



MASSACHUSETTS FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, INC.

"The Voice of Agriculture"

466 Chestnut St, Ashland, MA 01721 • Phone: 508.881.4766 • Fax: 508.881.4768 • Email: info@mfbf.net • www.mfbf.net

January 19, 2010

To: Joint Committee on Public Health
RE: HB 3477

On behalf of the 6500 members of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation and their families, I am writing in strong support of HB 3477. While we would have liked to have provided verbal testimony on this bill, the late notice combined with the bad weather and special election made this impossible.

The agricultural community benefits significantly from public health efforts relative to food safety and facility operations. Not only do the protections offered by public health agencies protect the health and safety of our customers, but they also protect the integrity and reputation of our products and operations. We recognize these benefits and are not opposed to reasonable regulation.

Unfortunately, there have been an increasing number of Board of Health actions in Massachusetts which have not been reasonable and have not been developed or implemented with knowledge of agriculture. Unreasonable Board of Health regulation has been a hindrance to the growth and development of agriculture. This has implications not only for business development (a critical issue given today's economy), but also for public health. Fresh, local produce offers numerous health benefits and the proliferation of farmers markets has benefited many communities where such produce has not been readily available. As testament to this, I would point to the Massachusetts Public Health Association's Act Fresh program, which promotes local agriculture as a *public health* initiative.

HB 3477 essentially dictates that Boards of Health may not *unreasonably* regulate agricultural activities. It in no way prohibits reasonable or necessary regulation. The language closely mirrors that of MGL 40a Section 3, which prohibits unreasonable zoning regulation of agriculture. MGL 40a Section 3 has been in place for a number of years. It has provided significant relief to the agricultural community without hindering the ability of zoning boards to effectively and reasonably regulate agricultural activities. Similar benefits would undoubtedly result from the passage of HB 3477.

The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation strongly urges the Joint Committee on Public Health to report favorably on HB 3477.

Contact:

Brad Mitchell, MA Farm Bureau Federation
Director of Government Relations
brad@mfbf.net, 508.881.4766