

# Massachusetts State Grange Legislative Policy Manual 2023



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“The Massachusetts State Grange brings people together to build stronger communities by encouraging agriculture and environmental sustainability, community service and fostering future leaders.”



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GRANGE, VISIT [WWW.MASSGRANGE.ORG](http://WWW.MASSGRANGE.ORG)**

## **LETTER TO LEGISLATORS**

Dear Legislator,

The Massachusetts State Grange is a non-profit fraternal organization with approximately 2,000 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 at our 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 one of the following officials of the Massachusetts State Grange:

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## **LETTER TO GRANGE MEMBERS**

Dear Grange Member,

This booklet contains the legislative policies adopted at the Annual Sessions of the Massachusetts State Grange. It also contains a list of the elected officials at the state level. This has been included to encourage you to contact them about policies in our book. Find your local Representative or Senator and call their office, send an email or letter about policies in our book you feel strongly about. They work in Boston to represent us and changes can only happen when people like you speak up and let your voice be heard. State Grange policies only become a reality when Grange members use their voices together.

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, 2023.

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...” For more information, please see page 16.

If you have any questions regarding resolution writing, please contact the Legislative Director or State Grange Secretary:

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# **LEGISLATIVE PRINCIPLES of the MASSACHUSETTS STATE GRANGE**

The delegates of the Massachusetts State Grange at the 144<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Massachusetts State Grange in 2016 adopted the following legislative principles. These principles guide all of our legislative activities and provide a clear look at for what our organization stands.

- 1. NON-PARTISANSHIP**
- 2. SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FOOD AND FARMERS**
- 3. SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION**
- 4. PROMOTE CIVIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP**
- 6. SUPPORT FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES**

If you have any questions regarding the legislative principles, please contact the Legislative Director.

# **LEGISLATIVE POLICIES**

## **adopted by the**

# **MASSACHUSETTS STATE GRANGE**

### **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 the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension, Community Involved Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Heifer International, and other agriculturally-based groups and encourages them to implement existing programs for the education of adults similar to the existing 4-H Youth Programs.

#### **REDEFINITION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports a Massachusetts constitutional amendment to reduce the 5 or more acreage necessary to zone property of agricultural land to 2 acres for municipalities of 50,000 people or less and 1/4 acre for municipalities of 50,000 or more.

#### **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.

### **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. Key to any Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program is the need to protect private property rights especially the right to restrict access

### **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 Agricultural Resources for the payment of the premiums to the exhibitors at all Adult and Youth Fairs in the Commonwealth.

### **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.

### **MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTION**

The Massachusetts State Granges supports the passage of laws that would allow for additional USDA inspected slaughter and processing facilities to be built in



the Commonwealth. The current movement for local food demands greater access to local meat and poultry.

### **BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the expansion of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture to include greater regional representation.

### **REGULATIONS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that creates a system of checks and balances on local Board of Health regulations on agriculture. Whenever possible, agriculture related regulations should be reviewed by the local Agricultural Commission or, if there is not one in the municipality, the Department of Agricultural Resources to ensure they will not adversely affect farmers.

### **ANIMAL WELL BEING**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports common sense regulation on the treatment of animals, understanding that when farmers are using approved best practices animals are treated well. Livestock represent the farmers livelihood, therefore keeping their animals healthy is a clear priority.

### **DAIRY**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports fair price supports for milk production. It is crucial to maintain these supports to shelter the income of farmers during periods of low milk prices. We support programs like MILC that work to achieve this goal and support the continuation of the program.

### **COMMUNITY GARDENS**

The Massachusetts State Grange encourages each municipality to provide free plots of land for community gardens and provide assistance in developing these plots.

### **AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the University of Massachusetts and the UMass Extension Service, and urges the legislature to continue funding the programs at adequate levels.

### **OTHER AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the work of the 4-H, Future Farmers of American (FFA), Agriculture in the Classroom, and the agricultural high schools in promoting and educating young people about the importance of agriculture.

## **FARMERS MARKETS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the creation and maintenance of Farmer's Markets throughout the State. Access to customers is crucial for farm profits and the ability of consumers to purchase fresh food items ensure that local dollars are spent in the community.

## **FOOD LABELING**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation requiring labeling imported food as to the country of origin. We encourage products grown in Massachusetts to bear the label "Grown in Massachusetts" and carry the "Commonwealth Quality" seal.

## **SEED BANKS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the creation of seed banks to preserve and protect plant genetics for future generations. Special concern should be placed in ensuring that locally adapted plants and contained in the seed banks.

## **RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT WE EAT**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that require food products, including transgenic seeds, plant parts, and derivatives, to be labeled as containing GMOs for the purpose of consumer information.

## **OPPOSITION TO NATURAL GAS PIPELINE**

The Massachusetts State Grange opposes any pipeline that would travel through farmlands, conservation or open lands.

## **PESTICIDE USE AND BEES**

The Massachusetts State Grange support legislation to limit the sale and use of Neonicotinoids.

## **GLYSOPHATES**

The Massachusetts State Grange advocate for the education of consumers and the agricultural community of the potential adverse effects of Glyphosate in our food. We further encourage the agricultural community to use farm practices that will eliminate the use of drying agents, and thereby eliminate the troubling amounts of residual Glyphosate in our food.

## **ASSISTING CROP POLLINATORS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports laws requiring that all new solar panels installation be raised in a manner to accommodate crops essential to pollinators.

## **REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURAL STANDARDS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the passage of policies that will encourage farmers to implement practices that follow regenerative agriculture standards

## **BUILDINGS AND PROPERTIES**

### **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 Kelo City v. City of New London.

### **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 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.

## **COMMUNITY INTERESTS**

### **AWARDING OF ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the adoption of a plan allocating electoral votes based on the proportion of popular vote.

### **LIMITING INFLUENCE ON ELECTIONS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the ratification of a constitutional amendment authorizing Congress to pass legislation limiting and/or banning independent expenditure-only committees and supports the convening of a Constitutional Convention to propose such an amendment should Congress fail to act. The Massachusetts State Grange opposes a Constitutional Amendment or legislation which would limit spending on issue-only advocacy by corporations, unions or other organizations.

### **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.

### **PROTECTING PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports a change in the current U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' policy of using social security numbers as the Medicare claim numbers.

### **STEALING FROM CEMETERIES AND WAR MEMORIALS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that any pawn shop, antique dealer and recycling facility be fined not less than \$500 for receiving property stolen from cemeteries and war memorials.

### **RURAL BROADBAND**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the expansion of broadband internet access to all people whether they live in urban or rural areas.

### **OPEN ACCESS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports open access to all the state parks, forests, and watershed protection areas for all non-motorized recreational activities.

## **FCC LIFELINE PROGRAM FOR LOW INCOME CONSUMERS**

The Massachusetts State Grange oppose measures that would limit or reduce the Lifeline Program

## **EDUCATION**

### **AID TO SCHOOLS**

The Massachusetts State Grange support changes in the Chapter 70 educational funding formula to provide greater support to rural school districts and additional direct, per-pupil aid to rural school districts to offset the unique costs rural districts face The Massachusetts State Grange support full reimbursement for transportation costs for regional school districts as promised in Chapter 71, Section 16C of the Massachusetts General Laws

### **EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the expansion of agricultural education in secondary schools.

### **FARM TO SCHOOL**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports local farm to school lunch programs to ensure that children have ample fresh local food in their diets.

### **AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the work of Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom in educating teachers in ways to integrate agriculture into the curriculum.

### **GRANGE HISTORY**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports teaching the accomplishments and contributions of the Grange when presenting the history of our country.

### **MILK VENDING MACHINES IN SCHOOLS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the addition of milk vending machines to all schools in the Commonwealth. Easy access to milk for all students is crucial for their nutritional well-being.

## **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, wind generated energy, and methane digesters.

### **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.

### **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.

### **SAFE DISPOSAL OF “HAZ MAT” LIGHT BULBS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that businesses selling incandescent and fluorescent light bulbs be required to take aforementioned light bulbs back and be responsible for the safe disposal of them.

### **BOTTLE REDEMPTION**

The Massachusetts State Grange encourages the state legislature to enact a law requiring a five cent deposit on all individual sized drink containers

### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Massachusetts State Grange believes that climate change is a high level issue and steps must be taken to thwart the effects and causes of this disastrous problem.

### **FOSSIL FUEL EMISSIONS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports and promote energy efficiency and encourages sustainable and cost-effective solutions to lower fossil fuel emissions in the US and around the world.

## **HEALTH 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 supports 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 encourages all employers 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.

### **FIGHTING HUNGER**

The Massachusetts State Grange encourages the Massachusetts State Legislature to better educate local businesses of the need to distribute excess food product to local shelters and soup kitchens. We further encourage members of Congress to make the necessary wording changes to Section 3 part K of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to allow for hot prepared foods that can benefit a person's nutrition to be purchased with SNAP benefits and restrict such items that don't add nutritional value to a person's diet.

### **HOMELESS YOUTH**

The Massachusetts State Grange requests elected officials at all levels to seek solutions to ongoing problems facing homeless youth including making more resources available both day and night so they may become self-sufficient, independent, gain self-esteem and thus become productive individuals.

### **AGE FOR LEGALIZED RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA USE**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation to change the legal age of consumption for legalized recreational marijuana to 25 years old.

## **INSURANCE**

### **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 and affordable in coastal areas.

## **TAXATION**

### **TAXATION**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports fair taxation of all residents to support local and state governments.

### **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 passage of a Hearing Aid Tax Credit which would provide a \$500 tax credit per hearing aid, available once every 5 years for dependents and for those aged 55 and older.

### **LEGISLATOR TAX DEDUCTIONS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the filing of legislation with the United State Congress that would amend the 1981 federal tax law to state that legislators be eligible for a deduction on their federal tax only on the days they actually travel to the State House.

### **ESTATE TAX**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports amending current law to enact a 5 million dollar exemption and a 35% maximum estate tax rate.

### **FARMER TAX CREDIT**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the current 3% tax credit on incorporated farm and urges the legislature to expand this tax credit to unincorporated farms.

## **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.

### **DRIVING AGE**

The Massachusetts State Grange continues to support the current driver's license age of 16 1/2.

### **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.

### **TEXTING WHILE DRIVING**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the law that places restrictions on texting while driving.

### **PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES WHILE DRIVING**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports a change to laws regarding the use of personal electronic devices while driving to include drivers of any age and to institute a proper fine for all violators.

### **RIGHT TO REPAIR**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports legislation that requires automotive manufactures to make available all repair information to all repair shops.

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports the further expansion of public transportation to rural areas. These services provide a vital link between rural and urban areas.

### **TRAFFIC DETAILS**

The Massachusetts State Grange supports all details requiring lane closures or traffic stoppage that the personnel, including law enforcement, directing traffic use hand held slow/stop signs that are more visible than the human hand.

## WRITING RESOLUTIONS

The Grange has a long history rooted in member participation in our policy development through our resolution process. Each Granger is tasked with addressing voids and surpluses in our policy and can propose to implement these changes by offering amendments to your local and State Granges. Drafting resolutions may seem like a daunting task at first, but if you follow three simple steps listed below, you will soon be on your way to writing a clear and effective resolution.

First, it is important to know the anatomy of a resolution. There are three main parts: the **Title**, the body or **Whereas** section, and the conclusion or **Resolved** section.

1. The Title should clearly state the issue to be addressed. For example, if you are drafting a measure to deregulate the postal service, your title should be something along the lines of:

**Example:**

**Deregulation of the Postal Service** rather than just Postal Service

2. The Whereas section is where you get to make your argument for why this resolution is necessary. This section does not become policy but explains to other Grangers why the issue is important and provides details, data, and other reference material so they can be better educated on voting for the issue.

**Example:**

**Whereas, the federal government imposes unreasonable regulations and mandates on the U.S. Postal Service but no longer funds any of the organization's operating costs; and**

**Whereas, the U.S. Postal Service will continue to be forced to close local post offices and reduce services under such a business model; and**

**Whereas, the U.S. Postal Service could survive and compete if allowed to create its own business model free of Congressional oversight; and**

**Whereas, the National Grange has a rich tradition in helping to ensure the rural free delivery of mail; be it**

3. The Resolved section must be a complete sentence which sums up what your resolution is trying to achieve and can stand alone without any of the supporting information.

**Example:**

**Resolved, that the National Grange support legislation that creates an autonomous U.S. Postal Service which can set its own operating procedures and business model without the undue regulation of the federal government.**

### **Writing Resolutions that Stand the Test of Time**

In closing, make sure your resolution can stand the test of time. A good deal of Grange policy dates back 75 years or more and continues to be relevant because the ideals and concepts hold true today. However, we also have policy that is out-of-date and relates to issues that have been dealt with on the local and congressional levels. If you have a resolution that deals with an issue that is connected to a current event or particular bill, your resolution may be included in the committee of jurisdiction's policy statement for that year, rather than passed as a resolution. Rest assured that this is still very important and is actually a better home for your resolution. Good luck and happy policymaking!