

Minutes: MA Food Policy Council remote meeting Friday, July 24, 2020, 9:30 a.m. – 11 a.m.

In attendance:

Senator Jo Comerford

Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Ryan C. Fattman

Representative Hannah Kane

Commissioner Amy Kershaw, DTA

Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety Specialist

Commissioner John Lebeaux, DAR

John Lee - Farmer

Rob Leshin, DESE

Bobby Malinn, EOHD

Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH

Sam Wong, Local BOH

Eric Stocker - Distribution

Danah Tench, DEP

John Waite- Food Processing

On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus (“COVID-19”). In accordance with the State of Emergency, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (“MFPC”) convened a meeting on July 24, 2020 a.m. through virtual means that allowed real-time public access. Instructions were provided to enable participants to follow the proceedings of the FPC while those activities occurred.

9:40 Call to Order by Chair and Commissioner Lebeaux: The process for a remote meeting was reviewed. The meeting was not recorded. Council members were identified by roll call including votes, reflected in the minutes. John Waite, Vice Chair, hosted the meeting via “Go To Meeting,” and had a process in the event of the event being “bombed.”

Chair and Commissioner Lebeaux welcomed Commissioner Amidon, Department of Fish and Game, who shared thanks for the Council’s interest in seafood and efforts to add a seat for fisheries. Commissioner Amidon introduced Dan McKierney, Director of the Division, who later provided an update on relief for the seafood sector. He has been working with Billy Costa to promote Massachusetts seafood.

Acceptance of the minutes was made in a motion by John Lee, seconded by Eric Stocker and passed unanimously by individual voice vote as follows. Yes: Senator Jo Comerford , Bill Fredericks, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Sam Wong, Eric Stocker, Danah Tench, John Waite. Comments from Representative Kane and John Waite had been incorporated previously, and were not substantial.

Officers Reports

Commissioner Lebeaux: The Council secretary position and bylaw committee chair position will be discussed by John Waite, Council Vice Chair and according to the bylaws, head of the nominating committee. He encouraged members to volunteer for these positions.

John Waite, Vice Chair: The Structure and Council Roles subcommittee will meet before the next meeting. According to the latest Open Meeting Law, the group can meet remotely, after posting the agenda and participation details. The subcommittee will revisit the bylaws and also explore adding more seats, including Fish and Game for example. He noted Representative Ferrante's legislation to elevate the food system within state government. Separately, candidates will be solicited for the secretary position and bylaws committee vacated by Jeff Cole.

Council member updates

Danah Tench: The public comment period for DEP's Solid Waste Master Plan will be extended through September 10. There are four on-line public meetings include three that are still open: Thursday, August 20, 6 – 8 PM; Tuesday, September 1, 6 – 8 PM; and Thursday, September 10, 6 – 8 PM. To register or for more information: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/solid-wastemaster-plan>

Rob Leshin shared an update DESE's reopening guidance with a section on school meals for inperson and students learning remotely, including Q & A documents such as USDA waivers to help with meal service. The current provision of universal free meals will continue through August. Efforts are in progress to extend the waiver. Efforts with the school districts to transition back to the NSLB program are on-going.

Lea Susan Ojamaa: DPH convened a Health Equity Advisor Group to explore root causes of health inequities. Commissioner Kershaw also served on this project. The full recommendations were published July 9, 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/covid-19-healthequity-advisory-group>

<http://blog.mass.gov/publichealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2020/07/DPH-COVID-19Health-Equity-Advisory-Group-Recommendations-Data-Release-and-DPH-Responsecompressed.pdf>

MA Food System Caucus update: Representative Hannah Kane and Senator Jo Comerford

Representative Hannah Kane shared that the Caucus has been very active in all food topics, including assisting legislators with food security issues. Of all the legislative briefings, those in the food insecurity and production area among the most attended, most recently with 87 joining a food access briefing in late June. The Caucus continues to grow with four new legislative members. <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/>

Senator Comerford and Representative Kane continue to call attention to fisher and aquaculture farmer issues. Lt. Governor Polito and Representative Ferrante are also advocates for this sector. Senator Comerford echoed Representative Kane's gratitude for the work of the MA Food Security Task Force and everyone involved.

The Caucus has identified several priority bills that correspond with food access and insecurity, farmland, and economic development. Senator Comerford noted helpful input from DAR on legislative re: healthy soils and bolstering farmer sustainability during this time, as well as Senator Gobi's work on hemp issues. Caucus legislative priorities are listed here: <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/mentor-team>

Program - COVID-19 including MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program

MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program updates and related topics, Commissioner John Lebeaux

On May 17, the Baker/Polito Administration announced an investment of \$56M, including \$36M for the MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program. Close to \$3M in Grant awards was announced earlier in the week representing a wide gamut of project and organization recipients: <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-awards-3-million-in-foodsecurity-grants>. The rolling application process continues through September 15. The Grant was based largely on the Command Center's Food Security Task Force recommendations that included the group that Winton Pitcoff and Commissioner Lebeaux co-chaired. The Grant is being administered through EEA with a multi secretariat review team. DAR review team members include Rose Arruda and Laura Maul. A key concept in the Grant awards is to strengthen the long-term resiliency of the food system.

Rob Leshin had a phone conversation with a school director who can now purchase a food truck to support her remote learners due to the Grant. She was extremely grateful.

Commissioner Lebeaux: A recommendation of the Task Force was connecting and centralizing food system marketing and distribution channels, recognizing the severe disruption caused by the pandemic. Both DAR and DMF were informed that long-standing business relations with some customers nearly disappeared, especially in the hospitality sector. The need for a business to business marketing platform was apparent. DAR staff reviewed several national platforms that could be adopted but found many were not suitable. DAR worked internally to develop a platform and connected with DMF to include seafood. The new MassGrown Exchange connects food and fisher products with buyers, in addition to related services such as transportation, processing and donations. This platform offers a market development tool not just during COVID-19 but into the future. More detail will be shared at the September Council meeting.

MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program and HIP update, Amy Kershaw, DTA
Commissioner and Task Force co-chair.

Commissioner Kershaw thanked everyone on the Task Force and discussed progress that's been made in several areas. Fortifying the emergency food system was a priority for food banks/pantries and other institutions. There was a focus on closing some of the eligibility guidelines to get SNAP benefits to clients. There is a \$5M investment into HIP for fresh local produce getting into the hands of SNAP clients and at the same time, infusing the economy of the local communities. Legislations colleagues worked to allow carryover of unused funds into the next fiscal year. A goal is that this investment helps with existing underlying problems as well as COVID -19 issues.

An expedited process to gain new vendors was established. A priority is that new vendors have interest to sell in communities hit hard by COVID, where food access and environmental justice issues exist. There is interest in vendors who are creative with delivery and connections to their communities, via language for example. There have been 91 applications and 39 have been approved. Many are small local farmers that live and work in their communities. Some are larger growers that have innovative delivery solutions. There is a good geographic spread. Commissioner Kershaw complimented staff Mia Kortebein and her team for amazing work around this program. She thanked everyone for their support including Commissioner Lebeaux and the DAR team.

CARES & MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program update and initiatives to increase consumption of MA seafood: Dan McKiernan, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries

Seafood businesses have lost significant sales due to the pandemic. Many Massachusetts seafood dealers have accounts across the countries that have disappeared. Fewer products have been sold overseas. Massachusetts seafood dealers have lost some \$95M since March 1, 2020. There are signs of improvement, but the losses are substantial. Congress developed

programs for seafood and Massachusetts had the third largest award in the country. DMF has been fortunate to have statistics based on excellent data collection to capture the industry activity. Worst hit were dealers who relied on restaurant buyers and customers overseas. Oyster producers were the hardest hit since consumers lack experience shucking. Demand is also very off for Bluefin tuna for example. These fishermen are being advised not to harvest until the fall. Seafood processors are altering their product line, for example with home packs with frozen portions for home consumption. Having a diverse customer platform such as the MassGrown exchange is helpful. Lobsters and oyster wholesale dealers and processors are working to diversify their customer base. This platform is important and will be promoted to the industry. The Seafood Marketing Committee Advisory group provided positive feedback.

Dan mentioned his appreciation of the working relationship with DAR as part of the Grant review team, on the MassGrown Exchange platform, and earlier projects. John Lebeaux echoed the sentiment of appreciation in working closely with DMF. MDAR intersects with DMF in aquaculture, as well as with seafood and aquaculture for export marketing development, accessing programs and services developed with USDA funds through Food Export USA Northeast, of which Commissioner Lebeaux is an officer of the Board of Directors.

The Cape Cod Fishermen's Alliance has developed haddock chowder for food pantries and for retail outlets. The retail business will subsidize the food pantry product. Haddock is an undervalued species. The fishery is abundant. Foundation support is subsidizing fishermen for their product.

MA Food System Collaborative: MA Local Food Action Plan Update Listening sessions: Winton Pitcoff, Director

It's been five years since the Food Local Food Action Plan was accepted by the Council. This crisis has made this an important time to revisit the Plan and set some new priorities. The Collaborative has hosted a series of zoom calls with existing networks including local food policy councils, Buy Local organizations and other groups that can share on the ground info and what is needed for a resilient food system. Results will be aggregated, synthesized and shared back out for top priorities. A report is expected in late fall or early winter. The Collaborative has also been involved in many projects mentioned by previous speakers. He complimented DTA for a thoughtful and efficient process to add new HIP vendors.

Commissioner Lebeaux: In the current grant, the evaluation criteria include consideration for proposals that support gateway cities and low-income census tracts, and a connection to the MA Local Food Action Plan. MDAR continues to try to find ways to promote and use the MA Local Food Action Plan.

Winton: The additional unemployment funds from Congress are expiring this week, which will be a significant strain on the emergency food system. It's a good opportunity to talk about the cost of food. Food prices in the U.S. are low but people are still going hungry and growers are getting low wages.

Announcements:

Brandeis Heller School graduate students promote food system survey: Christian Gochez. Along with teammates from Brandeis, Christian thanked Jennifer Hashley from New Entry for this project. A literature review based on the Collective Impact model has been conducted, and an interview and survey is in process. Outcomes include a stakeholder map and actionable items. A report will be shared at the Council's September meeting. Please take this survey and promote it widely: https://brandeis.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_80QEZO45G43mdA9

July 20 – August 9, **NOFA Summer Conference Virtual Event** - nofasummerconference.org
September 2020, 9:30 – 11 a.m. (tba) [Massachusetts Food Policy Meeting](#)

Public Comment: An announcement of the awarded projects for the MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program will be made in the next few weeks.

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was made at 11:19 by John Waite and seconded by John Lee and passed unanimously by voice vote: Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Danah Tench, and John Waite.