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Legislative White Papers for Ag Day at the State House April 4th, 2017

The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commission (MAAC) voted on 2/20/17 to support the following bills filed by the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) and those that the MAAC Board worked with MFBF to file with the legislature. MAAC membership also voted at the Annual Meeting on February 25th, 2017 to reaffirm the support for the following bills.

For additional support contact MAAC Board members at massagcoms.maac@gmail.com

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H181 – “An Act Relative to Updating the Plumbing Code in Order to Accommodate Agricultural Uses” - Representative Mirra <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H181>

- While the state building code contains provisions for agricultural buildings, the state plumbing code does not put them into the category of commercial buildings. Many farmers and farm organizations believe that the broad requirements for commercial buildings are not sufficiently tailored to the needs and activities of farms, resulting in inappropriate requirements, and often unnecessary costs.
- The bill creates a committee of public health, plumbing and agricultural representatives from both the public and private sector to make recommendations on possible changes to the state plumbing code.

H458 – “An Act to Promote and Strengthen Agricultural Preservation” – Representative Orrall <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H458>

- This bill would delete a very broad and vaguely worded provision of the statute governing the administration of the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program.
- This provision has been responsible for significant conflict and misunderstanding in the administration of the APR program.

S1513 – “An Act Relative to Exemptions from Taxation of Structures and Buildings Essential to the Operation of Agricultural and Horticultural Lands” -Senator Donnelly <https://malegislature.gov/Search?SearchTerms=s1513>

- State law contains provisions ensuring that property taxes on agricultural land are commensurate with income derived from farming (Chapter 61a). However, there are no such provisions for agricultural buildings. With direct sales and on-farm processing, farm buildings are increasingly becoming as important to the viability of farms as the land itself. However current tax law often results in farm buildings being taxed at a broad commercial rate not supported by their use.
- This bill would create a property tax exemption or 10 years after the construction of a new agricultural building to offset the tax rate.

H441 - “An Act to Promote the Care and Wellbeing of Livestock” - Representative Kulik
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H441>

- Creates a board within the Department of Agricultural Resources consisting of farmers, local humane organizations, veterinary organizations and relevant state agencies.
- The board will be charged with ensuring livestock is treated humanely and will be given the ability to create relevant regulations, guidance, etc.

H3321 – “An Act Relative to Farm Training in Massachusetts” - Representative Hill
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H3321>

This bill was filed with the joint effort of the Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions Board of Directors and Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation

- The bill provides a tax credit for farms who hire students that are participating in an agricultural program or attending an agricultural school as paid interns or as part of a training program.
- This is an opportunity for students involved in programs like Future Farmers of America to build on farm experiences with possible school credits and earn a pay check.
- This is an opportunity for schools to partner with farmers to extend or create on farm educational programs.
- Farmers cannot take in unpaid volunteers to learn about agriculture due to labor laws, while many nonprofits are able to do so, presenting their version of agriculture.
- **This is an opportunity for farmers to invest their knowledge into the next generation of agriculture with a paid work program for youth.**

H2715 – “An Act Establishing an Agricultural Tourism Study Commission” - Representative Kulik
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H2715>

- **Agritourism is a growing business in Massachusetts**, but is running up against conflicts with local zoning, agricultural preservation restrictions, etc.
- This bill creates a Commission to explore how to appropriately support and expand this growing sector.

H2114 - “An Act to Ensure Appropriate Regulation of Piggeries” - Representative Dykema
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H2114>

- Presently municipalities can regulate or even ban piggeries with any cause
- This bill would require regulations to be based on guidance from appropriate state or federal agencies, and would prevent the banning of piggeries without supported justification.
- Pigs will eat what consumers will not and reduce on farm waste, while providing local meat options.

H2465 – “An Act Relative to Agricultural Commission Input on Board of Health Regulations” – Representative Kulik <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H2465>

MAAC also worked very closely with MFBF for HD 2574 – An Act Relative to Agricultural Commission Input on Boards of Health, in an attempt to work with our local Boards of Health.

- Boards of Health (BOHs) have very broad authority and are often put in the position of regulating both commercial and non-commercial farming activities. Unfortunately, there is typically very little knowledge of agriculture on BOHs and the resulting regulation are inappropriate or too restrictive.
- This bill would require that Agricultural Commission be given 45 days to review BOH regulations impacting agriculture and make recommendations to the BOH. More than half the municipalities in the Commonwealth have created Agricultural Commissions at Town Meeting.