

minutes

MA Food Policy Council virtual meeting

Friday, January 27, 2023

9:30 – 11:30 AM

In attendance:

Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Fattman

Sophia Flioni, Office of Representative Kane

Rachel Klein, Senator Comerford's Director of Constituent Services

Commissioner John Lebeaux, MDAR

John Lee, Allandale Farm

Rob Leshin, ESE

Bobby Malinn, MEOHED

Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer

Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Danah Tench, MassDEP

John Waite, Food Processing

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Brittany Mangini, DTA Associate Commissioner of Food Security and Nutrition Program

Will attend part of the meeting: Phoebe Walker, Local Boards of Health

Absent: Jessica del Rosario, Amanda Kinchla, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Representative Donahue

The meeting was **called to order at 9:34 AM** by Chair and Commissioner John Lebeaux.

Mckenzie May made a motion to **accept the minutes**, the motion was seconded by John Waite, and accepted by voice vote: Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Rachel Klein, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, and Brittany Mangini.

Program: Congressman James McGovern, 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health - Aligning state policies and programs gave a presentation. Last September, the White House convened the Conference, the first since 1969 including agencies, food and ag businesses, and participants with lived experience. There is an ambitious road ahead to reduce hunger by 2030, requiring a whole society response for action at all levels. There is no need to reinvent programs, but rather to connect the dots and fill in the gaps to end hunger. During the Conference, Massachusetts was highlighted for many programs and models. A holistic approach is critical. At the state level, a draft plan to end hunger is in development. Universal meals need to be made permanent. Healthy school meals are critical to childhood learning. The Congressman is urging USDA to expand community edibility, so more meals are covered with federal funds. All kids need free universal meals. Under the radar has been college students and food insecurity. It's important to fully bring local farmers into these conversations. Heading into Farm Bill re-authorization of programs that can demonstrate progress against the Conference goals is key. There are efforts to expand local food systems, and for growers to have the same support that big agribusinesses have in the Farm Bill. Small farmers are the bedrock of the food system. This is a challenging moment in Congress. There's no need to wait for action from

Congress when there is so much to be done at the state level. USDA is rich in resources to complement state work. There is a renewed interest by private donors to support state innovation. Hunger is a political condition; the political will must be aligned on these issues. This is the moment to be impatient and get things done.

Commissioner Lebeaux thanked the Congressman for joining the meeting from Washington and invited him to return annually to kick off the new year for the Council. Ayn Yeagle was commended for her outreach to the Congressman.

Q: What's your perspective on the renewal of the farm bill as it relates to SNAP this year. Congressman McGovern shared his worry due to the debt ceiling debate. SNAP funding could be vulnerable. The thrifty food plan amount is expected to decrease. The Farm Bill chair is hard to reach. There might be more hoops to jump through. He encouraged stakeholders to remind everyone of the program benefits. Massachusetts still has unspent ARPA funds. A deal could be struck with a claw-back of unspent funds as a way to move a debt ceiling forward. Please obligate the funds and get them out. It's important to move expeditiously with USDA to make school meals permanent.

Q: Are there any statistics about hunger by party? Congressman McGovern: Intelligence is not a prerequisite for being in politics. There are people on the ag committee who don't understand the benefit. Some have never visited their local food pantry. The Conference included a high number of people with living experience, rather than charts and facts and figures. Voices from the ground can be persuasive. We have to be creative about how we message and lobby. The Senate will be helpful. The House will be challenging. The Administration is dedicated. We have to take advantage of every opportunity to move these issues forward.

Program: FSIG survey results, **Shannon Emmett**, Research Director, Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources & Agriculture, State House. Representative Domb congratulated everyone involved in participating in the survey and thanked Council members who assisted with outreach.

Q: Could the results be connected to the MA Local Food Action Plan, and then connected with the Conference goals?

A: Shannon responded she (?) would be happy to discuss efforts to cohesively show impact. Commissioner Lebeaux commented that survey responses about contracts related to all state contracts. The mutual goal is to make the program stronger. In the field, the Commissioner hears often that this program has been and is a game changer.

Officer Reports

Chair, Commissioner John Lebeaux has been asked to continue in his position during the transition. He shared his gratitude to the administration. With the administration transition in progress, the Council's Annual Report is being reviewed by the Secretariat. The vote will be postponed to the March meeting. Commissioner Lebeaux shared comments to remember Steve Kulik and his long-time support and tireless work to support the Massachusetts food system.

[An 'amazing public servant': Retired Hilltown lawmaker Steve Kulik dies at 72 \(gazettenet.com\)](#)
[State Rep. Stephen Kulik recalled as 'decent man,' who rose above politics for common good - masslive.com](#)
[Stephen Kulik Obituary \(1950 - 2022\) - Worthington, MA - Daily Hampshire Gazette \(legacy.com\)](#)

Local Food Policy Council grant program update: This grant program aims to enhance the work of existing and newly forming local food policy councils and food working groups across Massachusetts to accelerate their development, increase their capacity, and increase their connections and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning to support the state's local food system and complement and build on the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan and work of the Council with its focus on environmental justice and climate change in the food system. Funding for this Grant Program was provided through a FY 23 Legislative Earmark of \$250,000 to MDAR. This is a one-time funding opportunity. Award announcements are expected early winter.

MassGrown Wellness update: Deputy Commissioner Ashley Randle MDAR's Mental Health and Wellness program <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/agricultural-community-mental-health-wellness-program-overview> funded by USDA in 2021 with over \$500,000, aims to support mental health challenges faced in the wide range of food and agriculture sectors. Vermont Farm First is the contractor, with extensive experience in this area.

MA Food System Collaborative: Winton Pitcoff. The Collaborative is working to file legislation, with a focus on eight bills that most closely align with goals and recommendations from the Local Food Action Plan.

An Act to promote food literacy

[SD.1348](#): Sen. Jason Lewis / [HD.2580](#): Reps. Andres Vargas and Mindy Domb

To help Massachusetts children lead healthy, independent, thoughtful lives, all students in grades K-12 should have access to food system education in school. These bills will add food literacy to the list of topics that students should learn about in school and provide the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) with opportunities and resources to support those lessons.

An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination

[SD.311](#): Sen. Jo Comerford / [HD.1171](#): Rep. Paul Schmid

New regulations and laws related to PFAS should not jeopardize our food security, including Massachusetts farmers' ability to produce food. These bills will provide financial and liability relief should farmers' ability to grow crops be impacted by PFAS, as well as establish an account to support technical assistance and education to help farmers adapt to new practices that reduce the use and dispersion of PFAS.

An Act strengthening local food systems

[SD.875](#): Sen. Jo Comerford / [HD.1801](#): Rep. Natalie Blais

Farmers in Massachusetts struggle to remain sustainable, on average earning just 94 cents for every dollar they spend producing food. They must compete in the global marketplace while facing higher input costs, more restrictive regulations, and fewer supportive resources than farmers in other states. These bills will create a "circuit rider" program at MDAR to coordinate support for farmers, establish a \$3 million Next Generation Farmers Fund to provide education grants, direct MEMA to incorporate food production capacity into disaster planning, give MDAR needed tools to help protect farmland, and establish a state food system coordinator position.

An Act promoting equity in agriculture

[SD.611](#): Sen. Jo Comerford / [HD.498](#): Rep. Natalie Blais

According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, BIPOC farmers are represented on only 2.3% of the Commonwealth's farms, farms that steward just .3% of the land in farming and sell just .4% of the market value of agricultural goods in the Massachusetts, despite people of color making up 29% of the state's population. These bills will establish a commission charged with developing recommendations for MDAR to equitably serve socially disadvantaged farmers to address these disparities.

An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program

[SD.63](#): Sen. Anne Gobi / [HD.2737](#): Rep. Mindy Domb

The Healthy Incentives Program leverages federal SNAP funds by increasing SNAP recipients' ability to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers, improving health outcomes for vulnerable communities and increasing sales for local farms. These bills will establish the framework for the program's long-term sustainability.

An act supporting the Commonwealth's food system

[HD.400](#): Reprs. Dan Donahue and Pat Duffy

Many state agencies play roles in supporting and regulating the food system, but because of limited communication between them some of these efforts are duplicative, inefficient, or even contradictory. These bills will establish a state food system coordinator position to serve in an advisory capacity to all agencies to coordinate and inventory food programs and develop and track metrics related to food system goals.

An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need

[SD.263](#): Sen. Jo Comerford / [HD.223](#): Rep. Hannah Kane

Thousands of tons of edible food are sent to landfills each year because of donors' concerns about liability, and because diverting it to those who need it can be costly. These bills will provide civil liability protection for individuals and food establishments who donate food directly to consumers, and a tax credit to Massachusetts farmers in the amount of the fair market value of the donated food, with a \$5,000 annual cap per farmer.

Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands

[SD.261](#): Sen. Jo Comerford / [HD.1170](#): Rep. Paul Schmid

Article 99 of the Massachusetts Constitution authorizes lower tax rates for agricultural land, but only on parcels greater than five acres. Changes in management practices have made farming on smaller parcels more sustainable, the subdividing of large tracts of land means many farmers farm on multiple smaller parcels, and rising land prices put larger parcels out of reach for many farmers, particularly beginning farmers and farmers of color. This proposed amendment will remove the acreage requirement, making farmland of any size eligible for tax relief.

MA Food Policy Council Advisory Committee report: Co-chair Andy Varela shared that though there wasn't a quorum at their December meeting, it was a good opportunity for those present to learn more about each other and everyone's food system experiences. Council member Ayn Yeagle asked for other Council members to be involved with this committee.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus, Sophia Flionis, Legislative Aide to Representative Hannah Kane

Increasing Caucus membership to newly elected members is on-going. The Caucus <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/> now has 132 members, working to develop legislative priorities, developed by consensus. The Caucus worked to release the Healthy Soils Action Plan Report. Governor Healy pledged her commitment to food security, which was impactful, including support for school students. On December 14, the Caucus hosted a legislative briefing on the White House Conference, including key takeaways and next steps. On January 25, the Caucus joined Project Bread with a pledge to end hunger by 2030. Key issues and solutions were outlined.

MA Food Policy Council member updates

Healthy Soils Action Plan update: Caro Roszell Massachusetts was the first state to commission a healthy soils study, which includes approaches to make five types of Massachusetts lands more resilient for climate change. Next, funding should be secured for the implementation of a healthy soils plan. American Farmland Trust will hire a consultant to design a program based on recommendations, and implementation. Healthy Soils Action Plan <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/resilient-lands#healthy-soils-action-plan>- Resilient Lands Initiative <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/resilient-lands#the-resilient-lands-initiative>

Secretary Danah Tench report on DEP's GAP Grant awards <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-gap-energy-grant-program> that included six farms and four food pantries. She reminded the Council that DEP's commercial refrigeration grant ends soon, and to spread the word. There are financial incentives to install climate friendly refrigeration systems <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-massdep-commercial-refrigeration-grant#:~:text=This%20program%20provides%20financial%20incentives,applications%20through%20February%202023>.

Commissioner Lebeaux wished former commissioner Suuberg well in his new work and recognized his guidance during their years together on the Council.

Announcements

March 17, MA Food Policy Council, remote - 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

April 12, 2023, Agriculture Day at the State House - 10 AM – 2 PM

Public Comment

Commissioner Lebeaux thanked Bonita and staff for support for the Council.

A motion was made to adjourn at 11:20 by Danah Tench, seconded by John Lee and accepted by voice vote: Bill Fredericks, Rachel Klein, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini.