

**MA Food Policy Council annual meeting (remote & in-person)**

**December 4, 2024, 11 - 1:00 PM** Room 428 Boston State House

Draft minutes

In attendance:

Keath Christensen, Senator Fattman's Office (virtual)

Senator Comerford and staff Rachel Klein

Denise Courtney, DESE

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Dave Dumaresq, Farmer

Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs (virtual)

Doug Botelho, Representative Donahue's staff

Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Kerry Shea, Representative Kane's staff

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

Danah Tench, MassDEP

John Waite, Food Processing

Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Not in attendance: Amanda Kinchla

The meeting was called to order at 11:20 by Commissioner Randle. A motion was made to accept the minutes by Jessica del Rosario, seconded by Phoebe Walker and passed unanimously by voice vote: Keath Christensen, Senator Comerford, Denise Courtney, Dave Dumaresq, Anne Gobi, Doug Botelho, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Jessica del Rosario.

**EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper** shared welcome remarks and reviewed recent food system legislative accomplishments including MDAR having the authority to buy, hold, and sell land to underserved growers. She congratulated and thanked the Council for their work to bolster the Massachusetts food system including work to mitigate climate change.

**Legislators** in attendance included Representative Schmid, Representative Elliot, Representative Kerans, Representative Blais, and Representative Arena-DeRosa. Representative Schmid shared that he has been

incredibly honored to work on the Agriculture Committee. He introduced the Committee's director of research, Jacob Kaminsky. Many staff from other legislative offices were also in attendance.

**Agriculture Excellence Recognition:** Representative Paul Schmid was honored for his leadership as Chairperson, Joint Committee on Agriculture.

**Officer and Committee Reports:** Danah Tench was recognized by Commissioner Heiple and Commissioner Randle for her important work supporting the Council both representing DEP and as the secretary for the past 8 years. The new DEP representative, Bruce Hopper, was introduced.

Nominations for Officers, Nominating, Advisory, and Letters of Support Committees were made as follows: **Officers: (2-year terms)** Chair: Ashley Randle, Vice Chair: Phoebe Walker, and Secretary (nominated from the floor) Torry Stamm Katsiroubas. **Nominating Committee:** Chair: Vice Chair of Council, Phoebe Walker, Members: Margaret Moulton, Ayn Yeagle, Caro Roszell, Rob Leshin. **UMass Extension person on the Advisory Committee:** Angie Jagiello, Associate Director for Operations and Communications at the UMass Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment. **Letters of Support Committee:** Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, and after six months, Caro Roszell. A motion to nominate Torry Stamm Katsiroubas was made by Caro Roszell, seconded by John Waite. A motion to pass the entire slate was made by Senator Comerford, seconded by Ayn Yeagle, and passed unanimously: Keath Christensen, Senator Comerford, Denise Courtney, Dave Dumaresq, Anne Gobi, Doug Botelho, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Jessica del Rosario.

**Advisory Committee Update:** Ayn Yeagle reported that the committee recently met with Mass DEP re: environmental work focused on food waste. The group will be meeting with MDAR staff re: the farmland action plan. These meetings will inform their priorities.

The Council's 2024 Annual Report will have an addendum. Members can include a page on letterhead about their work to support the food system over the past year.

**MA Legislative Food System Caucus** Senator Jo Comerford shared greetings from the 154-member Caucus members, who are deeply committed to the Massachusetts Food System. In the latest work, eight priority bills were selected and three were passed into law in part or in whole. Some 24 additional bills considered, with 16 reported favorably. Examples include Universal School Meals; an Act strengthening local food systems; a provision to have MDAR buy hold and sell land to expand farm opportunities to traditionally marginalized communities; value-added production to be assessed as horticulture land to support farmland diversification and sustainability; and allowing agritourism opportunities on APR land. The Economic Development Bond Bill includes allowing tech and ag school students to operate hoisting equipment under supervision; \$21 M to support fisheries and cranberry, including eco conscious gear. She thanked administration for the state's disaster relief program. Farmers are included as a cohort in next year's budget. The intention is automatic replacement of the fund (\$20M in 2023). The Caucus is working to restore HIP benefits, a legislative priority, and appreciates the advocacy support. The Ag Committee reported 42 bills favorably. There was a HEMP policy meeting with partners focusing on this complex topic. The "Ag in the 21 Century" report work continues as does

Project Bread's "Make Hunger History" Coalition. She commented that Representative Paul Schmid's impact on agriculture is indelible.

**Comment:** The Economic Development Bond Bill included successful modernization of the local health system, critical for farmers and food system participants to have access to an equitable system.

**MA Food System Collaborative:** Becca Miller, Policy Director, thanked the Caucus for their partnership. She highlighted additional legislation including the food literacy bill: An act to promote food literacy, which has led to working with MA Farm to School on budget advocacy. Successful outcomes include \$1M in FY24 and FY25 to DESE's Fresh Grant program, and the school wellness coaching program, SWITCH. The Collaborative organized the campaign coalition to provide feedback on the framework for comprehensive health and physical education, updated in summer 2023 for the first time in 30 years, to include concepts for food literacy. She thanked Senator Comerford and Representative Blais for the \$20M for natural disaster relief for farmers in 2023. Also, the Farmland Action Plan which was released in December 2023. The Collaborative looks forward to implementing the Plan via legislation next session and working with Katharine Otto from MDAR. She thanked legislative staff in attendance and encouraged them to join future meetings. She promoted the Mass Food System Forum, once again sold out. The Collaborative is worried about HIP. On December 1, benefits were cut to \$20, regardless of household size. These cuts will increase food insecurity and force farmers to lay off staff, lose revenue and customers. There are over 285 farmers directly impacted by this cut, not including those that sell to HIP vendors. It is anticipated that food insecurity will increase while families deal with other stresses relating to heat and transportation. After program cuts, it takes months to rebuild trust in these institutions, which can last longer than the amount of time that benefits are cut. On Nov 13, the Collaborative coordinated a lobby day at the state house with 100 in attendance. All 200 legislators received a visit. At least \$10M is needed to restore HIP. The Boston City Council passed a resolution in support of full funding for HIP at their meeting December 4. Separately, the Collaborative's Ag Equity Network met with Commissioner Randle and the MDAR Environmental Justice team and local food policies re: literacy needs. The Collaborative is also working on rewriting and refiling priority bills with food system legislative champions.

**Comment:** Ayn Yeagle. Growing Places serves 274 people through a home delivery HIP pilot program. With HIP funds decreased, separate fundraising is required to make ends meet. Building back the HIP budget is critical to both recipients and farmers. **Comment:** Dave Dumaresq. In the past ten years, his farm has invested heavily into year-round products and storage. HIP sales have become important; however, the market has suddenly been cut in half, adding risk to the business. Growers are risk takers, but at the same time, are working to diminish risk. **Comment:** Commissioner McCue. He applauded the focus of the Council and advocates to support full HIP funding. He acknowledged the impacts of suspending or reducing the benefits of the program, and shared that this issue has been beyond challenging. DTA recognizes that farmers need to plan and this interruption in funding doesn't support their work. He also acknowledged that 1.2 M people in MA have food access challenges. **Comment:** HIP is a long-term investment in the health of our residents. **Comment:** Commissioner Randle recognized how challenging this situation is, and the impacts of suspending or diminished funding.

A motion was made by John Waite and seconded by Ayn Yeagle for full funding to restore the HIP program, per Senator Comerford's recommendation. A voice vote was taken. In favor: Keath Christensen, Senator Comerford, Dave Dumaresq, Anne Gobi, Margaret Moulton, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle. Agency members abstained since their legislative efforts occur through their designated liaison.

**Program:** *Panel discussion: A sampling of state, federal, and partner grants showing impacts for the long-term viability and sustainability of our local food system, strengthening food security, and ensuring equitable access to healthy food.*

A new program to support farm market infrastructure and sustainability. -MDAR [Farmers Market Sustainability Grant Program](#): Elevating agricultural vendors and improving food access at the Gardner Farmers Market \$9,985. Erica Bosse, North Central Massachusetts Farmers Markets.

Over \$7 million awarded in first round. -USDA [Local Food Purchase Assistance](#) (LFPA): Boston Area Gleaners: Guaranteed Income Supports Socially Disadvantaged and Small Farmers in Massachusetts. \$750,000. Usha Thakrar, Boston Area Gleaners. The program will be funded again, partly due to the impacts demonstrated by site visits experienced by the USDA team when they visited Massachusetts.

Latest year funding is \$25M. -MDAR [Food Security Infrastructure Grant](#) (FSIG): Increasing food security through improved aggregation, storage and distribution: \$102,888. Margaret Moulton, Berkshire Grown, and Anna Houston, Off the Shelf Farm, Great Barrington.

-FSIG seafood: Support in FY21, 24 & 25 for grading, processing, freezing, and packaging equipment. Jared Auerbach, CEO, Red's Best. Introduction by Wendy Mainardi, Division of Marine Fisheries Seafood Marketing Program Coordinator.

-MDEP [Massachusetts Gap Energy Grant Program](#): Elliott Farm, LLC, Lakeville (\$200,000) Deanna Elliot, Owner (video). Introduction by Danah Tench, Director of Clean Energy Programs, DEP.

-USDA [Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program](#) Worcester Regional Food Hub, Shon Rianford, Director. Introduction by Denise Courtney and Maggie Nowak, DESE.

### **Council member updates**

Caro Roszell thanked legislators and advocates for the important agricultural inclusions in the Economic Bond Bill. She flagged the upcoming Environmental Bond bill as the next opportunity to invest in a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system in Massachusetts. AFT is working with the Collaborative to ensure that agriculture is featured prominently in the Environmental Bond. Healthy Soils are a universal solution to climate adaptation. Advocates recommend that the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program be strengthened by hiring a Program Coordinator. She shared letters describing these priorities.

### **Announcements**

MA Food System Collaborative Annual Forum, December 17, 2024, Holy Cross, Worcester

Food Policy Council meeting, January 17, 2025, virtual

## **Public Comment**

**A motion to Adjourn** was made at 1:12 PM by John Waite, seconded by Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, and passed by voice vote: Keath Christensen, Senator Comerford, Denise Courtney, Dave Dumaresqu, Anne Gobi, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Jessica del Rosario.

**1:15 – 1:45 MA Grown and Fresher Reception** Light refreshments were served

Attendance: Over 60 in person, over 20 via TEAMS.