

LEGISLATIVE POLICIES
adopted by the
MASSACHUSETTS STATE GRANGE
2010

www.massgrange.org

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LETTER TO LEGISLATORS

Dear Legislator,

The Massachusetts State Grange is a non-profit fraternal organization with approximately 2300 members throughout the Commonwealth. Our organization was founded on agricultural issues, however we have concerns in other areas such as community service, health, education, transportation infrastructure, and other issues of importance toward the goal of maintaining the quality of life in ecologically sustainable communities.

This booklet contains our policies on current social, political and economic issues affecting our state and nation. These policies were voted on by the delegates beginning at our 2006 annual convention, and are updated each year as additional policies are adopted.

We are providing you with a copy of these policies for your reference. If you have any questions, please contact the Massachusetts State Grange Legislative Director:

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 16 Roy Avenue
 Holliston, MA 01746-1722
 508-429-5458
 legislation@massgrange.org

LETTER TO GRANGE MEMBERS

Dear Grange Member,

This booklet contains the legislative policies adopted at the Annual Sessions of the Massachusetts State Grange since 2006. Your Grange can submit recommendations for future policies to be added to this booklet or recommend amendments to current policies by submitting them in resolution form to the State Secretary by August 1, 2010.

When submitting resolutions, be sure that the last paragraph begins "RESOLVED that the Massachusetts State Grange support..." or "RESOLVED that the Massachusetts State Grange oppose..."

If you have any questions regarding resolution writing, please contact the State Grange Secretary: Randall Vaill, Jr.
1018 Hillside Drive
Palmer, MA 01069-2178
413-284-1135
secretary@massgrange.org

AGRICULTURE

PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURE

It is the policy of the Massachusetts State Grange to work with other agricultural organizations to promote good agriculture, a safe environment, and a rural character of which all of the citizens of Massachusetts can be proud. This should be accomplished through legislative actions/policies, education of both agricultural professionals and the general public, and the protection of our state's precious farm and forest lands.

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports local sustainable agriculture and encourages the development of programs to assist people in developing their ability to grow and sell food produce with minimal government regulations.

ENCOURAGE AND DEVELOP NEW FARMERS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports cooperative extension service, Community Involved Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Heifer International and other similar agencies and encourage them to implement existing programs for the education of adults similar to the existing 4-H youth programs.

AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONS

We support the formation of the Agricultural Commissions at town levels. This gives the Agricultural community a voice on town issues which may affect local agriculture. This also provides a support system for farmers dealing with issues and perceptions of the general public. We also encourage these communities to pass the Right To Farm By-Law to make people aware of the fact that they live in an agricultural community and make them aware of the issues connected with agriculture.

DAIRY

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the concept of the Northeast Dairy Compact where the premium raised through the sale of milk in the Northeast and distributed among the farmers in the Northeast, the MILC program on a national level where the milk price is set according to the Boston zone price and a percentage of the difference between that and \$16.94 is paid to farmers from the government, the CWT (Cooperatives Working Together) where members pay through a milk check deduction (now at \$.10/ hundred) to support a farmer funded whole herd buy out, a herd size reduction, or exports of dairy subsidies, and/or any other program on a state level that would add to a dairy farmers income during a period of low prices.

APR PROGRAM

Access to usable, reasonably priced land being essential to the continuation of a viable agricultural base in this state, the Massachusetts State Grange supports the continuation of the APR program. Foremost is the need for fair treatment of the farmers already enrolled in the program, no retroactive changes to the agreements already made. The State Grange supports the need to keep prices of farmlands accessible to those actively involved in farming as opposed to the creation of large gentlemen farms. Key to any Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program is the need to protect private property rights especially the right to restrict access to properties actively used for agricultural purposes.

NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the important movement toward a National Identification program with a preference given to Breed Associations who meet certain criteria to maintain the registry.

IMPORTANCE OF FAIRS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports and understands the cultural and financial importance of fairs in Massachusetts. Fairs educate the general public on the values inherent in the agricultural lifestyle in an ever increasing urban environment, and introduces them to the many and varied animals, fruits, vegetables and other farm products raised by farmers. We also recognize the financial opportunities that fairs provide by providing a place for people involved in agriculture a place to exhibit, advertise, and possibly merchandise their products. Fairgrounds provide and maintain open space at no cost to the towns where they are located.

EXHIBITION OF LIVESTOCK

The Massachusetts State Grange opposes any legislation restricting the exhibition of livestock at Fairs.

FAIR FUNDING

The Massachusetts State Grange requests the full restoration to the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture for the payment of the premiums to the exhibitors at all Adult and Youth Fairs in the Commonwealth.

MINIMUM WAGE FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

The Massachusetts State Grange would like to go on record to urge the Massachusetts State Legislature to keep the minimum wage for agricultural workers under the age of 18, at its current level of \$6.75 an hour. We are losing farms each year. Millions of dollars are spent on preserving farmland. Keeping the minimum wage would help keep the farms operative.

GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports a moratorium on the further growing of genetically engineered crops within the Commonwealth until such time as there is credible and scientific evidence that these products are not harmful to our health or our environment.

THEFT FROM FARMS AND FARM STANDS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports strengthening the penalties for stealing produce from farms stands or other farming, or pick-your-own operations to be equivalent to stealing from any other store or retail location thus allowing prosecution for any amount or value of stolen merchandise.

EDUCATION

AID TO SCHOOLS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports increasing State Aid to rural school districts to improve the quality of education in these rural communities.

ENVIRONMENT

ENERGY CONSERVATION

The Massachusetts State Grange supports energy conservation and improved energy efficiency within the state infrastructure.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RESOURCES

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the development and implementation of alternative energy resources within our state, such as biomass, solar, pumped storage, and wind generated energy.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the reformation of the Endangered Species Act into a more regionally based policy. There is a need to reform the Act as it is currently too restrictive and not locally based. There needs to be an element of common sense added to the regulatory policy. The burden of proof needs to be shifted to the regulatory agency to prove a species actually resides on the property. This is especially important in an era of eco-terrorism, where species have been planted on properties to stop development.

PESTICIDE USE

The Massachusetts State Grange continues to support the UMASS Pesticide education program to educate applicators in Massachusetts. We also encourage the UMASS Cooperative Extension to educate the general public how to properly apply fertilizer and pesticides to their own lawns and gardens.

HEALTH, INSURANCE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

FOSTER CARE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports increased funding of the Department of Children and Families to provide the best care possible for our children in need of support.

SENIOR CARE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports a change in the laws allowing patients in long term care to keep an account allotment of \$100 per month for personal needs such as hair care, etc.

OVER THE COUNTER DRUGS

The Massachusetts State Grange go on record as supporting an effort to have drug companies use larger, bold print on labels and inserts

RIGHTS OF DEAF/HARD OF HEARING PERSONS

The Massachusetts State Grange strongly supports legislation to protect the rights of deaf and hard of hearing persons. The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation which aids in the betterment of the lives of the deaf and hard of hearing.

EDUCATION OF DEAF/HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN

The Massachusetts State Grange favors an educational environment for deaf and hard of hearing children where their unique communication mode is respected, used, and developed to an appropriate level of proficiency. Placement in this environment should be best suited to the child's individual needs, which include, but are not limited to, social, emotional, cultural needs, age, hearing loss, academic level, modes of communication, styles of learning, motivational level, and family support.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that would require all health insurance companies to cover hearing screening, testing, surgery, and hearing aids, including mandatory regular hearing screening and hearing aids for children.

EMPLOYER PROVIDED LACTATION AREA

The Massachusetts State Grange supports that all employers be encouraged to provide a lactation area for new mothers to express their milk.

EDUCATION OF EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

The Massachusetts State Grange favors the education of persons relating to the Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) in sign language and deaf culture; especially those working in areas highly populated with deaf people.

ANTI-DRUG POLICY

The Massachusetts State Grange supports testing for drug and alcohol abuse in the work place but especially those who operate mobile equipment of all types. The Massachusetts State Grange supports counseling and rehab without prejudice for the first offence. The second offence should be permanent loss of license to operate.

LAND USE AND PROPERTY INSURANCE

EMINENT DOMAIN LAWS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the revision of the eminent domain laws within this state, so as to provide greater protection for private property rights especially a mandatory requirement to look for other potential non-agricultural properties before taking an active agricultural property. If at all possible the splitting in two of agricultural properties should be considered only as a last resort. The Grange further supports changes to the definition of public purpose in light of the US Supreme Court Ruling.

OPEN SPACE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports increased aid to farmers and other open space owners to help maintain the open vistas that make Massachusetts a tourist attraction and provides its citizens with fresh produce and homegrown products.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the formation of Community Land Trusts, funding a 50/50 partnership with the state, for the purposes of purchasing farmland, protecting it from housing development, and available through lease to be farmed.

WATER AND YOUR RIGHTS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports property owner rights including the ability to draw as much water as needed to support the property operation, be it a farm or a business.

EDUCATION OF PROPERTY ASSESSORS

The Chapter 61,61A and 61B assessment programs are important tools to keep the taxation of farmlands in line with their economic value. The Massachusetts State Grange is supportive of educational programs instituted by the Department of Revenue to bring all town assessors up to date with the farmland values and how to apply them. The goal being to fairly enforce the law in all towns across the state, this is especially important where many farms straddle town lines.

BASIC PROPERTY INSURANCE POLICY

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation requiring insurance companies in Massachusetts to offer a Basic Form insurance policy in all territories at a reduced cost.

WIND EXCLUSION FROM PROPERTY INSURANCE

The Massachusetts State Grange encourages the Massachusetts Division of Insurance to allow insurance companies to offer a property insurance policy with a wind exclusion to allow property owners in wind prone areas another means to reduce their costs.

“WIND POOL” PROPERTY INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the establishment of a “Wind Pool” insurance program in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to make insurance more available in costal areas.

TAXATION

TAXES

The Massachusetts State Grange supports fair taxation of all residents to support local and state governments. We oppose the continued diversion of taxes into the Boston tunnel system.

FUEL EFFICIENCY TAX CREDITS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports substantial tax credits for investments made in alternative renewable energy resources and tax credits for the installation of devices with increased energy efficiency.

HEARING AID ASSISTANCE TAX CREDIT ACT

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the Hearing Aid Tax Credit (H.R. 2329 and S. 1410) which would provide a \$500 tax credit per hearing aid, available once every 5 years for dependents and for those aged 55 and older.

TRANSPORTATION

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

The Massachusetts State Grange supports improved highway maintenance, properly painted lines, and well-marked exits on our highways with separate deceleration lanes and acceleration lanes for entry.

TRANSPORTATION TRUST FUND

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the establishment of one unified national transportation infrastructure trust fund and that any levies imposed to fund this trust be entirely dedicated to the country's infrastructure.

DRIVING AGE

The Massachusetts State Grange continues to support the current driver's license age of 16 1/2. Our rural members need the ability to transport themselves to work and to operate farm machinery on our roads.

PEDICABS

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislative action to require Pedicabs to have the same type of illumination as other non-motorized passenger carrying conveyances.

MISCELLANEOUS

CASINO GAMBLING

The Massachusetts State Grange opposes casino gambling in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

EQUAL TREATMENT FOR ALL SPOUSES

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the recognition of all legal marriages between two people regardless of gender and supports legislative efforts within the United State Government and its agencies to recognize all legal marriages and adopt fair and legal benefits distribution to all spouses regardless of gender.