

3rd meeting of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (FPC)

Friday, November 4, 2011 - 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM Costa Fruit and Produce, Chelsea

In attendance:

Commissioner John Auerbach, MA Department of Public Health
Valerie Bassett, Massachusetts Public Health Association
Katie Bishop, Representative Kulik's office
Assistant Commissioner Stephanie Brown
Jeff Cole, Mass Farmers Market
Manny Costa, Costa Fruit and Produce
Katie Millet, Department of Education
Alex Rittershaus, Representative Ferguson's office
Hirak Shah, Legal Council, Senator Fargo's office
Commissioner Scott Soares, MA Department of Agricultural Resources

Legislative guest attendee: Representative Linda Dorcena Forry

Members not in attendance: Representatives from DEP, the Springfield Board of Health, Senator Knapik's office and Frank Carlson were not able to join the meeting due to storm related responsibilities. Secretary Bialecki's office was not represented.

Minutes from the last meeting, October 7, were reviewed and approved.

Commissioner Soares, FPC Chairman asked members for introductions and then thanked host Manny Costa, Costa Fruit and Produce, who gave an overview of his organization including their focus and support for local growers and environmental sustainability programs. They often step out of the traditional role of distributor to support local programs relating to schools and healthy choices. [View the presentation here.](#)

Old Business included Valerie Bassett who shared an overview of "**Closing the Grocery Gap in Massachusetts**," prepared by the Food Trust as part of a review of increasing fruits and vegetable consumption through access to supermarkets. A fund has been created to include farmers' markets and small stores in the discussion. Massachusetts has fewer supermarkets per capita than most states. Draft recommendations have been developed and will be discussed at an upcoming meeting. The funds will be available to a range of healthy food outlets. There is a plan to encourage healthy food retailers to participate in WIC and SNAP. MPHA is working with partners to broadly increase awareness of the recommendations. The final recommendations will be released in early 2012. There will be discussions on how to collaborate with the FPC. [View the presentation here.](#)

A discussion about the Food Trust report on grocery access followed. Commissioner Auerbach: Can you talk about the financing initiative? How have they made that happen, was it with state and/or private funding and how much? Valerie Bassett: Pennsylvania passed a \$30 million bond bill that was matched by private funders, before the current fiscal situation. There was some foundation and private development money as well. New York just dedicated new dollars to this. The Food Trust site has recommendations from different states. California is doing it primarily through foundation funds. There are also several foundations in Massachusetts that are part of the discussions.

Commissioner Auerbach: Did they give grants or low interest loans? Valerie Bassett: They work with a community redevelopment institution to manage a grant process with nonprofit and profit partners. Businesses can respond to the grant. Financing vehicles, cash and technical assistance to help develop new and improve existing facilities is available.

Commissioner Soares: What's the definition of a market? Valerie Bassett: This is being discussed to make it broadly inclusive. While the focus of the Food Trust is supermarkets, there could be a range of places. Commissioner Soares: Are the recommendations at a stage where the Grocery Task Force is looking for feedback? Valerie Bassett: Definitely. Part of why I'm here is to get feedback. Letters are welcome. MPHA will be sending out a link with a survey monkey to get feedback.

Assistant Commissioner Brown: We want all of our clients to have as much choice as possible, but many don't sell healthy foods. The big supermarkets have the largest variety of healthy foods. Will the supermarkets work to promote healthy foods? What's the opportunity for messaging at the store? Valerie Bassett: The scope of the Task Force is narrow and focused on getting out the recommendations, but along the way, engaging supermarkets and developers for education and to include some language around encouraging public health experts to work with supermarkets is being discussed, from encouragement to requirement.

Commissioner Soares: This speaks to the FPC charge to make recommendations. The FPC could provide review and comments to reflect the broader interests of this group. Commissioner Auerbach: If there is model language from other communities for action steps, it would be helpful. The recommendations are general and we need a concrete way to move forward. Is there a legislative or policy action that could help us determine how to act? Valerie Bassett: I will talk with the Food Trust. I think there have been stages with legislative issues or an executive order.

Commissioner Soares: I would be curious to know what have been the benefit and challenges for the various components of the broader food system. Fisheries for example, haven't been part of the discussion. Valerie Bassett: I will check the deadline for the final draft and the opportunity to respond. An electronic copy will be circulated for FPC comments and can be included in the next FPC agenda.

Manny Costa: How do you judge how it is successful? Are there specific steps that make it work? Valerie Bassett: People may have less chronic disease with more access to healthy foods. But the main measure of success is 130 new markets – access is the first step in measuring success. Other byproducts/successes are related to it being a health initiative, so it is increasing grocery store promotion of healthy food and community partnerships. It has changed the relationship of the markets with the communities.

Katie Millet: Does the Food Trust have any info on the SNAP use in the 130 new markets? Jeff Cole: Are you recommending a report on SNAP use in the 130 markets in produce or in just SNAP use? Assistant Commissioner Brown: SNAP info on produce probably isn't available. Jeff: Supermarkets using bar codes probably know but may be reluctant to share that info. Just because SNAP increases doesn't mean that it is healthy food. Commissioner Auerbach: There is established data that the more you stores within a one mile radius of where people live, the more you can make a correlation that there is more produce consumption. You can assume that the mere existence of a store with produce that didn't have it before may have a positive effect.

A Farm to Cafeteria presentation was shared by Kelly Erwin, Farm to School Program Manager. Farm to School supports universal access and goes across all income levels. Local food programs in schools show more consumption of healthy foods. Having children visit farms increases their produce consumption. About 2/3 of the districts in the state preferentially buy local. About 110 farms sell directly, plus several distributors sell local produce. We work with those that are new as well as those that are already working to have more, as well as a focus on distribution and processing. As we look ahead, we may talk more about local less (Massachusetts) and regional more (New England). We want to support agriculture in Massachusetts and to support a regional food system. The School Lunch Program provides free and reduced lunch programs and free food with many requirements for documentation. Commodity food products are also available to public schools to incorporate into their menus. School food is not in the budget. The average price for a school lunch is about \$2.90. Massachusetts agriculture offers many opportunities for school foodservice. [Information about the Massachusetts Farm to School Program is available here.](#)

A Farm to School discussion followed. Jeff Cole: It costs a lot to be a farmer in MA – the land costs are high. Direct marketing is critical to the survival of Massachusetts growers. So, very few of our farms are doing wholesale though there is a huge demand. Only about 20% of MA growers sell wholesale and even then, are often doing both. We need more acreage in wholesale production. We've succeeded in selling the idea to schools but need more products.

Kelly Erwin: There will be a statewide farm to school convention on March 15th and we will announce the launch of a farm to school network for all organizations involved. It is a myth that locally grown produce is more expensive. There is a state law that was passed with critical support from MHOA that allows a school district to purchase less than \$25,000 per contract without going out to bid, in addition to the regular foodservice contract. College and state agencies are supposed to preferentially buy local and pay 10% more. Some towns are passing bylaws preferring local foods – often passed by local agricultural commissions.

Commissioner Auerbach: What about schools without kitchens – is there information available? Katie Millet: We don't have that information. When we gather information next year we will ask more questions. Commissioner Auerbach: The school can buy direct from the farmer or through a distributor with a contract that has a clause requiring local produce. From a policy perspective we could have model contracts. Katie Millet: Most distributors are including local in their bid specifications.

Manny Costa: The Boston Public Schools just added a local clause. There is a lot of money coming in to buy local, but we need more product. It might get to the point where growers can't afford to sell at wholesale. How are we going to get more local into the system – it might overheat pretty soon. There might be a breaking point sooner or later – the demand is voracious. Kelly Erwin: There are 1,000 acres of tobacco in western Massachusetts that could be available as well as state land. Commissioner Soares: One of the charges for the FPC is to support greater production. With 500,000 acres, even if we cultivated all the land, we would need to look at the regional food shed. Can you identify primary actions that the FPC could take to further Farm to School?

Kelly Erwin: Legislation has been introduced that awards .10 per meal if there are local ingredients. Another bill would extend credit. New farmer and land acquisition matchmaking could have a huge impact. We're working on season extension and processing. Long term, it would be great to serve local milk in our schools.

Jeff Cole: When demand outstrips supply, there is opportunity. Might there be a need for third party verification that local foods are actually local as provided by distributors and farm stands?

Manny Costa: It should be a transparent system through an invoice to an establishment. Commissioner Soares: Now is the time to talk about it and to have harmonization between certification programs. Kelly Erwin: Large foodservice management companies have their own certification programs and USDA has their own regulations. Manny Costa: I think local produce is getting a waiver right now but the worst thing to local agriculture would be an incident relating to foodborne illness. Anything we can do in the area of food safety is important. Commissioner Soares: There have been some discussions at the federal level to look at GAP harmonization. Manny Costa: The Tester Amendment exempts any farm under \$500,000 but it leaves a gap.

Kirsten Davis from the HSPH summarized information regarding: **“A look at best management practices for Farm to School.”** Peer states were reviewed, with the same growing zones. Procurement is typically the common component of the programs but with a smorgasbord of activities to cater to local needs. It is difficult to evaluate when it isn't clearly defined. Pennsylvania had the most rigorous evaluation with positive results. One of the outcomes is that evaluation programs need to be developed/implemented. There is not much data with good integrity, but a few studies have been published in peer review journals. It isn't reasonable to expect the farm to school program to lead to fundamental changes. It makes sense to focus on a process evaluation to track changes/successes over time or a series of case studies with a summary for continuity across schools. [View the presentation here.](#)

A best management practices for “Farm to School” discussion followed. Kelly Erwin: UC Davis did extensive plate waste studies to show success, which are difficult to execute. The Shape Up Somerville program which also included activity had BMIs which didn't grow as much as the control. Commissioner Soares: Maybe we didn't ask the right question. A better question has been to look at the program in relation to the first objective of this Council. Kirsten Davis: That would be much more workable. You can look at children's attitudes and behavior and program implementation to identify factors that are linked with better outcomes.

Kelly Erwin: After a year of the Kindergarten initiative, we showed that there was a big impact on the sensory components because we had fund for an evaluation. Commissioner Auerbach: The process evaluations are more realistic. We could generally survey kids. The hardest things to evaluate are with a real outcome in health, since there are so many different factors and that the outcome may take a long time to happen. We should focus on the more discreet questions. If schools are buying more produce can we measure that kids are eating more local food?

Kirsten Davis: Think about what information you need for policy advocacy. Create a standardized measurement and implement as broadly as possible. Make it basic and simple.

Jeff Cole: Do people feel better and are they happier - but would that data be relevant? Kirsten Davis: There are multiple stakeholders besides the schools, so the more you talk to the better. Assistant Commissioner Brown: Check on foodservice with other state meal providers. Kelly Erwin: Farms need to become official vendors to the state, to be proactive. Commissioner Auerbach: State food institutions need to follow state guidelines and the larger bidders respond. There may be a natural place for an existing evaluation program which asks questions about fruit and vegetables and could be compared with existing information. Katie Millet: USDA is looking at the USDA fresh fruit and vegetable programs and we're asking them to include information on local

purchases. Kirsten: Even strategies for fundamental barriers to collect the information should be addressed. Manny Costa: There might be a halo effect of local product on all produce.

Other business – matrix to be completed

Commissioner Soares: What are the next steps from the Farm to School discussions? A compilation and review of the matrix was suggested, since the Farm to School Program fits under several of the FPC legislative objectives. Commissioner Soares: What programs are you aware of in your agency or others, considering that there are many existing efforts? The matrix can be an appendix to the annual report. Jeff Cole: Could we put the matrix document on google docs for efficiency? We could use it a guide to find gaps. Commissioner Soares: Everyone has a different perspective, one of the challenges of this council, so the matrix would be a good way to include the information. Katie Millet suggested adding columns to the FPC matrix for evaluation notes as well as a column for comments.

Unfinished business

Commissioner Soares: There is **no news on the FPC food safety position**.

Draft bylaws were shared by Commissioner Soares which FPC member discussed. Jeff Cole: Our preference is to operate under Robert's Rules and the Bylaws are based along these lines. Valerie Bassett: What was the thinking behind having standing committees – for example a standing bylaw committee? Commissioner Soares: It mirrors Robert Rules, so a standing bylaw committee was included. If it is too formal, it could be changed to as deemed as necessary. It draws attention to special rules such as the structure to develop an Advisory Committee. Valerie Bassett requested a walk through on the bylaws in terms of anything special that the members should note. Commissioner Soares: Much of it comes from the legislation and is based on Robert's Rules. The officer's section identifies positions which are not included in the legislation; however we put these into place for the nominating committee. MDAR would also offer administrative support to the secretary position.

Commissioner Soares: The appointment of the advisory committee can be made based on the bylaws. Manny Costa: How does the Advisory Committee interact with the FPC? Commissioner Soares: That can be discussed and the next meeting can be focused on the role of the Advisory Committee. For example, the Advisory Committee could review the matrix and comment. The Advisory Committee could be very helpful and guide the decisions to make recommendations. Jeff Cole: We could have a two way communication and help with some specific work and also to advise us on the reality of what's going on in the greater world and identify other areas of focus. Manny Costa: They could be invited to future meeting. Commissioner Soares: The Advisory Committee members were spelled out in the bylaws according to the legislation, so the advisory committee will be at least 10 members. Jeff Cole: Would we have to go through the bylaws to add members? Commissioner Soares: No, it is included as a special rule.

Valerie Bassett made a motion to adopt the bylaws with the change of days to the first Friday of the month including the annual meeting and with the flexibility of changing from the first Friday of the month if needed, which was seconded by Manny Costa. Jeff Cole made editorial suggestions so that numbering of the articles would be clear.

Next Meeting Date Discussion/Announcements

The next meeting will be on December 9th because there is a conflict on December 2 with the Farm Bureau annual meeting.

April 3rd is Ag Day at the State House. Commissioner Soares invited FPC members to be on the planning committee for Ag Day at the State House.

Valerie Bassett promoted the upcoming meeting of the MHOA on November 18th.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:50. Public comments:

Representative Linda Dorcena Forry asked if food security could be discussed in terms of ethnic foods and diverse communities at a future meeting. Commissioner Soares: We haven't talked about it but we can include it on a future agenda. Valerie Bassett: We need to keep it on our radar screen. Commissioner Soares: UMASS has an ethnic crop program we could invite Frank Magnan to give a presentation. Jeff Cole: There are other growers who may be able to talk about the issue as well. Commissioner Soares: We should add a public comments section to the Bylaws.