

**Food Policy Council Meeting** (virtual and in-person)

July 12, 2024, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

MDAR Southboro Office, 3rd Floor, 225 Turnpike Rd, Southborough, MA 01772

In attendance:

Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs

Rachel Klein, office of Senator Jo Comerford

Rob Leshin, DESE

Julianna Kramer, Representative Donahue's Office

Representative Hannah Kane

Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety

Grace May, Senator Fattman's Office

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

Danah Tench, MassDEP

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Not in attendance: Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, John Waite

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The meeting was called to order at 9:37 AM by Commissioner Randle. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Representative Kane, and passed unanimously by voice vote: Anne Gobi, Rachel Klein, Rob Leshin, Julianna Kramer, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Grace May, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Phoebe Walker.

Massachusetts Legislative Food System Caucus: Rachel Klein, office of Senator Comerford and Representative Kane. This is an extremely busy time for legislators, advocating for food systems priorities. There is a focus on food donation legislation. The Caucus held a June briefing with the Greater Boston Food Bank and other food banks re: an equity survey that dovetails with the "Make Hunger History" campaign. On July 24 there will be a briefing on progress to strengthen the local food system, with locally grown food as a part of the plan. The Senate passed some significant issues in the economic bond bill, and some provisions have been passed, for example, striking the 5-year permit for agritourism and other issues relating to land use and land preservation, and promoting equity in farming. There is a bill that includes a grant to commercial fisheries and the cranberry sector with a focus on climate resiliency. Q: How does the funding for local food policy look? A: The budget is in conference but it's looking good. Comment: the Farm to School amendment didn't make it in the House however the Senate has a line item for \$250,000 in the budget. Commissioner Randle expressed deep appreciation for all the legislative support for food system work.

MA Food System Collaborative: Becca Miller and Kristina Pechulis

Representatives Schmit, Blais and Kane have been helpful during the whole process including the amendment that includes the farm to school grant, food donation tax credit and food policy council funding. Advocacy is important in the next few weeks to get these items included. Ag Tourism permits on APR land passed by both chambers. Advocacy for the supplemental budget including HIP continues. During farmers market season, everyone was encouraged to invite legislators to visit farmers markets.

#### Officer Reports

Commissioner Randle reminded everyone of the one-year anniversary of the flood in Massachusetts. She spoke with colleagues in Vermont who have experienced a devastating 48 hours. Damage assessment is in progress. Areas of Vermont received over six inches of rain in two hours. We need to build in more resiliency into the system. The Natural Disaster Recovery Fund press release shared testimonials - 40 farmers would not have been able to continue in business without the funds, critical for their business viability. Massachusetts farmers are reporting that so far, it's been a good year with early strawberries and expectations for a longer season.

Hemp discussion. Many of the products are unregulated and have proliferated in many retail locations. There is concern about underage access. The Cannabis Control Commission, DPH and MDAR discussed issues including joint guidance from DPH that lies with authority for local boards of health based on authority. Guidance has been very helpful to local boards of health.

Farmers Market Week is August 5 - 9, please join any MDAR market visits. The following week, for the first time, MDAR will host an Urban Agriculture Week, focusing on sites across the state. MDAR's Rose Arruda is coordinating a ten-year report as well as the details for the Week. Council members are welcome to join the events.

"Make Hunger History" has been the focus of the Council's Subcommittee in concert with Project Bread. The local food system and agriculture will be included in the final plan. The goal is to determine priorities to make sure that the work is an effective use of our time to promote legislative priorities or other topics to elevate to the Council. "Make Hunger History" will be a large part of the Subcommittee's work. A meeting will be organized before the Council's meeting in September.

- Bylaws Committee: Phoebe Walker

The Committee met and reviewed previous meeting feedback. Adding an extension seat and allowing members of the advisory committee to be compensated were issues discussed - both requiring legislative support. Other changes can be voted on by the Council. A draft will be shared 15 days in advance of the September meeting of the Council. Representative Kane suggested that a legislative briefing might be considered, but not at this year's annual meeting in December, since legislators generally are not available. She suggested that adding information about the appointing authority would be helpful.

- Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle

The Committee is fully seated and recently met with the Collaborative to discuss how the bodies align and/or complement their work, and to identify issues in the food system that aren't being worked on. The

Committee is passionate about food waste and climate change. The next meeting is Aug 13 from 4 -5 PM, feel free to participate. The Committee is wondering how race and equity in the Farmland Action Plan can be elevated in local communities and integrated and implemented and a focus on land access. They will develop a plan to work with other local food policy councils on these issues. Council members were asked to share any topics with the group re: climate change and equity. The Committee is also interested in food waste. Should there be more enforcement at the local level, and could the Committee be of assistance? Speakers with expertise in the Farmland Action Plan and the Massachusetts food waste ban will be invited to meet with the Committee.

Program: Local Food Policy Council reports:

1. Anna Bury, City of Chelsea

Anna expressed her excitement to be sharing information on their project. They coordinated groups to explore how the city could be better supported, with a need for a vision and strategic planning. With COVID funds drying up, the LFPC funds helped to fill those gaps. MAPC was hired to help develop a food action plan based on community vision. Residents were surveyed to understand their issues and set up properties. Several goals were achieved. Chelsea food leaders engaged with underserved community members and developed a simple action plan to guide city planning. A standout priority is sustainable practices and reducing food waste. A successful community meeting with five organizational participants included 75 attendees under the theme of "Growing and Making Food in Chelsea." Residents were asked how they would like to participate. Cooking classes ranked high. Key recommendations for the city were made for the next 12 - 36 months. The group is working on a comprehensive assessment, a structure for the working group, opportunities to elevate partners programs and activities, and expand opportunities for resident to join federal and state initiatives. Engaging restaurant workers for example is a next step. Partners including GreenRoots for hydroponic planting and East Boston Farm Stand or "Eastie Farm" which has a strong core of youth in their efforts.

Commissioner McCue shared that BOCA has helped to open new kitchens and training to teach classes.

We had 50% youth in our programs. Commissioner McCue asked if some organizations have been at the table - both very strong partners - opened new kitchens with BOCA not only hosting classes but training others to teach classes.

2. Kim Concra and Andrea Marczely, Cape Cod Cooperative Extension

Thank you to MDAR for this second round of funding which helped to continue work that started last year to understand needs of the five towns of the Cape. With the first funding we had groups in a wide range of food system categories and main highlights. Over 65% of pantries purchased local food. Food pantries want collaborative purchasing, food finance funding, food entrepreneurs training, and a food distribution hub. We worked with SCORE for a strategic review of the plan. Storage is a weakness and an opportunity for cold, frozen and dry. Funding has in general tightened up. Food pantries are so busy that they need to find other areas of support. An economist was hired, Michael Shuman who has worked with PV Grows, to explore the Cape Cod Hunger Network, and connections with our local food system and expansion possibilities. There were six events with four different business sketches developed, including next steps. Our talented social media staff created a landing page and space for building pathways to a Sustainable Food system on Cape Cod. Each of the six topics are listed and a zoom recording of Michael's talk including business sketches and summary notes. Topics include food

finance funds with PV Grows as an example. A food distribution hub would make distribution more efficient. A food purchasing collaborative would reduce costs and even restaurants and meal pantries would benefit. There could also be entrepreneurship training. Building a framework is the next step to understand what the business might look like, the demand, the competition and potential leaders. We've identified a core group of people who were not on our radar that were interested in pursuing this work. We'd also like to work with partners for asset mapping and helping with grant applications. We're planning a fall meeting with the Cape Cod Hunger Network re: food finance and joint purchasing opportunities, as well as supporting underserved communities, farming and food businesses. Lessons learned: we would have loved to have more people participate but the program was kicked off late, so we have fewer participants than we hoped.

Q: Rep Schmid was enthusiastic on food hubs, to aggregate farmer produce - including storage and perhaps some food preparation. He asked what resources the Cape has to put that together. A: There are two major food pantries that store for smaller pantries. There is a need for a greater storage system for produce, dry and frozen goods. Where on the Cape is the best location? Comment: In New Bedford, the Coastal Food Shed is opening an expanded facility which could be a good resource.

Letters of Support Discussion: Council members discussed the process for creating legislative letters of support. A suggestion was made to create formal procedures for the Food Policy Council to issue legislative letters, and that guardrails be set to ensure the letters align with the council's purpose. MDAR will start off by working with their legal staff and request a framework that could be discussed at the next meeting.

Council member updates:

Rob Leshin DESE: A new report reviews two years of school funded meals that reflects increased student participation and a strong ROI on state funds with universal meals and an explosion of farm to school activities. Check out our blog featuring our DESE Commissioner meeting with Food Research & Action Council (FRAC). We also submitted a report on school food waste and consumption that will be shared with the Council. There are good tidbits about what's already in planning including increasing consumption and more scratch cooking.

Phoebe Walker: Hemp derived TCH has loopholes. The Cannabis Control Commission reviewed the situation, and with a strong letter from the Alcohol Beverage Control Commission (ABCC) saying businesses could lose their liquor license, product started to disappear from the shelves pretty quickly. There needs to be a clear definition. There was great interdepartmental collaboration between MDAR, ABCC and the Commission.

Rep Schmid thanked Rob for his focus on local foods. Last year there were a few pilots to help schools purchase local, Rob shared that Year I is being completed with \$3.5 M to local schools with 60% of funds spent, working with 70-80 producers and 243 school districts. The program has had a resounding effect, and it was extremely successful and with food hubs providing support. In September, the full report will be released. There are about 100 schools that will be spending down the rest of the funds.

Commissioner McCue, DTA: DESE has done remarkable work with the supporting community including legislation bodies. Our role with DESE includes a new EBT program to add 600,000 kids for \$40/month for the three summer months. We're working to fill in the gaps. Our first issuance of payment will happen July 25. We'll also distribute the balance of funds under the state SNAP program of to certain

populations who because of their citizenship standing were not eligible. We ran out of money in April, so on July 29 we'll issue that balance to about 4,000 individuals who are not typically eligible.

Brittany Mangini has moved into a role with the Department as Chief Organizational Effectiveness Officer. Shelly Yarnie is the new Associate Commissioner of Food Security and Nutrition Programs. She has a strong history of working with equity and public service issues. We are starting the year with less money for HIP than we need which puts us in a precarious position moving forward. We will continue to keep a strong eye on the Farm Bill. There are some challenging as it relates to SNAP including a fall back to the USDA Thrifty Food Plan, which doesn't make sense during these economic times.

Ayn Yeagle: Labor issues are challenges for school, so, if possible, products that are lightly processed are a good option.

Commissioner Randle: MDAR's Farmers Market Spanish language program had 40 participants with very positive feedback. We will explore other programs based on language needs. The first edition of the Massachusetts Ice Cream Trail developed with MOTT, MDAR, and MA Dairy Promotion Board is being launched this month. A highlight of the map is celebrating from cow to cone. Criteria to be included in the Trail means using MA milk or cream in the ice cream products. There are over 100 locations listed. MDAR and MOTT will continue to build out a digital and print version as more businesses are identified. Comment: Town Line Creamery in Franklin Country has the shortest distance from cow to cone - just two miles!

#### Announcements

MA Food Policy Council (remote) September 13, 2024: 9:30 – 11:30 AM

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

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

December 4, 2024, 11 - 1:30 PM Room 428 Boston State House

*Plan to bring your favorite foods for the MA Grown & Fresher reception/lunch afterwards.*

#### Public Comment

#### Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made at 11:30 by Ayn Yeagle, seconded by Commissioner McCue and passed unanimously by voice vote: Anne Gobi, Rachel Klein, Rob Leshin, Julianna Kramer, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Grace May, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Phoebe Walker.

Attendance total – 35.