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PRESS RELEASE

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Senator Anne Gobi Advocates for Food Policy Initiatives in State 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. Gobi filed amendments supporting Buy Local initiatives, the statewide Healthy Incentives Program, the Farm to School project and Senior Farm Share Program that were all adopted in the reconciled version of the final budget.

"As I travel throughout the district I am amazed at the great work being done to bring locally grown and produced food to people in the district and outside of it," said Gobi. "Supporting our farms, farmers and agencies that bridge the gaps to provide quality food to people in need is something I am proud to do and will continue to work on."

Senator Gobi was effective in securing funding for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) at a rate of \$4,000,000. Launched in April 2017, the HIP provides a matching incentive for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients' purchases of locally-grown fruits and vegetables directly from farmers at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agricultural programs (CSAs). Each dollar spent through the program results in an additional \$1.12 in local economic impact as farmers in turn contribute that money back to the local economy, and SNAP sales at farm retailers have increased by nearly 600% from 2016 to 2017 as a result of HIP.

The budget also included \$500,000 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 play an important role in connecting farms to consumers and boosting this industry, while increasing access to locally grown, healthy foods.

The Farm to School project received support in the reconciled version of the budget, with \$120,000 being 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.

Senator Gobi was also able to advocate for funding for the Senior FarmShare program, with \$50,000 being allocated to ensure that low-income seniors have access to low cost, locally-grown fruits and vegetables. These shares are valued at \$125 and participants pay a one-time fee of \$10 during the enrollment period which takes place from May 1st- June 1st.

For more information on these programs please contact Senator Gobi's office at 617-722-1540.

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