

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO
Lt. Governor

KATHLEEN A. THEOHARIDES
Secretary

JOHN LEBEAUX
Commissioner

Jan 28, 2021

Governor Charles Baker

Massachusetts State House, Room 280

Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("Council"), I am pleased to provide this Annual Report pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 20, Section 6C(e) on the Council's ongoing work related to the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan ("Plan") (<http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/>).

Please accept this letter as the Council's 2020 Annual Report. 2020 is the ten-year anniversary of the Council, and the five-year anniversary of the acceptance of the Plan. Throughout the year, Council members continued to review the priorities and goals from the Plan. With the Plan's recommendations continuing to be very relevant, the 2019 coronavirus outbreak challenged the Council and partners to support the Massachusetts food system during wide disruptions. Topics focused on reducing hunger, food insecurity, agricultural sector support, and programs to offset the wide challenges within the food system.

With the Commonwealth legislation allowing public meetings to be conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access, the meetings had 2 – 3 times the usual attendance. The cooperative opportunity for the Council to work with the MA Legislature's Food System Caucus, the MA Food System Collaborative and local food policy councils has been an asset to develop and support policy and program recommendations. The Council's wide stakeholder group complemented the wide partnership representation on the Governor's Food Security Task Force. Having communications and relationships in place from the Council was an asset for efficiency in the development of Task Force.

The Council respectfully requests that the Administration and the General Court continue to support the Plan's broad goals and their underlying programs and link them to larger policy discussions. In addition, the Council appreciates the Administration's and the General Court's past support of the Plan's vision of a sustainable and equitable food system. We ask that you give continued support as relevant legislative and regulatory actions are developed. As always, members of the Council would be happy to meet with you or your staff to offer further detail on support for the Massachusetts food system or our work to implement it. Electronic versions of this Report and its attachments will also be provided to you forthwith.

Sincerely,

John Lebeaux, Commissioner
Chair, Massachusetts Food Policy Council

2020 Annual Report

An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Food Policy Council was signed into law on November 7, 2010, which created the 17-member Council that was tasked with developing recommendations for food system goals for the Commonwealth. Pursuant to Section 6C(e) of Chapter 277 of the Acts of 2010, the Council must submit an annual report outlining its findings, conclusions, proposals, recommendations, and progress towards reaching the goals that have been set forth. In 2019, the MA Food Policy Council (FPC) focused on six topics from the MA Local Food Action Plan, forming the meeting themes for the year. The MA Local Food Action Plan was accepted by the FPC on December 10, 2015 and was designed to increase MA-grown food; create jobs and improve wages in food and farming; protect the land and water needed to produce food; ensure food safety, reduce waste, hunger, and food insecurity while making fresh and healthy food more accessible for the residents of the Commonwealth. Detailed minutes of all meetings throughout the year are available at: <https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-food-policycouncil>

State Agency Members:

John Lebeaux, Commissioner, MDAR
Michael Kennealy, Secretary, Designee: Helena Fruscio, MEOHED
Dr. Monica Bharel, Commissioner, Designee: Lea Susan Ojamaa, MPH
Martin Suuberg, Commissioner, MDEP, Designee: Danah Tench
Jeff Riley, Commissioner, Designee: Robert Leshin, MESE
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner, MDTA

Legislative members:

Senator Joanne Comerford
Representative Hannah Kane
Senator Ryan Fattman
Representative Dan Donahue

Industry Members (appointed by the Governor):

Anna Goldenheim, MD, MPH, Community based nutrition and public health
Mackenzie May, Direct to consumer
Eric Stocker, Food processor and distributor
Samuel S. Wong, Ph.D., REHS/RS, Local health department representative
John Lee, Allandale Farm, Farmer
Amanda Kinchla, M.S., Food Safety Extension Specialist, UMASS Amherst
John Waite, Food processor and handler

Contact: Bonita Oehlke, MDAR

Introduction

The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan (Plan) was designed to increase production, sales and consumption of Massachusetts-grown food; create jobs and improve wages in food and farming; protect the land and water needed to produce food; ensure food safety; and reduce waste, hunger and food insecurity, while making fresh, healthy food available to all Massachusetts residents. The Plan offers recommendations for the public and private sectors to see these goals through to fruition.

2020 is the ten-year anniversary of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (Council), and the five-year anniversary of the acceptance of the Plan. Throughout the year, Council members continued to review the priorities and goals from the Plan. With the Plan's recommendations continuing to be very relevant, the 2019 coronavirus outbreak challenged the Council and partners to support the Massachusetts food system during wide disruptions. Topics focused on reducing hunger, food insecurity, agricultural sector support, and programs to offset the wide challenges within the food system.

The cooperative opportunity for the Council to work with the MA Legislature's Food System Caucus, the MA Food System Collaborative and local food policy councils has been an asset to develop and support policy and program recommendations. The Council's wide stakeholder group complemented the wide partnership representation on the Task Force. Having communications and relationships in place from the Council was an asset for efficiency in the development of Task Force.

Meeting locations are typically identified to support statewide access, however after the first meeting in Worcester and the following outbreak of the pandemic, the meetings were held remotely. On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws, declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus ("COVID-19"), allowing public meetings to be conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access. With easy access to attend via on-line platforms, the meetings had two-three times the usual attendance.

Meeting Summaries

January 31, 2020, Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Visitor Center

The new **DTA Commissioner, Amy Kershaw**, was welcomed. The new **direct to consumer representative, Mackenzie May** was introduced. The **MA Food System Collaborative** had the largest attendance so far at their annual forum. They have a new report "Reducing Food Waste in Massachusetts: Local Successes Informing Statewide Solutions:" <https://mafoodsystem.org/media/resources/pdfs/foodwaste2019.pdf>. Their legislative focus is funding for the supplemental budget for HIP. The one-year old **MA Legislature's Food System Caucus** has strong bipartisan membership and is focusing on food access, insecurity and farmland protection. The **Cambridge Local Food Policy Council** addressed initiatives and outcomes relating to climate change, since one of the biggest levers for climate change is food. School food and a wellness policy also has been a priority. The **Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)** reviewed their farming and climate change report: <https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/climate-perspectives/> Farmer **Dave Dumaresq** explained that growers are experiencing more unpredictability in temperatures, with significant impacts. He also noted federal and state programs to support climate resiliency. The MAPC artist in residence shared project data findings. A policy update was provided on a healthy beverage campaign implemented in a Cambridge hospital, with success in reducing the consumption of sugary beverages. A tax on these beverages was reviewed as means to make the healthy choice the easy choice and improve public health.

Due to the pandemic issues, the **March 2020** meeting was postponed to May.

***May 8, 2020**

Commissioner Lebeaux described the new 30-member **Food Security Task Force** working to improve access to food and resiliency of food supply chain as a result of the pandemic. The state legislature added funding for HIP. The **MA Legislature's Food System Caucus** worked closely with the Task Force. Legislative priorities were identified including the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program. The Food Trust was also elevated as an important vehicle for strategic food system support. Legislation was discussed: HB 2697: An Act establishing the Executive Office of Food Resources and Security. The **MA Food System Collaborative** work continues with a focus on food waste, HIP, local food policy councils, and a regional food resiliency plan. The work of **Buy Local** organizations across the state was discussed, with growers pivoting to market their products directly to consumers. Consumers have shown a strong response to supporting local. It was recognized that the Plan has been a tremendous platform during the pandemic. Council members shared their COVID-19 resources.

***July 24, 2020**

Council updates included the latest on **DEP's Solid Waste** Master Plan. **ESE** shared guidance for the reopening of schools. **DPH** convened a Health Equity Advisor Group: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/covid-19-health-equity-advisory-group>. The **MA Legislature's Food System Caucus** has been active in all food topics. On May 17, the Baker/Polito Administration announced an investment of \$56M, including \$36M for the MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program (FSIG) to strengthen the long-term resiliency of the food system <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-invests-56-million-to-combat-food-insecurity-in-massachusetts>. The rolling application process continued through September 15, 2020. Close to \$3M in a first round of grants was announced on July 22, 2020. Separately, 30 vendor applications were approved to deliver food in communities greatly impacted by COVID-19, supported by \$5M for HIP. MDAR reported on the **MassGrown Exchange**, an on-line platform to connect food and fisher products with buyers and related services as a market development tool now and into the future. **DMF** reported on the significant losses in the seafood sector, with oyster farmers being affected the most. The **MA Food System Collaborative** is working with food system networks to review the Plan and identify priorities to support a resilient food system.

***September 18, 2020**

The **Marion Institute** and South Coast Food Policy Council reported on their work with local restaurants to bring over 91,000 meals to at risk populations. The **MA Legislature's Food System Caucus** reported that fifty-one members signed a letter to prioritize programs relating to food insecurity. An update on the work of the **Food Security Task Force** and HIP focused on immediate relief while building long term sustainability and providing good nutrition. **DPH** reported on their COVID-19 Community Impact Survey to address impacts from this pandemic. **ESE** shared that USDA is allowing schools and community organizations to offer free meals at open sites across the state, and a new Meal Finder service: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>. For the **seafood sector**, the pandemic impacts have been very substantial. Some of the biggest losses were to products mainly consumed in restaurants. There has been a great response to local seafood during the pandemic. The FSIG was one of the recommendations of the Task Force, for long term solutions for a more resilient food supply. Commissioner Lebeaux shared his pride in this Grant which started out as a small idea at MDAR. **MassGrown Exchange**: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massgrown-exchange> was recently launched to assist farmers, fishers, food buyers, and ag-related businesses to connect, exchange, and find products and services, building the marketplace for local products. The **MA Food System Collaborative** focused on their work to update priorities for the Plan and interviewed stakeholders about food system stresses due to the pandemic as well as their vision of a healthy food system. **Brandeis graduate students** shared their work to strengthen the food system collaboration based on surveys, interviews, mapping, and benchmarking.

*** November 12, 2020-Annual Meeting**

Commissioner Lebeaux highlighted anniversaries: five-years for the Plan and ten-years for the Council. It was a privilege to have **EEA Secretary Kathleen Theoharides** attend, who commented that the pandemic continues to highlight the importance of the food system, public health, green spaces, and the need to invest in the local food system and support underserved communities. Secretary Theoharides serves as co-chair of the Food Security Task Force and thanked Council members, legislators and the community for their work and support. The FSIG process and timeline was summarized, and presentations from several awardees followed. **Hannah Spare and Rumbila Abdullahi, All Farmers, West Springfield**, shared the important impact of the FSIG program in Springfield area communities with improved food access through farmers markets. **ESE** reported that school nutrition directors distributed over 30M meals, with over half as free or reduced, maximizing the reach of local foods during the pandemic. **Rob Shaheen, New Bedford Public Schools'** grant supports a redesigned facility with new mobile serving, scratch cooking equipment, and increased refrigeration capacity. **DMF** noted that seafood sales have suffered from restaurant closures. The FSIG has provided important and unpredicted support for this sector. Heightened interest in cooking seafood at home was noted. **Jared Auerbach, Red's Best**, Boston, works with over 800 small fishermen. The FSIG supported their business pivot to retail sales with new equipment for efficient vacuum packing processing and freezer storage. **DPH** noted appreciation for work at the local and state level to increase access to healthy food and address food insecurity. **Paul Mina, United Way of Tri County**, Framingham, has three food pantries, including one of the largest in MA. Their FSIG will build transportation and freezer infrastructure. **Ben Clark, Clarkdale Fruit Farms**, Deerfield has a retail farm stand and changed their focus to direct delivery. A refrigerated truck purchased with support from the FSIG supports food safety and greater distribution. **DMF** reported that oyster farmers have been devastated by the pandemic. **Dan Ward, Ward Aquafarm**, Falmouth will have more flexibility to sell directly to consumers with the FSIG supporting his move to be a licensed dealer. The **MA Legislature's Food System Caucus** focus has been on pandemic and related food system issues with recommendations to increase investment in MEFAP and HIP, among others. **MA Food System Collaborative** shared highlights from their Perspectives on Resilience and Recovery report: <https://mafoodsystem.org/media/projects/pdfs/MALocalFoodPerspectives.pdf> **DEP** shared examples of progress in reducing food waste and the 2020-2030 master plan.

**On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws, declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus ("COVID-19"). In accordance with the State of Emergency, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("MFPC") meetings are being conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access.*