May 9, 2022

Dear Members of the West Tisbury Conservation Commission,

I urge you to withdraw your opposition to holding the West Tisbury Farmer’s Market (WTFM) at the Martha’s Vineyard Agricultural Society grounds on Panhandle Road. I write on behalf of Island Grown Initiative (IGI) and as a former MVAS Trustee and a current member.

Over the past 6 years, as Executive Director of IGI, I have worked closely with both the MVAS and WTFM to promote our agricultural, fishing and food communities. IGI secured a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to help the WTFM with its legal incorporation, with marketing promotion and with resources to help ensure a safe market during COVID. We do so because the WTFM is so critical to our farmers, fishermen, and food purveyors. I have personally hosted the MDAR Commissioner on his visits to Martha’s Vineyard and have shown him around the Fair, the WTFM, and many individual Farms. He and his team are impressed with the revival of the agricultural and food movement on the Island.

The Farmers Market originated with MVAS and is specifically included in the language of the Woods property restriction. This should be sufficient to continue the use of the grounds for this purpose if other local permitting is granted. The market may have grown since the signing of the restriction but so has the Island and the demand for local foods. Sales at the WTFM represent a significant source of revenue for our farmers and food producers. Your objection to non-agricultural vendors flies against standard operating procedures for Farmer’s Market’s around the country and the Commonwealth. Value added products have always been part of the market and continue to be important to bring in more customers and to help enterprising food and craft vendors.

I received the MDAR Commissioners newsletter last week which was promoting Farmer’s Markets around the Commonwealth and included a list of Market’s and the vendors they were seeking. That list included the following:

Pasta Chocolate Fibers
Pantry Products Ice Cream Condiments
Food Trucks Crafts & Textiles Soaps
Prepared Meals Fish Wine
Breads and baked goods Soup Value added products
Tea and coffee Pizza Beverages (other than coffee)

Frankly, the WTFM is more restrictive than Farmer’s markets elsewhere about vendor mix. From the beginning it has codified in their by-laws percentages that limit the non-agricultural product vendors. The WTFM managers today are preserving the ratios that were in place at the time that the restrictions for transferring the property to MVAS were made.

IGI has a track record of being strong advocates for conservation and protecting the lands and sea on which we all depend. We are leading the way on the Island regarding regenerative farming practices that will enrich our soils and help mitigate climate change. Noli Taylor our Senior Program Director is a founder of the Island Climate Action Network and is leading the charge on this week’s Climate Summit. We want to partner with the West Tisbury Conservation Commission on all these initiatives and the many threats to the Island’s survival. The WTFM is not a threat, but a vital opportunity to support our farmers, fisherman and food purveyors. The food renaissance is bringing more young people back to the Island. The WTFM is an essential marketplace for many of them; their own by-laws are sufficient to ensure a balance in the vendor mix.

I urge you to withdraw your objections and pave the way for the WTFM to open its season on the MVAS grounds.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Haag

Executive Director

Cc:

Lynne Whiting, Board Chair

Noli Taylor, Senior Program Director