

HOUSE No.

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>1/15/2025</i>

HOUSE No.

[Pin Slip]

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE HOUSE, NO. 87 OF 2023-2024.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)**

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) There shall be a special legislative commission to study and develop
2 recommendations for supporting investments, policies and practices designed to promote equity
3 in agriculture for socially disadvantaged groups in the commonwealth that have been historically
4 or systematically excluded or have had less access to resources and opportunities based on
5 cultural, racial or ethnic prejudice. These groups shall include, but shall not be limited to,
6 African Americans, Cape Verdeans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Caribbean
7 Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan natives.

8 (b) The commission shall consist of the following members: the commissioner of
9 agricultural resources, or a designee; the chairs of the joint committee on agriculture; 1 member
10 appointed by the Massachusetts Black and Latino legislative caucus; 1 member appointed by the
11 Massachusetts House Asian caucus; 2 members appointed by the Massachusetts food system

12 caucus, who shall be selected through an open nomination process pursuant to criteria developed
13 by the caucus; 2 members appointed by the commissioner of agricultural resources who shall
14 represent Buy Local organizations funded by the department of agricultural resources; 2
15 members appointed by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative; 1 member appointed by
16 the commission on the status of African Americans; 2 members appointed by a Massachusetts-
17 based farming association; 2 members appointed by non-profit organizations whose primary
18 purpose is working with farmers from socially disadvantaged groups; 1 member appointed by the
19 commission on the status of Latinos and Latinas; 1 member appointed by the commission on the
20 status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; 1 member appointed by the commission on
21 Indian affairs; 1 member appointed by Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation; 1 member
22 appointed by the Massachusetts Federation of Farmers Markets; and 1 member appointed by the
23 Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
24 Members appointed to the commission shall, to the extent possible, represent a diversity of
25 knowledge of urban and rural agricultural practices and experiences and be knowledgeable in
26 agriculture. The commission shall be co-chaired by the commissioner of agricultural resources
27 and a member of the commission chosen by the members.

28 (c) The commission shall investigate and study ways to promote equity in agriculture in
29 the commonwealth, and shall prepare a report including, but not be limited to, recommendations
30 related to: (i) data collection and dissemination; (ii) benchmark development and targeting areas
31 of need; (iii) equitable access to grant programs and distribution of funds; (iv) generating greater
32 equity in the legislative, regulatory and sub-regulatory processes to support agriculture in the
33 commonwealth; (v) improving equity in programs and services offered by the department of
34 agricultural resources, including, but not limited to, programs regarding land access and

35 protection, farmer technical assistance and education, marketing and other existing programs
36 identified by the commission; and (vi) the implementation and monitoring of equity goals in
37 agriculture in the commonwealth established by the commission. The department of agricultural
38 resources shall furnish reasonable staff and other support for the work of the commission.

39 (d) The commission shall hold not less than 3 public hearings in various regions of the
40 commonwealth; provided, that not less than 1 public hearing shall be held in a rural area and not
41 less than 1 public hearing shall be held in an urban area with potential for increased urban
42 agriculture.

43 (e) Not later than December 31, 2027, the commission shall file a report and any
44 recommendations, including any legislation necessary to carry out the recommendations, with
45 the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate, the house and senate committees on
46 ways and means and the joint committee on agriculture. The report shall be publicly available on
47 the website of the department of agricultural resources.