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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE SPEARHEADS COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL BILL**

BOSTON - State Senator Anne M. Gobi (**D-Spencer**) and State Representative Paul A. Schmid (**D-Westport**), Co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture filed a comprehensive, omnibus agricultural package today. The measure aims to provide opportunities and protections to current and prospective farmers throughout Massachusetts, increase access and availability of locally grown food products, and invest in educational and agricultural programs to further grow the industry.

“Maintaining a robust agricultural economy is the right thing to do, for our farmers, communities and the Commonwealth,” said Gobi. “We are fortunate to have so many people willing to spend their time and finances to make sure the rest of us enjoy a wide array of agricultural products. This bill is a step in recognizing their efforts and to support them moving forward.”

“The vast majority of farms in Massachusetts are family owned and operated, and still produce millions of dollars a year in agricultural products,” said Schmid. “This bill will provide valuable benefits to farmers to continue the economic development and growth that the agriculture and farming industry has had in the Commonwealth, and also incentivize consumers to participate in the process.”

The legislation, *An Act to promote agriculture in the Commonwealth*, reflects recommendations from the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, finalized in December 2015, including the option to create agricultural commissions in municipalities and utilizing state-owned land for non-commercial community gardens and farmers markets.

To incentivize farmers and drive local food production, the bill aims to ease regulatory restrictions that may currently inhibit agricultural modernization. The bill includes several reforms to licensing for foresting and

timber harvesting, Uniform State Plumbing Code and State Building Code updates, and allowable actions under the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program.

New initiatives suggested under the pending legislation seek to craft programs and industries not yet regulated by state government, including the allowance of off-premise raw milk distribution and contractual shared animal ownership agreements that will work to spur dairy business in the Commonwealth. Additionally, a retained revenue account for the Department of Agricultural Resources, in conjunction with the Agricultural Reserve and Security Fund, will contribute to the funding of various educational and innovative initiatives to promote food growth and security.

The bill cleared the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture and will now move to the Senate for consideration. If passed, this legislation will benefit current and future populations of the Commonwealth by stimulating economic growth through agriculture and providing added local, sustainable food selections to consumers.

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