

Draft Minutes, MA Food Policy Council

January 25, 2019, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM. MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Room 108, Westborough

Helena Fruscio Altsman
Jeff Cole
Senator Ann Gobi
Amanda Kinchla
Commissioner John Lebeaux
John Lee
Rob Leshin
Representative Hannah Kane
Commissioner McCue
Lea Susan Ojamaa
Mark Reil, Senator Fattman's office
Danah Tench
John Waite
Samuel Wong

The meeting was called to order at 9:58 AM by Commissioner Lebeaux, Council Chair.
Council members and the audience introduced themselves.

Update on federal government shutdown: Commissioner McCue talked about SNAP: accomplishments and challenges ahead and the need for continued advocacy. On January 13, all states were notified that to ensure access to benefits, an early issuance of SNAP benefits was needed. Actual SNAP benefits had to be on individual's cards by Jan 20. All states worked hard to accomplish this quickly and were successful. Typically MA benefits are offered every two weeks the first two weeks of the month on a staggered basis. MA loaded benefits for Feb for 93% of the caseload. The DTA staff worked hard and efficiently to make this happen. If the early issuance hadn't happened, it would not have been possible to sustain SNAP benefits for February and everyone in MA will be able to access their February benefits. The average SNAP benefit is \$220 / month. There has been the use of February benefits in January. During a normal month there is about \$4.2 M worth of SNAP redemption per day early in the month. In January it was \$11.5 M. The EBT system has been strained by this process including some system outages.

Certified SNAP retailers are on a five year program. If certification comes up during the shutdown, there isn't anything that can be done. So far, 19 retailers have been affected. The federal government has been alerted. Business has continued based on the assumption that funds will be available for March benefits. DTA will be ready to go when the federal government opens. There are other impacts such as Meals on Wheels and School Meals. It permeates many areas. The early issuance piece has been well communicated but there are still some folks that think they may not get their benefit. They will.

Rob Leshin shared that a day before the shutdown on 12.21, EOESE received funding for about a month. Since then, the entire 2nd quarter allotment for all programs of \$98 million has been funded. The agency is fully funded for the federal second quarter. There are enough funds for operations as well as reimbursements through March for active claim reimbursements. USDA is unable to commit to anything beyond that. Attorneys are working on understanding the terms of the continuing resolution to see if the next quarter can be released if the shutdown continues. There is no expectation that any

local group will have to use their own funding. In terms of USDA foods commodity program, all the purchases were made before 12.21 to the four regional warehouses in MA including about \$30M worth of products. The food is still moving and there is supply through March. Guidance was shared for school districts with federal employees and their children. When their back pay is reinstated, their annual income may not qualify. Schools have been asked to use their best judgments.

Acceptance of Minutes: John Wait noted a correction to the motion “*A motion to support the MA Farm to School grant program was made by Represented Kulik, seconded by John Waite and passed unanimously.*” He made the motion and Representative Kulick seconded. The FPC accepted this as an editorial correction. A request for clarification of the record of the vote was made and accepted by the Council. Danah Tench, Mark Reil, Sam Wong and Helena Fruscio Altsman recorded abstentions since they were not in attendance. All State agency members also abstained. Voting in favor was Jeff Cole, John Waite, Amanda Kinchla, Representative Kane, and Senator Gobi. It was noted that abstention doesn’t necessarily mean a lack of support

A motion to accept the minutes as clarified was made by John Wait and seconded by John Lee. The motion carried with abstention by Helena Fruscio Altsman.

Officers Reports

The 2018 MA FPC annual report with comments from DTA and John Lee that have been incorporated and are not substantive was presented. A motion to accept the report was made by John Lee, seconded by Amanda Kinchla, and passed unanimously. Council Officer elections: Elections will be addressed at the next meeting in March. MDAR has been in contact with the speaker’s office for a replacement for Representative Kulik.

Program:

Presentation: **Overview of selected food policy councils, structures and priorities of relevance to the MA FPC.** Review of new guide for lobbying and advocacy. Nicole E Negowetti, Health and Access Program, Food Law and Policy Clinic, Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, Harvard Law School and student Alex Harding.

What is the difference between advocacy versus lobbying and what can Council members engage in? The enabling legislation shows opportunities for advocacy, the process of supporting a cause or proposal. Lobbying is a subset of advocacy, aimed to influence government officials such as taking a position on a specific piece of legislation. Education and general recommendations would not be considered influencing a legislator on a specific piece of legislation. Writing draft language for legislation when requested would be considered general advocacy. There are fewer restrictions acting as an individual, compared to being a member of a FPC. MA FPC is a governmental Council. How does the structure influence what the Council can do? The DC Food Policy Council has a similar mandate. Their annual report has specific recommendations (like the Collaborative). Philadelphia FPC is similar but broader. They provide testimony upon request. FPC can provide expertise once it’s request from the legislature. The state of Nevada puts out annual reports with analysis and publishing major topics from meetings and outreach efforts including summits, etc. Many nonprofit FPC have limited lobbying. They have been very involved in advocacy and working with the city council. The MN group is embedded with the University and has lobbying restrictions so they focus on training food advocates.

They provide reports and technical assistance on broad recommendations for policy goals. Educating the public about the effects about a policy or nonpartisan analysis as requested.

Question: Do the government models have dedicated staff or funding? How many types of Council have state agency members?

Are there recommendations for this Council to change? The Council could provide testimonies as a primary avenue for future change. Another way to have influence, highlight some of those issues that we want to be priority and make a general recommendation and hosting some forums of folks who have difference ideas about the issues.

Question: The CA FPC wrote a member of USDA about the Farm Bill and recommendation. CA FPC is made of state FPCs across the state. What's the reach of this Council, state, national or regional?

Noted: Harvard is putting out a guide about lobbying and advocacy.

Massachusetts Legislative Food System Caucus, Representative Hannah Kane and Senator Anne Gobi

Representative Kane and five other co-chairs, Rep. Dan Donahue, Rep. Paul Schmid, Sen. Anne Gobi, Sen. Jo Comerford and Sen. Eric Lesser, launched the Caucus last week and had 52 offices attend (out of 200) which was monumental. Ashley Randle, MDAR, was in attendance. The Caucus was formed to have a convening group that can speak to the issues that impact the food system in the Commonwealth. Food access, Farmland and Economic Development are the priorities. There is good representation from the House and Senate. The Caucus has a mix of members that want to be involved at various levels. The Goal is to develop legislative and budgetary priorities in a participatory/consensus-driven manner. Our key partner is Winton Pitcoff and the MA Food System Collaborative because of the important role they have played and their strong connections to many other organizations. The Caucus has a broad list of partners/advocacy organizations that are being engaged. At an upcoming meeting, advocates will be invited regarding priority legislation. We are working to determine budget items and priority bills of the Caucus as well as endorsed bills. For example, the pollinator bills that already have a strong advocacy group would not be a priority bill for us but may be an endorsed bill. HIP will most likely be one of our greatest priorities. We also might weigh in on other issues that affect our priorities. We might draft a letter to our Congressional delegation encouraging them to find a way to end the government shutdown for example.

Senator Gobi noted that Representative Kane deserved all the credit for the caucus and noted that it was an impressive meeting considering that the house and senate wasn't in session. The bipartisan Caucus partners will grow to include groups such as the Food Project. The Caucus wants to have information consistently available and envisions opportunities to engage in public education, to be forward thinking and engage with local FPCs. Representative Kane's office staff is the contact. She also noted that over 6,000 bills have been filed.

Only Caucus members get to weigh in on the issues. When priority legislation is defined, there will be a press release. The Caucus is interested in marine topics as part of the food system. At least one legislation focus is expected in each of the three priority areas. Attention will also be positioned with other events during the year such as National Hunger Month, Veterans Bill etc. to allow the Caucus to

weave a narrative and impact other things that are going on. As Council members, Representative Kane and Senator Gobi will share the outcomes from the meetings.

Commissioner Lebeaux and many other Council members shared their enthusiasm for this fabulous development which offers a great opportunity to get great ideas converted into policy.

Discussion: MA Food Policy Council – roles and opportunities, FPC structure and new initiatives: John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center, and Nicole Negowetti

John Waite: What else can be accomplished? Do we need to look at our by-laws? Do we need to revisit how the council votes, if there might be a distinction of voting verses advisory members? Staffing support-Could the Council have dedicated staffing? How could the Council achieve wider diversity? What is the role of the advisory committee? What is the Council's relationship with the Caucus?

Based on the presentations it seems the relationship to the caucus and how we collaborate as a council is better defined. Perhaps thinking about how we operate and how we integrate with state agencies are good topics for discussion.

The Advisory Committee could help with diversity although it operates under the Open Meeting Law. The enabling legislation states "SHALL" include an advisory committee. No phone conversation or web based meetings are allowed unless there is a physical quorum is available. A vote is required for remote participation. The previous Advisory Committee was instrumental in the development of the MA Local Food Action Plan. After that was accomplished, it wasn't clear what was left to do. Could subcommittees get work done between Council meetings? How can membership be expanded? Formal subcommittees are also subject to the open meeting law.

There is an existing network of FPCs. How can they relate to this state FPC? Should a priority be to continue to lobby for fisheries and UMASS to have a person on this Council? The bill to have F&G has been refiled. DOT perhaps should be considered. If some from agencies are added, shouldn't there be more private appointees too? What does the Council want to do, and who should be at the table. If the FPC about informing the administration or is it three bodies (Collaborative, Caucus and Council). Think about it broadly before thinking about who to add. Who are we making recommendations to?

Amanda Kinchla: How could the Council be more impactful? It's frustrating to not be as actionable; I thought I would be offering recommendations on food safety topics.

John Lee: Our role seems to have become one of collecting information, education and publishing it for the Collaborative to do something with. We can't be as strong because the state members have to abstain. I see the Council as an aggregator of knowledge and information. The White Papers have been helpful. We are an effective group but not in the way we thought we would be. The group is valuable. The Collaborative can do the work we thought we were going to do. There is more political juice in the Council than the Collaborative. But there isn't an awareness of the technical and political challenges. Do the White Papers get any traction? How else could it be done? Could the Council offer a briefing at the state house or put out a press release? What can be done to help to lift the Council's visibility?

John Lebeaux: The development of the Caucus could be a watershed moment for the Council since 25% of the legislature has signed on. It really elevates the entire food system. The Caucus will look to the Council for advice and recommendations. Should the Caucus make a request, we would have to determine how to respond. Legal staffs would need to be consulted. This is a timely conversation.

Comment: Perhaps cross agency issues could be elevated at Council meetings to be more intentional.

Jeff McCue. My own experience shows that some of the Council's aspirations have been realized. I don't send a designee. The meetings are highly informative and a good opportunity to share challenges. The amount of staff that we have engaged around the activities of the Council is substantial, and has been helping to further the agency work. The biggest dividend is that we operated in a silo of food security and now incorporate our economic impact with food security into larger health imperatives, influenced by the Council and common benefits. This helps me understand how to do better.

Rob Leshin: It's been extremely valuable to be on the Council. In food and nutrition, child hunger is connected with three Commissioners. To be here sitting with them makes work efficient. I can attribute many benefits to being a part of this Council. There are many benefits and actions that happen behind the scenes.

Commissioner McCue: If there was an opportunity to revisit the legislation it would be interesting. I don't like the fact that I can't advocate. Having to abstain from votes is uncomfortable, but we will always still show up.

Lea Susan: We're here because this is where our hearts are, but I'm not sure what that shows. Legislative changes could have agency members as non-voting members. But we have actionable accomplishment just by putting us together in a room. The interaction is very important. We can think about actionable with us as non-voting members. Do state agency members make the Council actionable? Official capacity of state members could be changed.

Helena Fruscio Altzman: The biggest benefit has been the further collaboration with MDAR and credence for what a strong agency they are for food and ag topics. There is a strong benefit among the agencies.

Representative Hannah Kane: In terms of the way state government works, sharing Council minutes doesn't create any value. Some actionable items are not seen. What happens behind the scenes is not recognized. It's hard to summarize what happens. The work on the HIP program has been an excellent example. What do we want to have happen in two years, what should be accomplished, who will take the lead? The Food Caucus has been in the plan but it's now clear that there is a value for it. There could be more actionable words for the annual report than "reviewed and discussed" for example. What happened in the last quarter and how can we reflect on it? Many things happened because we have a Council. We have a stronger list of priorities that link to our six main areas and list which we want action on. The Council could engage the governor in how important the food system is and have him attend a meeting once a year at least.

Comment: What has happened behind the scenes would be great to be incorporated into the annual report. Meetings the past year have been outward looking with many presentations, but it would be good at each meeting for at least an agency, legislator and another member to share successes.

Comment: This meeting has been encouraging to learn that so much happens that we may not be aware of.

Council member John Lee, “I appreciate that we all get to put a face onto what we do and who does what to help get things get done, rather than faceless communications.”

John Lebeaux: It’s too bad that the agency isn’t Department of Food and Agriculture (DFA) instead of MDAR, but it’s hard to change. We remain committed to the concept of DFA. As I’ve publicly said, my background is municipal government and nursery. Through this process I’ve become quite educated on the food system and have become quite an advocate. We give preference to proposals for how they tie into the Action Plan. For example, the Food Trust has many parents including this body and the plan and outside stakeholders that resulted in it actually being implemented worked efficiently since HED was already at the table. We already knew each other and were talking about food at some level. We interact with all of the agencies about food. DEP and DFA report every week to the Governor’s office. Some of our weekly reports include information about the Council and the proceedings. There are many people making decisions about what’s a priority and there is a lot out there.

Commissioner McCue: As a result of being on the Council, Representative Kane and I had a chance to meet with the Governor’s office. The Governor’s office is aware of what’s going on as they work to give consideration to all of the other stakeholders. In the government sphere, we do a good job though it’s not always known for public consumption. And we don’t always move that quickly and nimbly. We operate at the speed of government. We’re actually in a good place and ready to take a good step.

Rep Kane suggested setting some yearly or two year goals which may help the Council manage and monitor work. Perhaps The Governor could be invited to attend a meeting each year.

New Business: MA Food System Collaborative Update, legislation for Food Plan metrics: Winton Pitcoff

The Caucus was an important initiative. Special thanks to Jessica in Representative Kane’s office. The Collaborative has been going through legislation. Priorities are listed on the Collaborative website. Jeff Cole has been hired to help with farm organization networking, and advocacy support. He is now working on climate change and policy implications.

Council member updates:

Helena Fruscio Altsman: Last week “FISH” was announced as part of the agency’s manufacturing innovation which will award \$500,000 to Northeastern University and fish processors to use robotics to increase fish processing in MA.

Commissioner McCue: HIP will run through February 28 and then start up again in the spring on May 25. A current pain point is that Mobile Market Plus has multiple partners. Though there isn’t an update yet,

conversations are continuing to ensure mobile market plus for HIP and SNAP is in place. The Governor's budget has 5.4 million for HIP.

Rob Leshin: The state fiscal budget had some "Breakfast after the Bell" language that the Dept. took action to require breakfast after school starts. Of the 614 potential schools, 283 are not participating. We let the school superintendents know about the requirement. They can re-report and commit to an after the bell model. By May 31, they must record the implementation of these models. The MA School Breakfast Challenge partnership is supported through the Child Nutrition outreach program and Project Bread. There are enough private funds to support all of the impacted schools. With Project Bread, a "Summer Eats" kick off included 150 summer food service program operators. T Senator Gobi welcomed the group and there was a discussion of initiatives to review gaps for high needs children. With a USDA Farm to School grant, a video to promote going local was developed, to be shown at the next meeting.

Public Comment:
Announcements:

February 26 – 28, Harvest New England Conference and Trade Show, Sturbridge

March 1, Massachusetts Maple Producers Association tree tapping, Ferrindino Maple, Hampden

March 27th Ag Day

March 29, 2019 MA Food Policy Council Meeting, Fish and Wildlife, Westborough, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
(A plan for 2019 will be four meetings at the Fish and Wildlife facility, one at UMASS and one at the state house although location suggestions are appreciated to consider.)

Adjournment:

John Waite made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Sam Wong and passed unanimously at 12:40 PM.