

Minutes

MA Food Policy Council Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, June 11, 2014 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, Agnes Varis Campus Center, North Grafton

In attendance:

Kerry Bowie, Depart. of Environmental Protection

Justine Caggiano, Representative Ferguson's office'

Jeff Cole, Federation of MA Farmers Markets

Suzanne Condon, MA Depart. of Public Health for Commissioner Bartlett

Helen Caulton-Harris, Springfield Board of Health

Michael Hunter, Undersecretary, MA Dept. of Housing and Economic Development

Steve Kulik, State Representative

Kate Millet, Depart. Of Education

Frank Martinez-Nocito, MA Depart. Of Transitional Assistance

Vivian Morris, MA Public Health Association

Greg Watson, Commissioner, MA Depart. Of Agricultural Resources

The meeting began at 9:40 with a welcome from Dean Deborah Kochevar, who provided a snapshot of the Tufts Veterinary School, the only one in New England. She asked that Tufts Veterinary School be used as a resource as needed.

Minutes: A motion to approve the minutes was made by Frank Martinez-Nocito and seconded by Representative Steve Kulik. The Motion carried on unanimous voice vote.

Reports of Officers: Commissioner Watson shared some highlights from the 2012 Ag Census 2012. The farmland acreage has been maintained but there has been a dip in production and increase in pastureland that will be analyzed. MA hosted the annual meeting of the New England Association of State Departments of Agriculture. FSMA is a major concern of every state, not in its attention to food safety but in its published format of one size fits all approach. The MA Commonwealth Quality program is a unique program that uses peer reviewed Best Management Practices and is tailored to local production conditions. The program is being accepted by supermarkets. Discussions for a regional approach are underway. The Boston Public Market is moving forward with some 139 vendors who have interest for the 40 outside spaces as well as those on the inside. Applications will soon be under review. This market is unique because all products will be sourced locally. There will be an emphasis on MA but other New England states will also have vendors. Representative Kulik suggested that Massport be approached to gauge interest for a MA kiosk with a kickoff schedule at the same time at the Boston Public Market.

The Agriculture Board, in touring in MA learned that there is need to improve the farming infrastructure in MA. This can be included in our strategic food system. Commissioner Watson noted that every farmer talked to about food safety has expressed concerned about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and noted the question of how can MA expand existing food safety programs and be proactive with FSMA implementation while addressing local terms and conditions.

Urban Ag is gaining momentum . Including urban ag in the MA plan will make it unique. The Ag Census, completed every five years, does not include urban agriculture.

Healthcare without Harm was mentioned with their Healthy Hospitals Initiative, to get healthy food options in hospitals. Sustainable “local” food must be produced within 250 miles, according to their definition.

3. New Business:

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) status report – documentation to be sent in the near future.

MAPC has accomplished start up work and is building a solid foundation for the statewide food systems planning including the list of project advisors , work groups and task force groups. This planning process is stakeholder driven – not top down. Job descriptions, the role of each group, and how they interact have been drafted. MAPC is open to discussions for other representatives from an organization or outside of the organization. The advisor group meetings will be held almost every other month. MAPC is working out how to engage groups with fewer resources and recognizes that there will be some need for some additional paid advisors/contractors, for example in the areas of food access and food justice. The contract with MDAR is being amended to make this accommodation. MAPC has a detailed stakeholder engagement and draft work plan with the other RPAs for tasks and subtasks. The work plan is very detailed and includes stakeholder engagement, meeting plans, interviews and events. Food Day may be a good opportunity to engage constituents on a regional basis and report out. There is a communications plan geared toward the broader public communication and media and presentation and materials. A detailed budget has been shared with MDAR.

The food systems planning effort had press coverage by Boston Globe recently. John Lee from Allandale Farm spoke about the food systems plan in Edible Boston that was one of the first press pieces in terms of conversation starters.

There have been inquiries from academic institutions to have student involvement including Harvard, Tufts, and MIT research directed projects including food access, food deserts, public health data, to identify gaps. Timing, (fall of 2014) may be problematic.

MAPC's public health division is working on a project relating to fm and their locations in the greater Boston area. Heidi Stucker, new to the MAPC staff and a graduate of the Tufts Friedman School, was introduced. Heidi will work on this project for the next 10 months. Her current focus is on what types of research are needed. MAPC met with the legislative director with MA Audubon as well as the Trust for Public Land regarding land ownership and municipal officials regarding zoning in rural and urban regions. There are several groups that will contribute with their own staff match.

Farmers and fisheries have been less available to participate. The MA Workforce Alliance is a partner for assistance on stakeholder engagement, especially in areas of workforce and economic development.

MAPC is looking for lead organizations for the working groups and technical task force; there will be roles for everyone. FPC members are invited to participate based on availability.

A recommendation was made to consider a separate technical advisory board made of academics, perhaps a group identified to vet a broad academic perspective. Some organizations have the capacity and resources to represent the thoughts of their colleagues – for example universities, food banks.

A comment was made that the advisory group composition is less diverse than might be ideal with a recommendation to consider community colleges as part of the academic landscape. MAPC wants to ensure that youth and elderly are also included. MAPC plans on events to bring underrepresented groups and seeks organizations that can represent these sectors. Comments: There are unique food access challenges with older adults and that there have been some innovation conversations around access to food. The MA Senior Action Council would be a good contact. The group who organized the Real Food movement is a good contact for engaging youth organizations. Food distributors should be included to bring in experience on supply chain issues beyond the producer level. Social justice is important but should not be an overarching focus in food planning. In thinking about broader policy areas – the role would be to review social justice and public health issues and bring it to the larger audience. When it comes to food access, there may be not as many conversations happening with those constituents and producers – so it makes sense to have a discrete group. On the other hand, social justice can be addressed by how the groups are populated across the board. Urban agriculture also provides an opportunity to include social justice and diversity. Consider Real Food Network and Boston Organizing Project.

The engagement process is being redesigned to adequately engage stakeholders and constituency based groups. FPC members can/should suggest relevant connections. MAPC expects to have about seven working groups to cover all of the areas of the system. There may be a separate fisheries group that will talk off line but also meet at times with the working groups. Floating ombudsmen could attend the working groups.

MAPC feels ecological resiliency is how our food system will be sustainable in relation to changing elements, climate change for example. A consideration for three lenses is: people, planet, and profit. And a education focus/plan is important to include in the food plan. For example, the MA Department of Public Health published a report about 10 months ago about menu labeling. People underestimated their calorie intake in some instances by 900 calories. MAPC has interest from a physician to work on the consumer choice aspect of the effort.

While the web portal is developed, documents will be posted with MAPC. MAPC has a separate email account for inquiries on this topic that are being collected. The web portal is being addressed by MAPC's data services team based on the budget. The mapping analysis can be an on-line function. MAPC is developing a portal inspired by Vermont, rather than using an existing template which isn't very flexible. The goal is to have it ready in July. In the interim, the MAPC site is currently being used and is a place to sign up for the newsletter. MAPC is also developing a logo that is reflective of the Food Policy Council as a public identifier. A format to take advantage of volunteers is being developed, but in the meantime, the website is best for engagement. Meetings will be posted on the website. Locations and details will be included.

The existing state FPC's around the state already are diverse and with important representation for that part of the state. The FPCs will be engaged in regional and geographic outreach, perhaps the sponsors of regional meetings.

The MA Taskforce Alliance will be looking at supply chain issues and institutional providers. Food hubs fit into the process relating to production - looking at land based versus ocean based. Processing is one area where food hubs will be engaged.

Comments: Need to address the economics of our food system and noted how little work there is on the aggregate economics of food systems. Consider looking at food production as land based, water based, and processing based.

4. Other business

Zoning Reform Bill H. 4065: According to Representative Kulik, the bill has undergone a revision incorporating a lot of the suggestions that had come in over the past year from a wide variety of groups. MA land use development and zoning statutes are sadly, considered to be the most outdated in the nation. This version is slimmed down to its most essential elements with a wide and broad range of sponsors. It's a work in progress at the moment but there may be a good opportunity for it to pass in the next 6 – 7 weeks in the legislative sessions. Sarah Peak from the Cape has been an instrumental partner. There has been editorial support around the Commonwealth, including the Boston Globe. The MA Maple Producers Association and Farm Bureau have raised some issues that we are being addressed.

Jeff Cole asked if the FPC would consider forming a task force to share concerns since the bill essentially changes the way land use is classified. The ag community is concerned about unintended consequences regarding land value, net farm assets, and the ability to borrow or fund their infrastructure investments. Representative Kulik noted Legislators are mindful of the concerns and suggestions that have been raised about the viability of working lands in regards to ANF classification system and will work closely with Jeff Cole and the ag community. American Farmland Trust is also an ally to think about incentivizing municipalities to support agricultural land.

It was concluded by consensus to not form a task force on this matter. It was stated that as the MA FPC represents many state agencies it is difficult to have one voice on an issue as well as to provide legislative input. Individuals and individual agencies can advocate as they wish. MAPC is willing to support issues that are identified during the food systems planning for additional research, education and advocacy. For example, the FPC Alliance could bring together the appropriate people to advocate for a policy issue. As they are able, FPC members can weigh in to education legislators on issues relating to relevant legislation including impact assessments.

[New England Food Policy: Building a Sustainable Food System](http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/new-england-food-vision) was discussed by Cris Coffin, American Farmland Trust and Jenny Rushlow, Conservation Law Foundation. The report connects with the NE Food Vision <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/new-england-food-vision> They shared highlights from the report of relevance to the food systems planning process.

The objective is to support policy for sustainable food networks and food policy councils. The report is focused on research results and purposefully not making recommendations.

There are many aspects of agriculture not addressed and food access and justice are not used as separate lenses.

Noted smart growth policies and executive order 525, labor cost and availability as a significant factor of farm viability, climate change increasing production costs, FSMA, new food hub models, increase in direct to the consumer dollars, opportunities around state procurement and nutrition programs, waste streams and waste stream management/regulation, and the NE Food Policy Gathering on July 29 in Leominster, MA from 10 to 4.

Member announcements

Food Day will be discussed at the next FPC meeting.

Plan to join the DTA and MDAR Massachusetts Mobile Markets special event, Friday, June 27th, Worcester to see models demonstrating creative ways to reach low income communities.

On July 31, 10 AM, DTA's HIP final report will be released and a community briefing with all the findings and evaluations and will kick off some policy discussions.

DTA's SNAP CSA payment pilot is moving forward with USDA and EBT programs for 11 CSAs utilizing SNAP benefits, the first in the country.

The MA Department of Public Health has lost 75% of the federal funding for the MA in Motion program, a significant negative impact.

Save the date for the NESWAG meeting Nov 10 – 12, Saratoga Springs, NY

The Food Project's Summer Institute: July 30 - August 1, 2014. This three-day Summer Institute is an engaging, interactive learning experience for anyone interested in the issues of youth, food, and community. Contact: Cindy Davenport, institute@thefoodproject.org or call 781-259-8621 x29

Motion to adjourn was made by Jeff Cole at 12.40 PM and seconded by Frank Martinez-Nocito.
Motion passed on voice vote.