

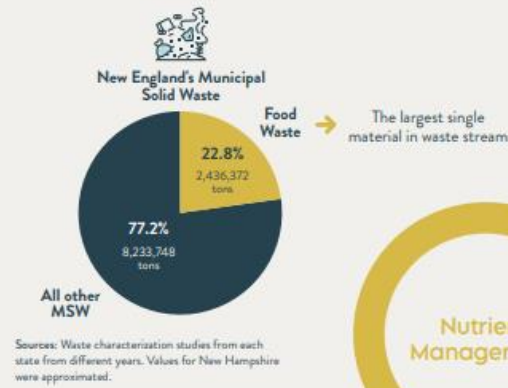
The Future of Local Food Systems: The Intersection of Climate Change and Food Access

May 12, 2026

Our Agenda Today:

- ❖ **Welcome**
- ❖ **Panelist Introductions**
 - ❖ **Ayn Yeagle** from Growing Places
 - ❖ **Stephanie Venizelos** from the City of Watertown
 - ❖ **Usha Thakrar** from Boston Area Gleaners
- ❖ **Spotlight: Rebecca Davidson** from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)
- ❖ **Moderated Q&A**
- ❖ **Audience Questions**
- ❖ **Closing**

FIGURE 1: New England's Food System



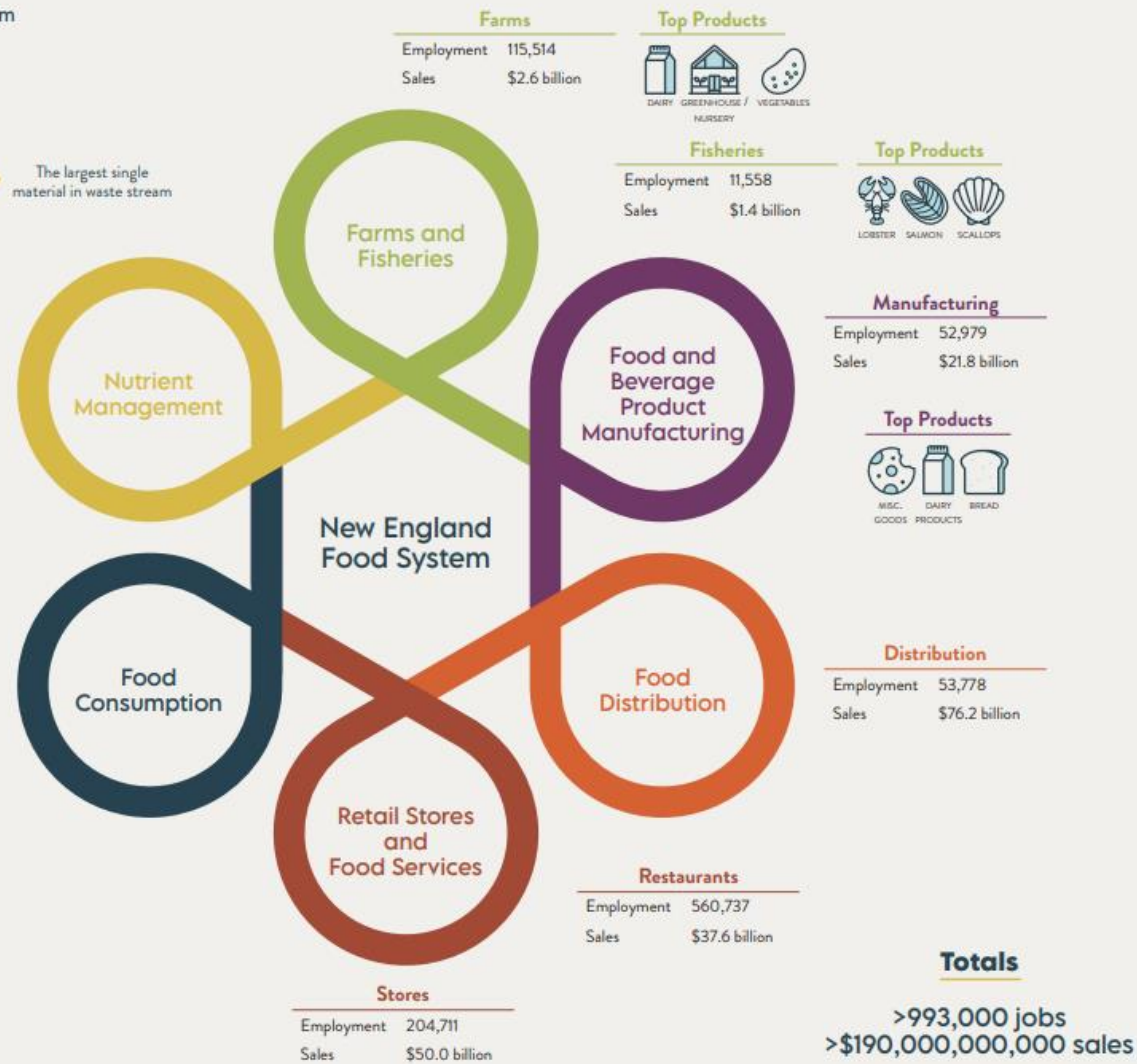
Estimated Consumption
32 billion pounds

Food Insecure*

MA	>590,000
CT	>346,000
NH	>74,000
ME	>124,000
RI	>88,000
VT	>50,000

*AVERAGE: 2019-2021

Source: Alisha Coleman-Jensen, et al., September 2022, [Household Food Security in the United States in 2021](#), USDA Economic Research Service, report #309.



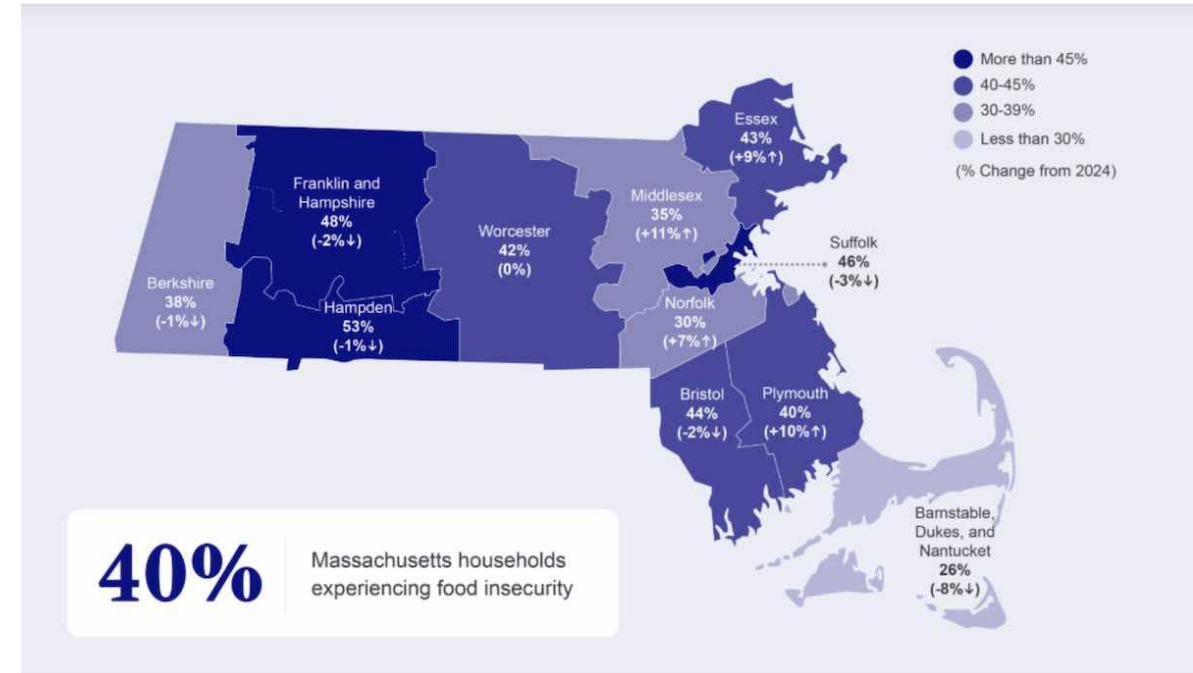
Source: Volume 3: Economic Impact of New England's Food System

Food Access

The factors that influence an individual or household's ability to acquire food for an adequate diet, while not compromising on other basic needs (FAO)

Food Security

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (FAO)



Climate resilience is about successfully coping with and managing the impacts of climate change while preventing those impacts from growing worse.

- Union of Concerned Scientists



Mass. is a national leader in keeping food waste out of landfills, study finds

By [Barbara Moran](#)
September 24, 2024

[Share](#)



Food waste to be processed at the Vanguard Renewables Organics Recycling Facility in Agawam.
(Ilesse Costa/WRIIR)



Our Panelists!



Ayn Yeagle
Growing Places



Stephanie Venizelos
City of Watertown



Usha Thakrar
Boston Area Gleaners



Regional Food Center
Local Food Works in North Central MA

Ayn Yeagle MS, RD
ayn@growingplaces.org

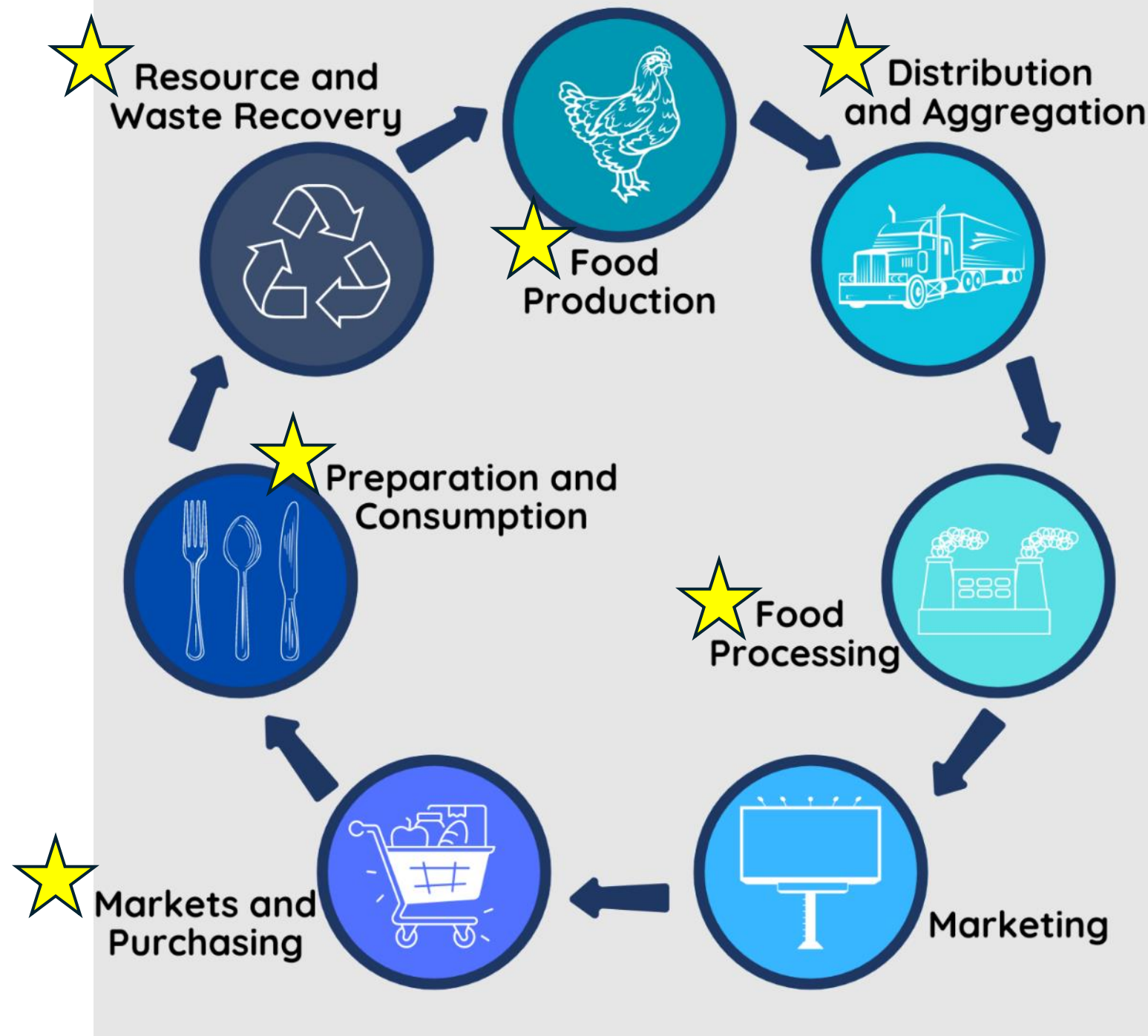


Regional Food Center



Vision: Growing Places (GP) envisions a thriving, community-based food system that nourishes every resident while sustaining the environment.

Mission: to actively engage in the North Central Massachusetts (NCMA) food system and build community capacity to transform it into one that promotes equity, collective wellbeing, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability.





Fresh Chef Kits

Ecovim



Food Waste Reduction Stats

Table 1: Waste diverted from landfill due to EcoVin.

Product	Total Starting Product Weight (lbs.) - (Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef)	Food Scraps Diverted via EcoVin (lbs.) - (Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef)	Food Waste Diverted from Landfill via EcoVin (%) - (Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef)	Notes
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Mashed Sweet Potato	80	2.8	4%	*Changed to simple recipes based on first round of results and weighing waste diverted into EcoVin.
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Curry Vegetable Soup	43	14.4	33%	
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Roasted Carrot Fries	56	12.65	23%	
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Roasted Beet and Sweet Potato Salad	37	2.4	6%	
TOTALS and AVERAGES	136	29.45	17%	

Table 3: Comparison of Households Not Wasting Food Due to Fresh Chef Kits

Product	Number Participants Reported Food Waste at Home - (Whole Control)	Number Participants Reported Food Waste at Home - (Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef)	Change in Households that Wasted Food at Home (%) (Whole Control vs Fresh Chef Kit)	Notes
(Whole - Control) Sweet Potato		1	400%	*Changed to simple recipes based on first round of results and weighing waste diverted into EcoVin.
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Mashed Sweet Potato				
(Whole - Control) Butternut Squash, Carrot, Onions	13	1	1200%	
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Curry Vegetable Soup				
(Whole - Control) Rainbow Carrots	13	4	225%	
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Roasted Carrot Fries				
(Whole - Control) Beets and Sweet Potatoes	10	2	400%	
(Lightly Processed - Fresh Chef) Roasted Beet and Sweet Potato Salad				
AVERAGES	10	2	556%	



Sustainable Packaging and Distribution



Food Systems & Climate Change Webinar

Stephanie Venizelos

Assistant Director of Human Services

Community Wellness & Food Access Programs

City of Watertown

May 12, 2026



My Role and Focus

Interdepartmental
City Role

New Human
Services
Department &
Priorities

Live Well & Food
Access Programs

About Watertown

Live Well Watertown Coalition & Programs

Convene a network of individuals and organizations who promote wellness, develop educational programs and resources, and foster collaborations that support all dimensions of well-being

Offer free programs to enhance health and well-being (active living, healthy eating, stress reduction, community connections and resiliency)

Food Access Programs

City Programs

- City food pantry
- Seasonal Farmers' Market and off-season SNAP CSA
- School fridge, freight farm, recycle efforts

Community Programs

- Catholic Collaborative Food Pantry
- Community Fridge
- Watertown Community Gardens Food Assistance

Farmers' Market & Food Assistance Programs

13th Season of the market
(operating 10 years within
the city)

Average **800 visitors** a
week

Over 150 people a week
receiving free food (SNAP
Match, HIP, donations)

Year-round **SNAP CSA**

10 – 40% annual increase
of food assistance
programs since 2020

Partner programs with
many local agencies
including the Watertown
Housing Authority

Looking ahead: Pilot
Winter Market and expand
collaboration with
Watertown Public Schools,
Farm to School and Freight
Farm programs

Community Efforts to Address Climate Change

City Budget Priority



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graph TD; A[City Budget Priority] --> B[Resilient Watertown / City Sustainability Team]; B --> C[Department of Public Works]; C --> D[Climate focused community organizations]; D --> E[MAPC Project: Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment];
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Resilient Watertown / City Sustainability Team

Department of Public Works

Climate focused community organizations

MAPC Project: Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment

Bridging the Gap in Watertown

Preparing

Preparing for
extreme heat and
other climate
change concerns

Strengthening

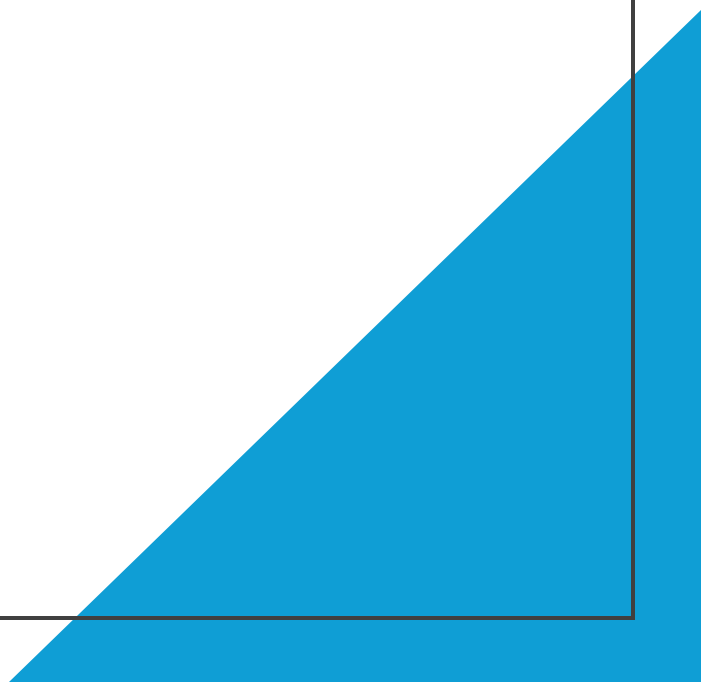
Strengthening our
food access
networks and
programs

Building

Building resiliency
for unanticipated
change and
challenges

THANK YOU!

Stephanie Venizelos
Assistant Director of Human Services
City of Watertown
svenizelos@watertown-ma.gov
www.livewellwatertown.org

A large blue triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

The Future of Local Food Systems: The Intersection of Climate Change and Food Access

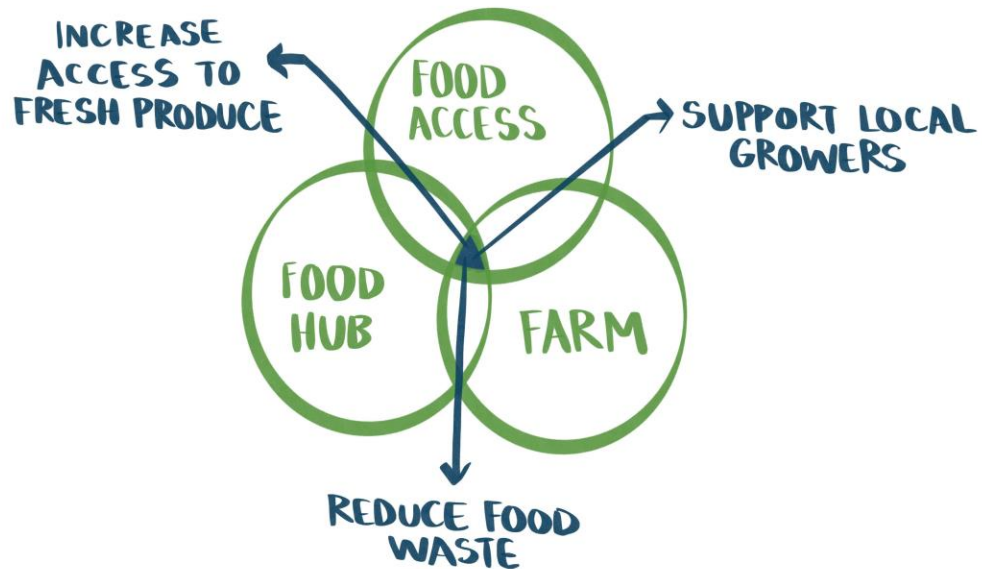


May 12, 2026

Usha Thakrar, Executive Director

Boston Area Gleaners - Who we are

The Gleaners work at the intersection of farming, food waste and food access.



To address these three challenges:

- Families lack access to affordable, healthy food
- Good food is being wasted
- Farmers in the region are going out of business

Activities

- **Sourcing**
 - Gleaning
 - Wholesale recovery
- **Distribution**
 - Donation to food access partners
 - Contract trucking
- **Boston Food Hub**
 - Market access for local farmers
- **Growing**
 - Food Banks (MEFAP)
 - Other mission-aligned customers
 - Donation to food access partners



Resources

Logistics is critical to the local food supply chain

Infrastructure

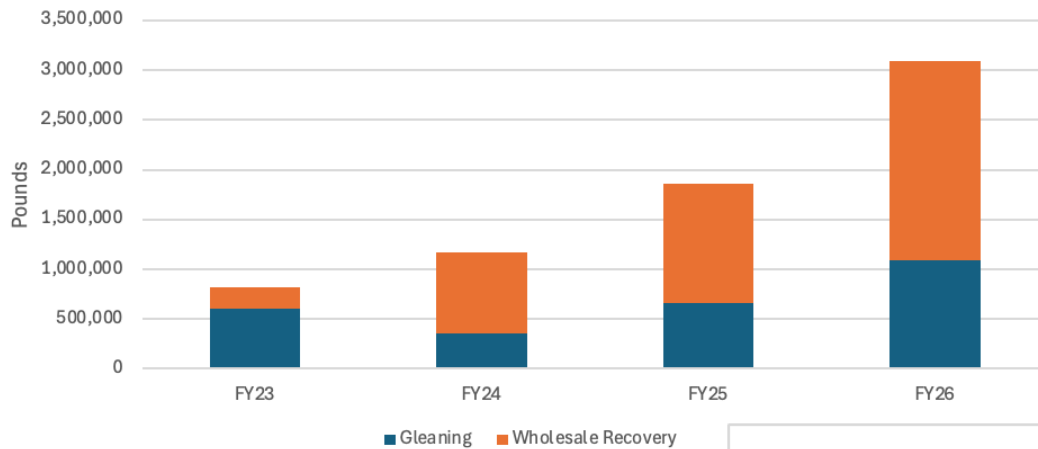
- Trucks (big and small)
- Harvest/storage containers
- Cold Storage
- Farming equipment
- Greenhouses
- Packing equipment
- Composting capacity

Staffing

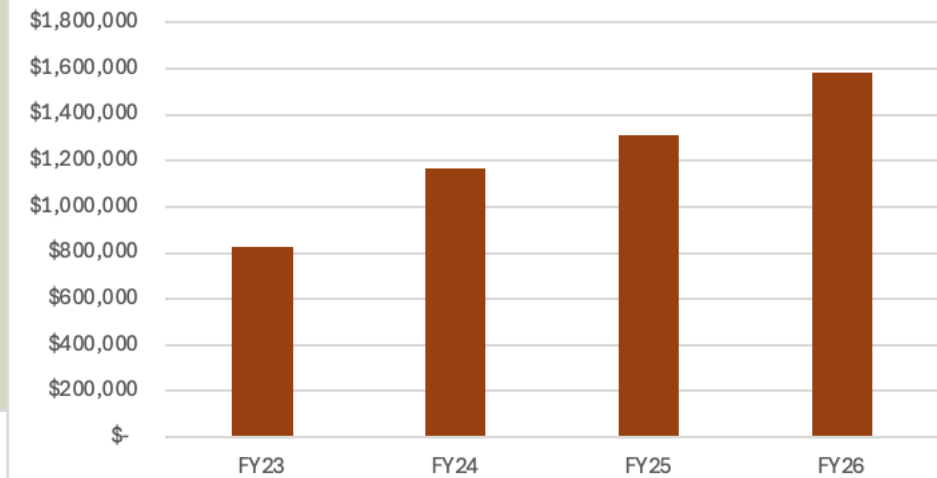
- 2.0 FTE Senior Leadership
- 7.0 FTE Administrative Team
- 7.6 FTE Operations Staff
- 4.7 FTE Farm Team
- 7.2 FTE Transportation Team

Our Impact on the Food System

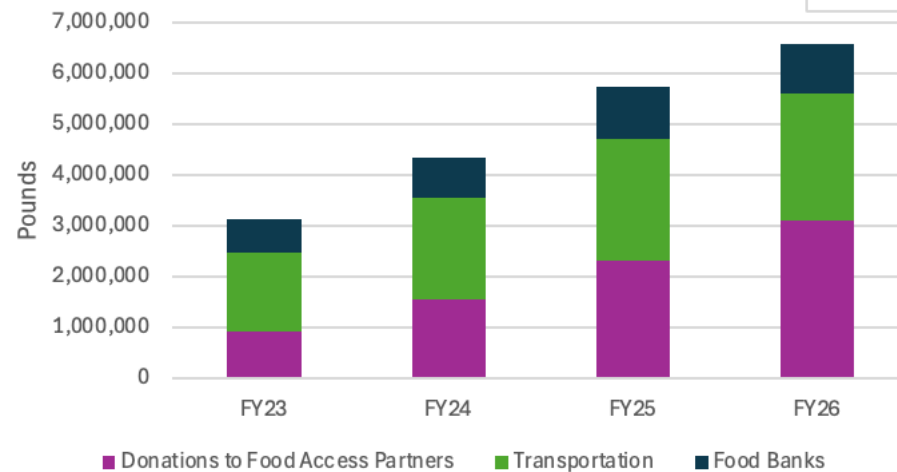
Fresh Produce Diverted for Donation



Revenue to Farmers



Distributed to Food Access Partners



MODERATED Q&A



Farming in a Changing Climate

Programs and policies that strengthen farm and food system resilience

Rebecca Davidson, Director of Food and Climate Equity



**MASSACHUSETTS FARMERS ARE CLIMATE
HEROES. YOU CAN BE A HERO TOO.
BUY MASSGROWN**



MASS.GOV/MASSGROWN



What is Massachusetts doing
about this?

What are our goals?

2 Key Strategies: Resilience + Mitigation

Resilience

“The ability of interconnected ecological, social, and economic systems to anticipate, adapt, withstand, respond, and thrive in the face of current and future conditions and disasters related to climate change.”



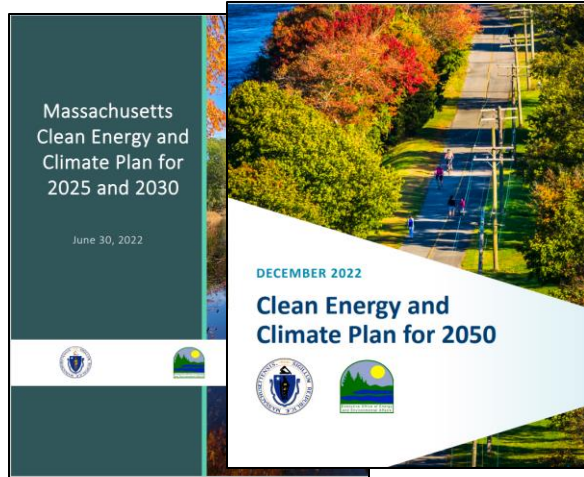
Mitigation

“[A]ctions or activities that limit emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) from entering the atmosphere and/or reduce their levels in the atmosphere.”



Massachusetts' Climate Reports and Plans

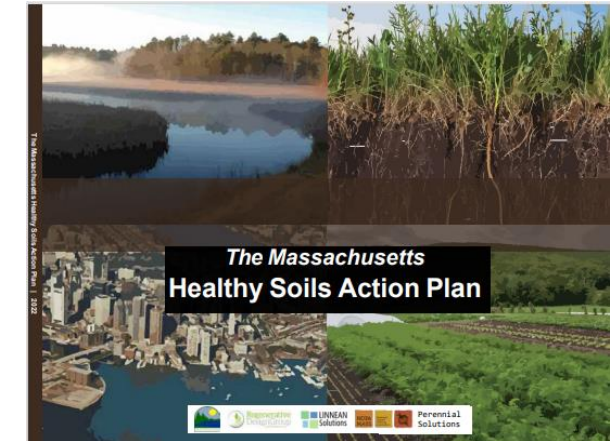
Clean Energy & Climate Plans (CECPs)



ResilientMass Action Plan



Healthy Soils Action Plan



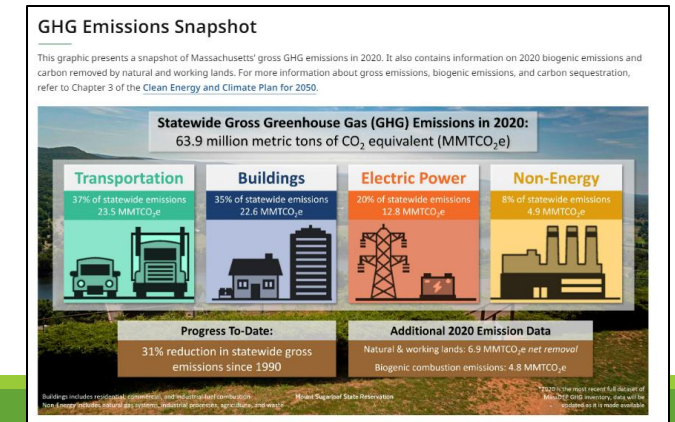
MA Climate Assessment



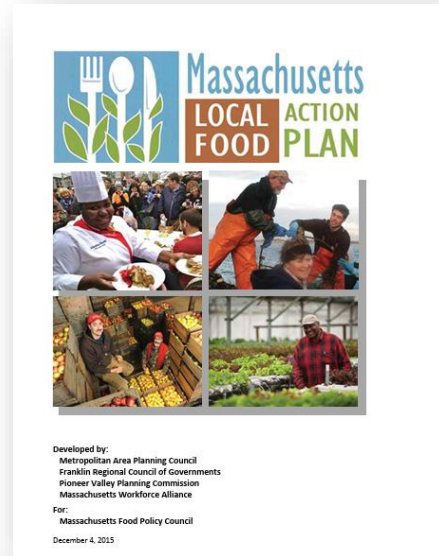
Massachusetts Climate Report Card



Clean Energy & Climate Metrics Dashboard



Massachusetts' Food Systems Goals



Environmental Justice Strategy

Secretariat and agency strategies for proactively promoting environmental justice in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Food Security Programs for the Commonwealth

	LAND/WATER PRESERVATION	PRODUCTION	PROCESSING	AGGREGATION/ DISTRIBUTION	MARKETS	CONSUMPTION /ACCESS	VALORIZATION/ DISPOSAL
STATE	APR Improvement	Climate Smart Ag			MA Food Trust Program	State Earmarks	Agricultural Composting Improvement Program
	Ag Preservation Restriction Program	Dairy Farm Tax Credit			Dairy Promotion Board Grant	Healthy Incentives Program	Food Waste Ban
	Stewardship Assistance & Restoration on APRs	Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture		★ MA Food Ventures		FRESH Grants	
	Community Preservation Act	Farm Viability Enhancement				Hunger Free Campus	
		Ag Food Safety Improvement					
		Cranberry Bog Renovation Grant Program					
		Urban Ag	★	Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program		Share the Harvest	
FEDERAL							
			★	Resilient Food System Infrastructure			
					Federal State Marketing Improvement Program	Congregate Meals	
						Women, Infant & Children Nutrition Program	
						SunBucks	
						SNAP & SNAP-ed	
						Summer Eats	
						Child & Adult Care Feeding Program	
					Specialty Crop Block Grant		
						Temporary Feeding Assistance Program	
						WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition	
						Local Food Purchasing Agreement	
						Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition	
						MA Emergency Feeding Assistance Program	
						Food and Nutrition Access	
						Health Related Social Needs	
					Seafood Marketing Program		



MDAR Grant Programs that strengthen mid-supply chain infrastructure, increase access to local and healthy foods

- DESE/EOE
- DTA
- MassHealth
- MDAR
- EEA
- EOHLC
- DFG
- DPH
- AGE
- EOED
- MassHousing

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG)

For food security infrastructure that increases access to locally grown, raised, harvested and caught foods, by strengthening the Commonwealth's food supply chain and increasing equitable food access

KEY IMPACTS

96% of awardees contributed to more equitable food system

95% of awardees felt more resilient to food system disruptions



“[FSIG] has been revolutionary for our city. This zip code was a food desert...we were able to bring in enough food that it was no longer classified as a food desert”



\$1.4M of FSIG funding helped Fruit Fair build a rooftop greenhouse, increasing capacity to grow and distribute fresh produce locally as part of the Food as Medicine initiative, and build a relationship with Chicopee Public Schools to supply student lunches.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

MA Food Ventures Program

To support healthy food initiatives and invest in underserved communities.

Massachusetts Food Ventures Program (MFVP) increases access to healthy, affordable food options and improve economic opportunities for low to moderate income communities.

Deadline May 28 2026

Who May Apply?

Massachusetts Municipalities

Massachusetts Non-Profit or For-Profit Organizations

Individual Residents of Massachusetts

Where to learn more?

[How to apply to MA Food Ventures](#)

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Local Food Access Programs

To advance
equitable access to
local, nutritious,
culturally-relevant
food

HIP/SNAP - HIP puts money back on your EBT card when you use SNAP to buy healthy, local fruits and vegetables from HIP farm vendors.

WIC/Senior FMNP – Provides coupons to purchase locally grown, fresh fruits vegetables, cut herbs and honey.

MEFAP - Established to ensure that residents in need have access to a supply of quality food in the Commonwealth.

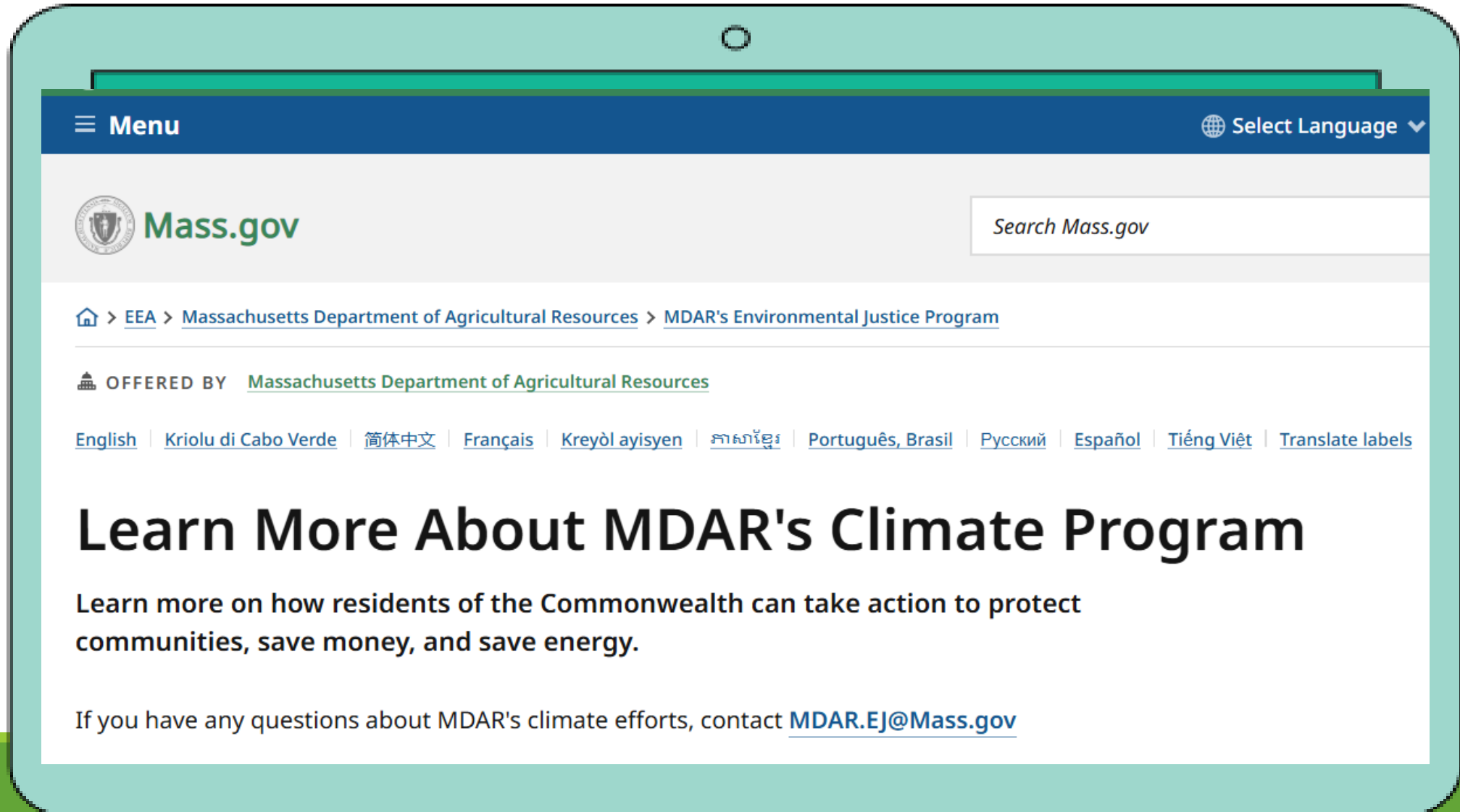
Previously funded programs:

LFPA - awarded funds to groups who purchased food from historically underserved farmers and producers to provide to underserved communities

RFSI - builds resilience across the middle-of-the-food-supply-chain within the states.

Where can I learn more?

Climate Webpage:



Thank you & Questions

Sign up here for updates from MDAR



AUDIENCE QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!



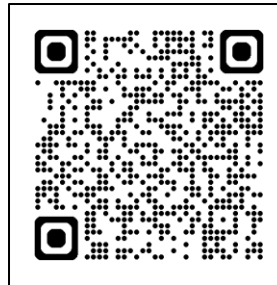
Spotlight form

Please fill out this form to submit a resource, event, or opportunity that you would like us to spotlight on our LinkedIn, newsletter, and/or website!



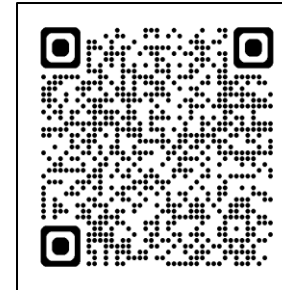
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LinkedIn page

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Feedback Form

Please take a few minutes to fill out our feedback form. We value your thoughts and take them into account when planning future trainings.

