

# The Republican.

## Food needs should be addressed in budget: Editorial

### The Republican Editorials

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The Massachusetts Legislature will consider a \$2.5 million line item in its fiscal 2016 budget to fund the Massachusetts Food Trust, which will help address food needs for communities that include Springfield.

This is a line item that should pass. The expenditure is not so much a cost but an investment in healthier food choices for people who in many cases are being denied access to those options.

An example is Springfield's Mason Square, where the absence of an anchor grocery store requires residents to either shop for groceries outside their neighborhood and often outside the city – often by bus – and limits their choices, especially regarding access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Various agencies continue working to bring a major grocery store to Mason Square. Public financing has encouraged private investment in states such as New York and Pennsylvania, where every dollar of state funding has been repaid with \$9-15 of private funding, according to the Massachusetts Public Health Association.

Public support of better food sources, particularly in urban neighborhoods, brings a payback of jobs and keeps money from food budgets within the city. Residents with low to moderate incomes still spend money on food, the difference being that in their cases, their food budget represents a higher percentage of their overall spending than is found in households with higher incomes.

But the bottom line is, they still eat they still purchase food. Without access to wider food choices and healthier produce in particular, they often compromise the quality of that food, which leads to illness and health care costs that hands the broader society a medical bill to pay.

Doesn't it make more sense to invest the money in healthier eating as opposed to medical care that results from poor diet?

The budget request is not insignificant at a time of tight money, but it is reasonable. It creates a basis for a public-private partnership that will encourage food distributors and large grocery stores to invest in the cities – not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's good business.

Many local legislators have voiced support for the Massachusetts Food Trust. The need is most acute in Western Massachusetts, and especially in Springfield.

This would be public money well invested. State officials have a lot on their plates at budget time, but making sure the plates of residents have quality food is not an issue that should take much time. Its prompt passage would represent what good government, good business and good health practice is all about.

[http://www.masslive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/05/food\\_needs\\_should\\_be\\_addressed.html](http://www.masslive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/05/food_needs_should_be_addressed.html)