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PRESS RELEASE

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Senator Gobi Boosts Food Policy Initiatives in Senate Budget

BOSTON – Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) has announced a multitude of budget initiatives aimed at increasing access to fresh, local foods. As a member of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council and the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, Senator Gobi has studied the need for greater food access for many years and advocated for funding boosts to food programs during Senate debate.

“We are so fortunate to have farmers and farms that supply a variety of products,” said Senator Gobi. “I will continue to do all I can to assist them because we all benefit from locally grown and locally available food.”

Senator Gobi was successful in securing \$300,000 for Buy Local initiatives in western, central, northeastern and southern Massachusetts. With over 7,755 farms and with generated sales over \$492 million, Massachusetts farms play an important role in the Massachusetts economy. Buy Local campaigns work to connect farms to consumers and boosting this industry, while increasing access to locally grown, healthy foods.

The Farm to School project also received support from the Senate. Senator Gobi’s amendment for \$120,000 was approved to facilitate sustainable purchasing relationships between local institutions and local farms, promote local food and agriculture education for students and support state, regional and national networking of farm to school practitioners. Farm to School programs increase children’s consumption of fruits and vegetables and strengthen their knowledge and attitude toward agriculture, food, nutrition, and the environment. Since 2004 the number of Massachusetts school districts engaging in farm to school activities increased from 10% to 68%.

Senator Gobi was also successful in adopting an amendment that provides \$90,000 for the apiary inspection program. Bees are responsible for pollinating about one-sixth of the flowering plant species worldwide and approximately 400 different types of agricultural plants. One third of the food we eat is pollinated by bees. This funding supports five part-time inspectors that travel throughout the state identifying disease in existing bee colonies.

In an effort to increase access to local, fresh foods, Senator Gobi filed an amendment supporting the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). HIP matches SNAP recipients' purchases of local fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) farm share programs. SNAP recipients receive an instant dollar-for-dollar match credited to their EBT card on eligible purchases and each household has a monthly cap of \$40 (1-2 persons), \$60 (3-5 persons), and \$80 (6+ persons). Only one-quarter of Massachusetts adults eat the federally recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day. This nutritional deficit contributes to increases in obesity and related chronic preventable diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. The HIP initiative, funded at \$1,350,000, works to address these problems and allows the state to leverage a \$3.4 million grant from the USDA.

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