

## Minutes Massachusetts Food Policy Council meeting

January 8, 2026, 11 AM – 1:30 PM

In person (Room 428, Boston State House) and remote

### In attendance:

- Commissioner Michael Cole, DTA (remote)
- Jessica del Rosario, DPH (remote)
- Representative Donahue
- Dave Dumaresq, Farmer
- Grace May, office of Senator Fattman
- Matthew Connolly, legislative director, Senator Fernandes
- Director Anne Gobi, EOHED (remote)
- Amanda Kinchla (remote)
- Rob Leshin, DESE
- Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer
- Commissioner Randle, MDAR
- Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils (remote)
- Kerry Shea, office of Representative Hannah Kane
- Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution (remote)
- John Waite, Food Processing (remote)
- Phoebe Walker, Public Health
- Ayn Yeagle, Community Health (remote)

Not in attendance: Bruce Hopper MassDEP

### Agenda

**Call to order:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Randle at 11:15 AM.

**Acceptance of minutes:** A motion to accept the minutes was made by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Margaret Moulton and passed by voice vote: Commissioner Cole, Jessica del Rosario, Representative Donahue, Dave Dumaresq, Grace May, Matthew Connolly, Director Anne Gobi, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, and Ayn Yeagle.

Senator Fernandes welcomed the Council and attendees and thanked them for their work to support food systems and fill in gaps including HIP funding.

**MA Legislative Food System Caucus:** Kerry Shea, office of Representative Kane reported that the Caucus has successfully acquired funding for several priorities including Buy Local organizations, the local food policy council grant, FSIG and restored funding for HIP. Actions at the state level aim to support SNAP benefits. She commented on the importance of all the food system partnerships in Massachusetts.

The Caucus will work with the Collaborative to build support for the LFPA program. Matthew Connolly, office of Senator Fernandes, reported that they are supporting seven priority bills moving out of House Ways and Means and onto the floor. He thanked the group for support during this challenging time, and support for food system issues in the environmental bond bill.

**MA Food System Collaborative:** Becca Miller. 2025 was a difficult year but there was strong collaboration and focus on the challenges. There will be summit of local food policy councils in early February, organized by the Collaborative. The Massachusetts Legislature's Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21st Century report released in December has excellent recommendations. There was a reminder to attend the March 26 HIP lobby meeting, 10 – noon, state house room 428. Food system educational efforts are in place to support state representatives in this election year. Commissioner Randle and MDAR staff were noted for their work on the land licensing program and the agency's food security division. Several legislators were recognized for their food system work including Senator Fernandes and Representatives Kane and Blais, considering that it takes a village to make this work across the finish line. This is the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Collaborative. There is a lot ahead, but much has been accomplished in the past. The Collaborative has four members, a small but mighty team.

### **Officer and Committee Reports**

Chair Randle updates included the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force; International Year of the Woman Farmer; Ag Day at the State House (March 11) and that New England Feeding New England's Local Food Count Survey is now live. The survey will help to document the amount of local food purchased in the state, critical for regional food resiliency. A suggestion was to work with DPH to promote this work. The Anti-Hunger Task Force report will be finalized shortly and is on track to meet the submission deadline. There will be one more listening session to review the recommendations and a last meeting to review final recommendations. This work has provided an important opportunity to bring together a wide range of stakeholders. This year's agriculture theme is the year of the women farmers, to align with the UN focus. MDAR will be spotlighting and uplifting women farmers during the year and during Agriculture Day at the state house. Please nominate women you know. MDAR grants will be posted soon and announced at the end of the month. A text message service was launched at the end of the year to better inform farmers re: grant opportunities and other news.

A motion to approve annual report was made by Dave Dumaresqu, seconded by Ayn Yeagle and passed unanimously by voice vote: Commissioner Cole, Jessica del Rosario, Representative Donahue, Dave Dumaresq, Grace May, Matthew Connolly, Director Anne Gobi, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, and Ayn Yeagle.

### **Committee Reports**

Advocacy Committee: Phoebe Walker. She invited Council members to attend their January 20 meeting, as they review the past year and make plans for the new year. She also reported on the success of SAPHE

2.0, state legislation that professionalizes and expands public health regulation and the need to support that work with \$15M in the state budget for FY27.

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle reported that the committee will explore how to align with and support recommendations for the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force, and partner efforts.

## **Program**

Chair Randle introduced the theme of Infrastructure and supporting middle of the supply chain, focusing on priorities in the state's communities, and her mantra of leading with compassion, positioning us to weather future challenges as we work together and to find creative solutions. State and federal grant programs have supported transformative changes to the Massachusetts food system.

State funded Food Security Infrastructure Program (FSIG). Five-year overview, Juli Stelmaszyk, Food Security Director, MDAR. A five-year review was shared, including the number of businesses and awards by category. MA has a strong food economy but heavily relies on food imported from outside the state. FSIG is one of many programs to build capacity for stronger food production. It also supports emergency feeding programs, resilience to food system disruptions, a stronger food economy, increased food security and equitable food access. The program builds cross sector and agency collaborations.

-Boston Area Gleaners/Boston Food Hub, Acton. Usha Thakrar, Executive Director. BAG has critical infrastructure to ensure local food is distributed to the emergency feeding system, supported with \$1.8M FSIG awards, also funding from LFPA, MFVP and MEFAP. Usha described her work as being at the intersection of farming food recovery and food waste reduction. About 8 million pounds of food was saved and distributed last year. MDAR has been an important and strong partner over the years with many programs including to buy equipment to take in produce that is of questionable quality and compost it. This equipment helps to sort, pack, and compost the produce. The takeaway is that public investment in middle of the supply chain and collaboration is critical. She thanked everyone for their support.

-Reed Farm, Sunderland. Kat Chang Laznicka, co-owner. They are building a USDA poultry processing facility. This grant award was \$495,760. They are non-generational farmers focused on providing sustainable local protein. Kat encouraged everyone to come to the farm, founded in 2018 and operating year-round. Federal and state funding has helped to move forward with poultry processing, helpful also for the region. Education is critical so that people understand where their food comes from.

-Boys & Girls Club Metro South, Taunton. Derek W. Heim, President & CEO; and Monica Lombardo, Vice President. Their recently built Blue Spoon Kitchen has been critical during emergency food response efforts. They also have a freight farm where they grow food for their kitchen, supported with a grant of \$848,000. A hydroponic farm in a shipping container grows herbs and vegetables that are incorporated into our meals.

USDA funded Regional Food Security Infrastructure Program (RFSI). Overview, Julia Nelson, Grants Management Specialist, MDAR. Julia summarized the program which has supported middle of the supply chain work, including equipment grants.

-Island Creek Oysters, Duxbury. Maya Bennett, Island Creek Ambassador. ICO operates the state's only cannery. The \$339,537 grant supported equipment acquired, installed, and training to automate current processes and expand formatting options to diversify and expand the mix of local and regional agricultural products it can work with.

-Worcester Food Hub, Mike Kane, Economic Development & Public Policy Associate. The \$83,520 grant supported equipment for the expansion of the Hub's wholesale operations in Central Massachusetts, to exponentially increase the number of farms, producers, and institutional buyers that they interact with.

Food Ventures Program. Overview, Rose Arruda, Urban Agriculture, Food Venture Program, and Food Trust Program. Rose described the program's history and impact. MFVP investments include: food processing infrastructure to meet the needs of the growing local food system; improved distribution systems to support opportunities for equitable access to fresh local food; and innovative retail outlet strategies that enhance access to healthy food.

-Commonwealth Kitchen (CWK), Boston. Jen Faigel, Founder and Executive Director. CWK works to transform the local food economy by strengthening capacity, creating connections, and unleashing the collective power of diverse entrepreneurs to start and grow successful food businesses. Large-scale food processing equipment was supported with \$85,000 in funding resulting in production efficiency. There is essential work that is happening in all parts of the supply chain with the ability to double/triple/quadruple production within the state. There are enormous opportunities for creative and collaborative work.

**Updates** DESE snapshot: Rob Leshin, Director, Office for Food and Nutrition Programs. Rob commented on his 11 years at DESE, and his gratitude for the people power, programming, and intersections with so many partners. He noted that this administration has prioritized meal support for children to be nourished and ready to learn. The Northeast Food for Schools Challenge program was described. Of the \$3.5M, 75% of those funds stayed in-state, with 55% of purchases made through food hubs. Even though the LFS grant was terminated, there is strong motivation and established school and vendor relationships that continue. The demand remains. DESE's fiscal portfolio is very strong with \$800M in funding serving over 600,000 lunches per day. To support food traceability, a partnership has been formed with Food Trails, including a new platform to be able to provide more local economy data. Food Trails supports anti-hunger and economic development with a boost to local producers to show a strong return on investment. Lastly, Rob shared that the Mass Fresh program continues to grow and support local food procurement infrastructure. So far, \$3.3M of MA Fresh Grants have gone out. The program represents the Intersection of health and learning.

### **Council member updates**

Caro Roszell provided a Healthy Soils Update. An RFQ has been posted for the coordination of the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Initiative and to implement the recommendations of the Healthy Soils

Action Plan. The Legislature created the Healthy Soils Initiative in January 2021; and the Action Plan was commissioned by EEOA in 2018 and released in 2023. The Healthy Soils Initiative's charge is to protect and enhance soil health across all land uses in Massachusetts, to meet its climate goals as well and support climate resilience for farmland, forests, wetlands, municipal lands and neighborhoods. The coordinator and their team will administer Healthy Soils challenge grants, convene stakeholders to collaborate to advance Action Plan recommendations, as well as provide industry-facing and public education and outreach on soil health. Caro shared thanks to Tom Anderson for getting the RFQ together. Eligible entities must be headquartered in Massachusetts and have an annual revenue under \$15m; responses are due on February 12<sup>th</sup> with a bidder's conference on January 14<sup>th</sup>: <https://www.commbuys.com/bsso/external/bidDetail.sda?docId=BD-26-1042-ENV-ENV01-123639&external=true&parentUrl=bid>

Ayn Yeagle and Margaret Moulton described their LFPA working group, including organizing a lobby day. Metrics include some \$11.3 M of local farm expenditures affecting nearly 500 growers, including BIPOC farmers, and 700 community sites. The program supports food equity and a more resilient food system.

Three grants and programs connected with the state Department of Public Health were described: [Public Health Excellence Grant Program | Mass.gov](#), the Massachusetts application for the [Rural Health Transformation Program | Mass.gov](#) program and a new award [CMS Announces \\$50 Billion in Awards to Strengthen Rural Health in All 50 States | CMS](#).

## Announcements

2026 Council meeting dates, 9:30 – 11:30 AM: March 12, May 8, July 10, Sept 10, Nov 10. Annual meeting, Jan 7, 2027, 12 noon – 3 PM, Boston state house.

## Public Comment

**Adjournment:** A vote to adjourn the meeting at 1:45 was made by Margaret Moulton, seconded by Dave Dumaresq and passed by voice vote: Commissioner Cole, Jessica del Rosario, Dave Dumaresq, Grace May, Matthew Connolly, Director Anne Gobi, Rob Leshin, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, and Ayn Yeagle.

A light reception followed, with apple cider, apple slices, cheese, crackers and chestnut flour cake.

*This meeting was held remotely via teams in accordance with an Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations ("Act"), signed on July 16, 2022, and extended pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to June 30, 2027.*

Attendance: 44 remote, 54 in-person (9 Council members attended in person, 8 remotely)