

**Minutes: MA Food Policy Council, Friday, August 2, 9:30 AM – 11:45 PM**

LSL South Rooms S330-S340, UMASS Amherst, Amherst, Institute for Applied Life Sciences, 240 Thatcher Road, Life Science Laboratories, Amherst, MA 01003

In attendance:

Jeff Cole

Senator Comerford

Representative Daniel M. Donahue

Amanda Kinchla

Commissioner John Lebeaux

Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH

Rob Leshin

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Eric Stocker

Danah Tench

John Waite

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Lebeaux at 9:56 AM. He thanked Joe Shoenfeld and the University for hosting us and noted the tour of the University Research farm after the meeting. Introductions of FPC members and attendees followed. The minutes of May 17, 2019 were unanimously accepted by voice vote after a motion to approve by John Waite, seconded by Danah Tench.

## **Officers Reports**

### **Council member updates**

Commissioner McCue shared a presentation with a HIP update and forecast moving forward. He noted an increase of around 13% FY 19 and while a 13% increase in SNAP caseload in July 2020, HIP increased by 23% over July 2019. It looks like more people are using HIP.

There are two pieces of FPC legislation to add seats to the Council. One for a seat for fish and game: H2784, and another to add a soil specialist: H 873.

Rob Leshin: There are 72 school districts that can still offer an After the Bell breakfast program. There is continued outreach and training working with partner Project Bread. The 2019 USDA Farm to School census will be released in a few weeks for the US. MA is releasing info to schools to fill out the data and hoping to build upon the census data. Last time 60% of schools responded to the census and showed a value of \$10.3 M . USDA announced several Farm to School grants, the largest amount USDA has given out. Four MA grants were awarded. MA in Motion has over 450 partners across the state.

John Waite shared that the MA Food Trust has been funded for next year with \$1M, and an additional \$100,000 for administration, again organized by WMFPC and Leaf. He thanked MDAR for their support.

Senator Comeford sits on the public health committee with Representative Kane. There will be a formal hearing with a focus on the intersection of public health and the food system on Sept. 27 at Greenfield Community College, organized by CISA and MA Food System Collaboration. More details to come.

## **Program**

- MA in Motion, Jessica del Rosario, Director of Community Initiatives, MA Department of Public Health, Kim Etingoff, Program Coordinator, Mass in Motion, MA Department of Public Health and Morgan Ovitsky, Be Well Berkshires Project Coordinator, Berkshires Health Systems

A sustainable solutions approach is key to support healthy eating, active living and other social determinants of health. Across the state there are 27 grantees in 70 communities. MA in Motion connects directly to Goal 7 in the MA Local Food Action Plan. Strategies include a focus on food assessment, community agricultural, healthy food distribution and retail, food planning and food zoning. MA in Motion has over 450 partners across the state.

- MA statewide food policy council: Food system plan, Healthy Hampshire, Caitlin Marquis, Program Coordinator. Healthy Hampshire piloted a successful mobile market pilot project. There were 26 share members. \$5,000 in produce was distributed with an average of 8 visits per share out of a ten-week session, and 201 additional ala-carte transactions. A follow up survey showed significant changes in attitude including “feeling healthy.” HIP is involved in the farm shares program as well. Prior to this program, there weren’t any HIP sites.

Comments: Liz O’Gilvie from W. Springfield gave a shout to MA in Motion in western MA and across for state for incorporating equity into the discussion of race.

Question: How strongly are you connected with the local government? There are many areas for local government to respond to such as the length of time programed into cross walks in order to better facilitate travel on foot. How do you get them to respond?

The local MA in Motion contact often meets with municipal staff, often in person and has a process for community engagement as well. DPH provides funding to the local municipalities. They have to be at the table to make the change happen. Local MA in Motion support should get more support. MA in Motion is multi-sector.

Question: How can the Council help with this? Senator Comeford: Will the Council make budget recommendations to the government for more funds for MA in Motion, for example?

John Waite: Good seqway, we’re discussing how the Council will be involved moving forward in the subgroup that will be meeting soon.

Rep. Donahue: Let us know what to share with the Caucus. There has been tremendous support for this program overall. Eric Stocker: Everyone wants more money and the state doesn’t have the money. And the state income tax is going down.

## New Business

- MA Food System Collaborative Update, Winton Pitcoff

Thank you to the legislative champions who support the HIP budget, though it looks like it's not enough to support HIP for the whole year. There are opportunities with the supplemental budget. A Collaborative focus is issues faced by mobile food vendors and local departments of health. This includes farmers and farmers market vendors, caterers, and food trucks with operations in multiple towns. A pilot is being organized in a small regional area with many clusters for reciprocity that hopefully can provide recommendations for addressing the issue on a larger scale.

The GreenWorks bill doesn't address how agriculture can help meet the goals of the bill including mitigating climate change. But we know they can. Many municipalities don't have publically held land that is suitable for the effort and need to work with farm, forest, and other land owners. A lot of towns do own land that would be suitable for farming, rather than solar. Comments looking to better harmonize the regulations around climate change were submitted to the Senate this week and were looking to ensure that the food system is included in these discussions.

Small parcel farming is a timely topic of conversation and legislation. There are some farms that are too small to participate in some programs. As urban ag and more issues around equity surface for farms less than five acres that are viable, what could be done to increase access?

The next Collaborative Forum will be held November 22, in Worcester at Holy Cross.

The University of Iowa has a local food leader training program. The Collaborative will host their program on Sept. 4 – 6 at the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center that includes a Community food systems certification to help support those who work in local food systems.

As the budget is done the Collaborative is watching the revenue committee re: several bills around farmland. Comments have been submitted. It's been almost four years since the MA Local Food Action Plan has been completed, and it's still quite relevant. From the Council, Amanda Kinchla is on the Collaborative steering committee and Jeff Cole works for us.

- Brief status report: Council roles and advocacy v. lobbying: John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center and Nicole Negowetti, Harvard Law School

This subcommittee plans to meet August 30 and get into the weeds about the roles and structure with members: Jeff Cole, Eric Stocker, Danah Tench, John Waite, Winton Pitcoff and Nicole Negowetti.

Commissioner McCue: Last week a call for comments came out re: rules for change around eligibility the SNAP program, over the next 60 days. The current number of SNAP recipients is about 760,000 in MA, between 130 and 200% of poverty, who are also eligible for school foodservice support.

The Collaborative is working on a full analysis for the budget. The work of the Council and the plan is visible in the budget including MEAFAP, HIP, the SNAP GAP, and Buy Local.

Jessica del Rosario: We've focused on increasing access to healthy food. Obesity in our environment means lots of unhealthy food. A program called "Change Lab Solution" is a model to reduce sugar consumption and includes examples of local policy efforts". Sen Comeford is interested in this topic with work on bills around sugar reduction.

John Waite was asked by the Carrot Project to let us know they are still providing TA for farm businesses and are appreciative of the state support.

#### Public Comment

Liz O'Gilivie shared that she appreciated this meeting's topics and discussions. In Springfield, the school wellness policy now includes minimum local food requirements. There is a new culinary nutrition center where sauces are prepared from scratch. WMPFC is providing flash frozen vegetables. She suggested that a future meeting could be held in Springfield?

#### Announcements

- MAACTA (MA Access to Capital & Tech Assistance) Working Group, John Waite
- September 20, 2019, MA Food Policy Council meeting 9:30 – 12:30, MA Technology Collaborative, Weiss Conference Center, 75 North Drive, Westborough, MA 01581
- November 6, 2019, MA Food Policy Council meeting, 9:30- 12:30, RM 428 State House, Boston
- UMASS in the spotlight quick overview: how to get there and what to expect: Joe Shoenfeld

**Motion to Adjourn was made at 12:06 PM** by Amanda Kinchla, seconded by John Waite and passed unanimously.

**12:45 – 1:45 UMASS in the Spotlight** – The future of farming: UMASS Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment; Tour and discussion at the UMASS Crop and Animal Research and Education Farm, 89 River Road, S. Deerfield. This 350-acre farm which once housed a dairy herd but now has focus on vegetables and forage, and a small number of animals.

- Student Farming Enterprise of the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, *Amanda Brown, Director and Lecturer*
- Assessing how traits affect pollinator disease transmission, *Lynn Adler, Professor, Department of Biology*
- Extending growing season with Kohlrabi and Faba bean, *Masoud Hashemi, Extension Professor, Stockbridge School of Agriculture and Team Leader for UMass Extension Crops/Dairy/Livestock/Equine Program*
- Tomato diversity: the evolution of wild tomatoes, *Ana Caicedo, Associate Professor, Department of Biology and Jacob Barnett, PhD student in Organismic and Evolutionary Biology*

- Field trials for pest management and genetic resistance to pests in vegetable crops, *Sue Scheufele, Extension Educator, UMass Extension Vegetable Program*