

February 17, 2022

Martha's Vineyard Commission
P.O. Box 1447
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter concerns the Island Grown Farm Master Plan Phase 1 DRI. I would like to express my opposition to Island Grown Initiative's proposed construction of a new Education and Innovation Center for the simple reason that farmland should be used for farming.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities in our current food system: The supply chain disruptions and empty supermarket shelves show the folly in relying on food that is produced in far-away places for our sustenance. In an uncertain future marked by climate chaos and political tensions, relinquishing our ability to produce food locally could be a dire mistake. To irreversibly lose even a small amount of farmable land on an island with limited land area and high demand for real estate could be a decision with tragic consequences.

As a former agricultural employee, I know firsthand the challenges that farmers face. Access to farmland is one of the biggest hurdles for new farmers; on the Vineyard, where much of the land has been lost to development and real estate prices are astronomical, this barrier is even more severe. It is my understanding that the structures in IGI's current proposal, along with future planned structures, will total over 12,000 square feet – this is over a quarter acre that will never be used to grow crops, raise livestock, or be leased to a local farmer in need of land (and the true acreage of lost farmland is likely greater when taking landscaped areas, parking, walkways and other features associated with the new structures into account).

Many of the commenters have expressed their appreciation for the benefits that Island Grown provides to the community, and there is no doubt in the value of their gleaning, composting, food equity and other initiatives. However, it is important to remember that these programs already exist in the absence of the proposed facility, and therefore do not depend on it for their continued existence. Furthermore, I'd like to offer a slightly different perspective that hasn't been considered: Any educational offerings that IGI provides that aim to increase understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of local food production are only valuable insofar as there is land on which to farm. Farming starts with the land, and the land should be given first priority.

The Farm Institute, Slough Farm, and Native Earth Teaching Farm already offer farm-based educational offerings. Aside from the potential duplication of effort, it seems like a wiser use of IGI's resources would be to partner with other organizations and use their existing facilities for educational programs rather than investing in an entirely new development.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sepanara
West Tisbury, MA