

SENATE No. 539

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Anne M. Gobi

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 regarding a farmland protection and viability action plan.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
Anne M. Gobi	Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex	
Natalie M. Blais	1st Franklin	
Hannah Kane	11th Worcester	2/27/2021
Joanne M. Comerford	Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester	2/27/2021
Brian W. Murray	10th Worcester	2/27/2021
Paul A. Schmid, III	8th Bristol	2/27/2021
John C. Velis	Second Hampden and Hampshire	2/27/2021
Kimberly N. Ferguson	1st Worcester	2/27/2021
James B. Eldridge	Middlesex and Worcester	3/5/2021
Michael O. Moore	Second Worcester	3/5/2021
Eric P. Lesser	First Hampden and Hampshire	3/12/2021
Susannah M. Whipps	2nd Franklin	4/1/2021

SENATE No. 539

By Ms. Gobi, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 539) of Anne M. Gobi, Natalie M. Blais, Hannah Kane, Joanne M. Comerford and other members of the General Court for legislation relative to a farmland protection and viability action plan. Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE SENATE, NO. 482 OF 2019-2020.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)**
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An Act regarding a farmland protection and viability action plan.

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) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the secretary
2 of energy and environmental affairs, in consultation with the farmland protection and viability
3 advisory commission established into subsection (b), shall develop a farmland protection and
4 viability plan. The plan shall set forth the commonwealth’s goals, priorities and recommended
5 actions for farmland protection and access to reflect the importance of farmlands of the
6 commonwealth to its citizens who derive their livelihoods from farming, the food that is
7 produced, and the importance of protected farmland for ecosystem health and biodiversity.

8 The plan shall include, but not be limited to: (i) an inventory of state land in active
9 agricultural production or that is potentially suitable for farming; (ii) a review of state agency

10 policies related to the use or lease of land for farming and recommendations related to state
11 policies for the use and lease of state-owned land for farming; (iii) an analysis of recent trends
12 and potential threats related to farmland loss and conversion and its recommendations, including
13 resources necessary to improve state data collection for farmland trends and to establish a system
14 for tracking acres of farmland in production over time; (iv) recommended statutory, regulatory or
15 policy revisions to the agricultural preservation restriction program to support the long-term
16 economic viability of protected farms, to address housing needs and to ensure the program is
17 managed in a transparent and consistent manner and with policies that keep pace with changes in
18 agriculture and associated markets; (v) an analysis of farmland enrolled in a program under
19 chapter 61A of the General Laws and recommendations for improving enrollment of farmland in
20 the program; and (vi) measurable statewide goals and benchmarks related to farmland
21 conversion, farmland protection and farmland access and recommendations for state policy
22 changes and program funding levels to meet these goals and benchmarks. The plan may include
23 maps, illustrations and other media and shall be based on best available science and best
24 management practices.

25 (b) There shall be a farmland protection and viability advisory commission to assist the
26 secretary in developing the farmland action plan. The commission shall be chaired by a farmer
27 and to be appointed by the secretary and shall consist of: 2 members of the senate or a designee,
28 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader; 2 members of the house of representatives
29 or a designee, 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader; 1 member of the board of
30 food and agriculture; the commissioner of agricultural resources or a designee; a representative
31 of the Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts at
32 Amherst; a representative of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation; a representative of The

33 Trustees of Reservations; a representative of the American Farmland Trust; and 3 persons to be
34 appointed by the governor, 1 of whom shall be a farmer, 1 of whom shall be a representative of
35 an urban agriculture organization, 1 of whom shall be a representative of a farmland access
36 organization.

37 The advisory commission shall meet at least quarterly and otherwise at the discretion of
38 the chair. The commission shall make recommendations to the secretary for the proper
39 management and development of the farmland protection and viability plan.

40 (c) The farmland action plan shall be delivered to the joint committee on environment,
41 natural resources and agriculture not later than December 31, 2022. The executive office of
42 energy and environmental affairs and the department of agricultural resources shall provide
43 technical support to the commission.

44 (d) The secretary shall develop and implement a public outreach and information
45 program to provide information to the public regarding the farmland action plan.