Lovely</i>	<i>Second Essex</i>	<i>3/5/2021</i>
<i>Anne M. Gobi</i>	<i>Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex</i>	<i>3/12/2021</i>
<i>Susannah M. Whipps</i>	<i>2nd Franklin</i>	<i>3/31/2021</i>
<i>Alan Silvia</i>	<i>7th Bristol</i>	<i>9/16/2021</i>
<i>Sal N. DiDomenico</i>	<i>Middlesex and Suffolk</i>	<i>10/4/2021</i>

SENATE No. 502

By Ms. Comerford, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 502) of Joanne M. Comerford, Hannah Kane, Brendan P. Crighton, Brian W. Murray and other members of the General Court for legislation to promote 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 (a) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires
2 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 15 members, including the commissioner of agricultural
14 resources or a designee; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the legislative food system caucus, to be
15 selected through an open nomination process under criteria developed by the caucus; 2 of who
16 shall represent nonprofit organizations whose primary purpose is working with farmers from
17 socially disadvantaged groups, to be selected by the commissioner through an open nomination
18 process under criteria developed by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen by Buy Local
19 organizations funded by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the Massachusetts Food
20 System Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the Massachusetts Food System
21 Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the commission on Indian affairs to represent
22 Native American farmers; 1 of whom shall be chosen by Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation;
23 and 1 of whom shall be chosen by the University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food
24 and the Environment.

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

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

29 (c) The commission shall investigate and study ways to increase equity in agriculture in
30 the commonwealth, and shall prepare a report that includes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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