

Minutes: MA Food Policy Council meeting, Friday, July 11, 2025

9:30 – 11:30 (remote)

In attendance:

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Julianna Kramer, office of Representative Donahue

Dave Dumaresq, Farmer

Skyler Nash, Chief of Staff, office of Senator Dylan Fernandes

Director Anne Gobi, EOHED

Bruce Hopper, MassDEP

Representative Hannah Kane

Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety

Rob Leshin and Denise Courtney, DESE

Grace May, legislative aide, Senator Fattman's Office

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

John Waite, Food Processing

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Not in attendance: Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Phoebe Walker

Call to order: Commissioner Randle called the meeting to order at 9:36 AM.

Acceptance of minutes: A motion to accept the minutes was made by Bruce Hopper, seconded by Amanda Kinchla and passed unanimously: Jessica del Rosario, Julianna Kramer, Skyler Nash, Director Gobi, Bruce Hopper, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Grace May, Commissioner McCue, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Representative Hannah Kane. Governor Healey's FY26 budget supported food system work. The HIP program, including carryover, is about \$21M with \$7.5M in the pending supplemental bill. Overall, the investment is higher than ever, though the need is also higher. The Caucus will be lobbying for continued HIP support. The Environmental Bond Bill includes the addition of a Massachusetts Food Policy Council seat for the Division of Marine Fisheries and UMASS Extension Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment. Joint rules adopted for the first time since 2019 include changes. For example, bills need to be

reported out 60 days after they have been heard, with an extension of 30 days. Bills may be voted on by members of both houses, so there may be different language and a lag in tracking. Representative Blais, Senator Comerford and Senator Fernandes are working with Farm Bureau and Becca Miller to grow the coalition to support a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticulture lands. Plan to join the Caucus for an update with the Food Bank to “Make Hunger History” in Massachusetts. Representative Kane thanked Senator Fernandes, Representative Blais, their staff and Becca Miller from the Collaborative for their important role in strong food system advocacy.

Senator Fernandes will be weighing in on priorities in the upcoming Bond Bill and plans to file some friendly amendments. He is also interested in stand-alone farm/agriculture/fisheries legislation. He thanked the Caucus for all their work.

Comment: When there is an opportunity to support priorities from the Committee, Council members would like to add additional voices to support this work.

Senator Fernandes complimented Representative Kane for her leadership on these issues. In September, the Joint Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries will share the hearing date when available, and when out of committee, will welcome advocacy support.

MA Food System Collaborative: Becca Miller shared her enthusiasm about HIP funds reverting back to \$40. The Collaborative is lobbying for additional funds to go back to previous levels. The budget also included level funding for food and agriculture literacy and support for the Local Food Policy Council grant. Disaster fund relief is being established thanks to Senator Comerford and Representative Blais. On the federal side the Reconciliatory Bill has passed, which includes a number of food system concerns including reduced SNAP funding and administrative cost sharing for states. Some will be implemented when USDA provides guidance, and some in the next fiscal year. Advocates are being supported to testify at the Bond Bill hearing coming up, including support for FSIG and MDAR programs relating to climate, farm viability, agricultural land preservation and land acquisition. In late May, Emily Fidanza from the Collaborative coordinated a well-attended Agricultural Literacy Summit with Mass Ag in the Classroom: cultivating the next generation of agriculture literate individuals. The Agricultural Equity Network is supported by Emily Fidanza and Norris Guscott, currently with a story telling project. The Collaborative is starting a ten-year review of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. In addition, Becca Miller will be meeting with Ayn Yeagle and Margaret Moulton regarding impacts from LFPA funding cuts and possible next steps.

Comment: It's good news that HIP is being increased back up to \$40, however it can be a burdensome process to update client contracts without strong administrative support. If there is any way to address this moving forward it would be helpful.

Officer and Committee Reports

Chair Commissioner Randle: MDAR looks forward to working with the legislature to advance priorities during the upcoming hearings. FSIG awards are being finalized, hopefully with an announcement in August. In addition, a consultant is conducting a five-year impact report. There are successes to report from these food system investments. When the report is complete, there will be an announcement and an event that Council members will be invited to attend. Disaster block grant program support was announced at \$220M through the USDA Farm Services Agency. There have been weekly meetings with FSA and other partners to determine program parameters including farm eligibility requirements, with hopes to launch a program in October. MDAR has tried to have as many areas covered as possible. Aquaculture will be included when there are combined sewer overflow incidents. Thank you to Congressman McGovern, a key advocate for this support, who is working to replicate it to the previous Natural Disaster Recovery program. July 20 is National Ice Cream Day. MDAR's second edition of the Ice Cream Trail has been launched with over 100 listings. Plan to visit a site to support our dairy farms, small businesses, and retail stores using local dairy products. Farmers Market week starts August 3, with Urban Ag week following. August 19 is the 40th anniversary of the Massachusetts Tomato Festival at the Boston Public Market. The Council will receive details about attending these events to celebrate Massachusetts agriculture. There is good on-going momentum in Massachusetts, in spite of current challenges.

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle reported that the Advisory Committee looks forward to meeting with the Advocacy Committee to support legislative priorities.

The Advocacy Committee will share a report at the next Council meeting.

Program

Reviewing the first months of the new administration and food system effects: Christopher Bosso, Professor of Public Policy and Political Science, Northeastern University. There has been tremendous turbulence in the first six months including instability and cuts. Given the nature of Massachusetts Agriculture with small farms with tight margins and connections with consumers, these cuts are very significant. The Reconciliation Bill is a vehicle that Congress used to override the system that was instituted decades ago for Congress to get budgets done on time. It has morphed into a way for legislation to happen that no one actually likes. It affects FY 26, and also has immediate impacts, especially regarding SNAP. It tightens the work requirements that already exist, and makes rigid requirements that states have to implement,

causing an administration burden. There may also be cuts in SNAP administrative funds. The more the requirements are tightened, the more people are removed from the program, and it doesn't actually get more people to work. This bill freezes the thrifty food plan for ten years, raised during the Biden administration by 20%. SNAP education is eliminated, which doesn't make sense if the goal is to educate people on how to eat better. In addition, SNAP cuts are significant in terms of agricultural revenue. The Bill reflects this administration's idea of the role of government. Basically, the normal Farm Bill process is overridden, taking care of big agriculture. New England farms don't gain much. The Bill reduces crop insurance for big business, extends some climate funds (controversial) and increases Specialty Crop Block Funding that would expire with the Farm Bill. It basically shorts circuits the Farm Bill. For the time since 1973, USDA reduced its share of SNAP costs. Previously they fully funded the program. States will have 75% of the costs and will be forced to come up with millions of their own funds. States can't legally withdraw from SNAP but can do the minimum for SNAP involvement. There is no penalty for no efforts to increase enrollment. States can make it hard to apply. Previously, there were incentives to enroll as many people as possible. The 10-year projection is a 20% overall cut in SNAP, the biggest in history. In Massachusetts, this will have a ripple effect on state programs such as HIP and school meals. The tax cuts rob the government of funds for these programs. The Reconciliation Bill is filling in for the Farm Bill, which expires September 30. Whatever isn't in the Bill, which is most of what's relevant for Massachusetts including urban agriculture and what's of interest for small farmers, disincentives discussion. Do Democrats want to claw back SNAP funding? SNAP has been the glue that's hold the Farm Bill together. USDA's job is to promote agricultural production and to get Americans to eat as much of that as possible. HHS is bringing a different perspective about healthy eating with opinions about agricultural production methods. USDA has been pushing back against HHS regarding standard production that uses chemicals. In terms of dietary changes, HHS say there are bad foods. USDA says there are no bad foods, which is the reason why they have been reluctant to have restrictions on SNAP food purchases. USDA is allowing SNAP to experiment with restricting sugary beverages in some states. USDA and FDA will demonstrate how assertive the government will be in food safety.

Rob Leshin: What is the HHS tone regarding the MAHA movement and how it pertains to school foodservice? There have been rumors of a simple updated dietary guideline, and a revision to school plans to reflect the updates. A 400-page document updated to a four-page document for example. Given the Federal rule making process, updating the dietary guidelines quickly doesn't seem achievable. Are there other pathways the administration could use to speed up the process?

Professor Bosso: Short of an executive decision, it's hard to foresee this happening. The school meals programs are complicated in each region. There are many interests, and everyone wants

their local food included. This probably won't happen soon. HHS Kennedy's zeal will run into the food industry in a serious way and be a pain point. The rulemaking process is there for a reason. There would have to be emergency rulemaking, an unlikely pathway for speeding up the process without contortion in legal language.

Q: The whiplash and uncertainty of what is happening is difficult. How are you seeing the how the Judiciary system relates to policy and trends that are happening?

Professor Bosso: The current supreme court has given the Executive Office more power. To what extent can the president make unilateral cuts without Congress is to be seen. To what extent will the current system let the president eviscerate government without Congress? Congress traditionally has had the power of the purse to reign in the Executive office. What's the use of the legislature then? Congress so far has rolled over and played dead – how far will this go?

Senator Fernandes is interested in Massachusetts programs that have been cut and the impacts, in anticipation of a future hearing. Professor Bosso's slides will be shared.

Commissioner Randle noted friction since MAHA didn't include agriculture and removed some industry tools. Agriculture groups have been meeting weekly with HHS and the White house to be included in a final report. Efforts are ongoing to find a more balanced approach between the two sectors. Hopefully the next MAHA report will include more of the agriculture sector.

Growing together - MDAR Environmental Justice team & stakeholder engagement: Rebecca Davidson, Director, Food & Climate Equity; Olivia Palmer; Dimple Rana. The team described how and where Environmental Justice fits into state government. Areas of work include relationship building, engagement, technical assistance, internal training, language support, grants and data. The team is working to pivot in this environment and find creative solutions to leverage existing networks and strengths. Multiple state agencies have an Environmental Justice and Climate Change liaison. Olivia Palmer focuses on internal support, aiding MDAR staff to incorporate environmental justice into their work, and language access. Dimple Rana's work is external, bridging the gap between MDAR and historically underserved growers. There are deep disparities to be addressed to uplift the system. MDAR programs and services booklet is available in ten languages. Grant writing is a challenge; MDAR's EJ team has organized a list of grant writers. Accessing diverse farm systems helps other growers identify resilient solutions and puts new farmers in the pipeline. There is a webinar about these programs, and a Spanish language course for farmers market staff and vendors to better interact with Spanish speaking customers. Outreach and engagement rooted in trust building is breaking down barriers and leading to meaningful engagement. MDAR's Environmental Justice [newsletter](#) is the foundation. There are farmer videos and other resources for historically excluded farmers to become

connected. MDAR's state owned land licensing [program](#) has seen growth. The team has been meeting re: impact of LFPA cuts, and options for support.

Comment: MDAR's Environmental Justice program has been helpful to understand barriers, with important work conducted over the past two years.

Farmland Action [Plan](#) update: Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator, MDAR shared a six-month update. The work plan, released in 2023, is continually evolving. Editing is open for information or to address questions. The spreadsheet can be filtered based on topic. A drop-in session 7.22.25 is open for questions. The Farmland Partnership program will be released in February, to fund partners on Plan implementation with a two-year grant. Awards are expected to be made in September. To make systems change, education, trust and relationship building take time.

Council member updates

Ayn Yeagle and Margaret Moulton described efforts to mitigate LFPA grant funds, a huge loss for the Massachusetts considering that some \$14M was infused into the food system, which ended abruptly in 2025. Growers had crop plans in place to accommodate this program. Ayn and Margaret met with the Collaborative and initiated a group to explore the next steps. Other individuals and stakeholders are invited to join. Short- and long-term funding need have been identified. The program was making an important and sustainable change in our food system with direct support for underserved farmers and insecure households. It's difficult to replace the federal funds with grants. The strength of this group is in the statewide character. The intent is to fill in the gaps and consider applications to larger foundations.

Commissioner Randle commented that NASDA has been engaged and is supporting both a House and Senate passage of bills to codify this program. Both versions would provide some \$6M for Massachusetts. All Commissioners and Secretaries agree about the importance of the program. Bipartisan support can lead to traction. The MDAR Environmental Justice team will be invited to join this group. She asked that the Council be kept informed of this work.

Commissioner McCue reported that his team, state representatives from Maine, and other key players met with federal SNAP staff and had a positive discussion. He thanked legislators including Representative Kane and Senators Comerford and Fernandes and the Caucus for their support of HIP, with hopes for future consistent stability. He shared good news that in the first seven days of July, \$199,000 was generated in HIP sales, compared to same time in June with \$129,000 in sales. It's less than last year at the same time but under the new program with the \$40 benefit, suggests a level of promise and underscores the need. There are also funding requests for CHIP cards to better secure benefits with less fraud. At the time of the Governor's budget signing, DTA was stunned by a decrease in the administration budget and inexplicably

for the case worker level. This is addressed in the supplemental budget. There are highly administrative levels of work DTA's case workers. If SNAP is the sun, HIP is a planet. If we can't support SNAP, HIP is less relevant. Commissioner McCue discussed the state's error rate, last year at 14%, the middle of the pack nationally. The error rate is not related to a lack of attention to detail but rather that many clients don't share their income. A client might get a promotion or additional hours, affecting their income. This speaks to some of the challenges of the program rather than the detailed work of the case workers. SNAP funds to Massachusetts are significant, with \$2.7 B annually coming to the state. He shared that DTA's work with DESE and the SUN [bucks](#) program supports 516,000 students to date, to receive \$140 over the course of the summer for fresh fruits and vegetables, when school meals aren't available. Applications for these programs continue.

Rob Leshin: DESE celebrated the Terrific Tray winner and general [successes](#) in school foodservice. "Participation in school meals continued to climb during the 2024-25 school year, the third year of state-supported universal free school meals. Preliminary data for the 2024-25 school year show an 11,000 increase in the number of students eating school lunch each day and a 20,000 increase in the number of students eating school breakfast compared to the prior year. Data for the most recent complete year available, the 2023-24 school year, show an increase of \$8.3 million meals served compared to the [2022-23 school year](#). With support from a combination of state and federal funding, 7 out of 10 students in Massachusetts eat a free and healthy breakfast or lunch at school." There was a large increase in breakfast participation, an important impact of state funding for universal free meals. At the upcoming School Nutrition Association meetings, he'll connect with colleagues regarding changes in SNAP and hopes to see some reversals of Local Foods for School funding. The School Meals Nutrition Standards Commission report has been in progress for two years and is expected to be released soon.

Announcements

- 2025 Food Policy Council meetings: Fri, Sept 12, 9:30-11:30; Wed, Dec 3rd: 9:30 – 11:30, Jan 6, 2026: Annual meeting, Rm 428, MA Statehouse, 11- 1:30 date tbc
- November 21, 2025 [Save the date](#) for the annual Massachusetts Food System Forum, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester

Public Comment

Adjournment. A motion to adjourn was made at 11:48 AM by Commissioner McCue, seconded by Rob Leshin and passed unanimously by voice vote.

This meeting was held remotely via teams in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 signed by Governor Healey on March 28, 2025

58 attendees