

MA Food Policy Council Minutes

Monday June 1, 2015

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Worcester Union Train Station, CMRPC's Union Hall, Worcester

In attendance:

Kerry Bowie, MA Dept. of Environmental Protection

Jeff Cole, Federation of MA Farmers Markets

Suzanne Condon, MA Dept. of Public Health

Amanda Kinchla, UMASS

Representative Steve Kulik

John Lebeaux, Commissioner, MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources

John Lee, Allandale Farm

Katie Millet, MA Dept. Of Education

Vivian Morris, Boston Public Health Commission

Stephanie Peach, designee for Representative Leah Cole

Mike Scuderi, Costa Produce, designee for Manny Costa

Timothy Wilkerson, MOBD

John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center (not yet sworn in)

Bonita Oehlke, MA Dept. of Ag Resource recorded meeting notes.

The meeting was called to order at 9:45 by Commissioner Lebeaux. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Representative Kulik, seconded by Suzanne Condon and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Lebeaux thanked Trish Settles and CMRPC for the use of the excellent, centrally located space in Union Hall. He asked FPC and attendees to introduce themselves and share their relation/interest in the Food Policy Council and food systems planning.

The Statewide Food Systems Planning Update was presented by Winton Pitcoff, MAPC, including a MA Workforce, Education and Training Analysis draft, by Alex Risley Schroeder of the MA Workforce Alliance.

Draft documents/reports to date were described, including the Preamble, Stakeholder Engagement, Existing Conditions, a Workforce Alliance report on underrepresented groups that will be integrated into the overall plan reports, and a spreadsheet that needs input from the FPC.

The Goals and Recommendations chapter will be based on sorting through priorities to strengthen the state's food system and will be in the form of an overarching goal followed by many broad statements.

A discussion about metrics took place. What are some key points of data that are already out there to gauge progress/success? Are there metrics that could be used that are not currently used? FPC member are asked to suggest existing metrics or ideas on needed topics/research to help measure the progress of the plan during and after implementation.

The first draft of the plan reflects the outcome of the robust process, including public forums and interviews that have occurred. Some information may be represented as a minority opinion, but is included as an important part of the education and planning process overall as well as to not lose the positions of advocates who have been at the table so far. Therefore these elements and the diversity of input will remain in the planning documents. Once it goes to public review, the FPC and Working Groups will start refining the information.

Recommendations are being developed based on the external engagement process. Some examples are:

To optimize wholesale/institutional sales/markets. Can procurement contracts be standardized for state and municipal sales? Many of our neighboring states require the purchase of local food where as in MA it's not.

Remove the sales tax exemption for sugary foods and move the funds to the Food Trust or similar work to enhance consumption of local farm products.

Work with the AG on enforcing truth in advertising laws re sales of local food.

Review regulations such as the state commercial plumbing as it relates to agriculture. Can regulators work more closely with nonprofit and Technical Service Providers as soon as new regulations are promulgated? Can assistance to and training for local BOH re: ag issues be assisted by Ag Commissions? If regulations about poultry are being changed input should be solicited/incorporated from local small poultry businesses.

Educating consumers regarding diet and health and the declining UMASS budget over the past several decades are important issues.

Reinvesting in the MA Grown and Fresher program while support the Buy Local campaigns. Get funding for professional marketing direction.

More research would be helpful e.g. a map of all the food expenditures in all of the state agencies in relation to the goals of the food plan, with resulting evaluation on how resources could be reallocated to support the food plan.

The MA Food Systems Planning draft will be publically released on October 23, to be reviewed on-line. Comments will be integrated and then an updated version presented to the FPC in December for review and a final plan due December 28th.

Alex Risley Schroeder provided an update on her work relating to jobs and sustainability, education, training and workforce development regarding identifying career pathways around food systems work. For example, starting with culinary training at a community college and finishing up at UMASS could lead to a job as a food scientist. The report broadly describes topics in workforce development in a system, with food as the defining topic. Point of the report is to share the information and then connect with workforce development professionals. MA farming has a very seasonal employment system. This makes it difficult to support a family. These jobs are often held by migrant workers and it is challenging to find local workers. The seasonal worker issue is also important for food processing sector.

The report also looks at future demand for food sectors jobs and external impacts for example by federal oversight on transportation and regulations on truck drivers delivering food. Distribution costs are predicted to increase, because of fewer truck drivers.

Home Economics education interest continues to surface, which could be met through a "modern grange." Technical assistance for those starting food systems businesses is important.

There are challenges around regulations, sometimes not solved at the state level. The state is currently reviewing regulations.

Creating jobs that don't pay living wages will impede the ability to grow a robust local food economy. Yet if it was easy, it would already be done.

A FPC member mentioned a focus across the state on career centers, voc schools, institutions in a more cohesive way to educators. For example, the North Shore Community College is supporting casino job development by preparing the workforce. The FPC was reminded to review social status data relating to race to be sure that the plan includes a transformational perspective.

Another FPC member appreciated the thought to integrate farm workers and food processing training to match the skill sets needed when UMASS who gets inquiries from food businesses. UMASS could play a role in the future.

Discussion on the implementation of the plan: What comes after the plan is written? All are eager for a unifying network to keep this together as a plan. Who is going to hold the vision of the plan, measure tracking, and implementation and moving forward? Who will fund the network of collaborators? What will it look like and how will it be governed? Who decides on priorities: The FPC or the executive committee, or a public or private office or state agencies? Should there be additional seats on the FPC, perhaps from the former Alliance? Should the FPC meet more frequently? Should there be a food and ag caucus in the legislature? If implantation is independent of the FPC how would organizations connect with the FPC? Funders would like to get a sense of some implementation models and direction, to possibly be a part of their December funding dockets.

FPC members discussed a priority to keep these issues on the front burner. There were thousands of voices brought together across agriculture and a huge opportunity to think about ag, food, farming and to bring the legislature together to get something accomplished. In the past, the process was basically land based and is much wider now and a voice is needed that keeps these topics in the public sector. We have so many good organizations already doing good work we don't need a new big group. A focus on networking, communication and support of existing groups in order to strengthen the food plan agenda is important. Leadership needs to be supported and redundancy avoided so that priorities don't disappear.

Some setting of priorities should come from the FPC. Some priorities will be straight forward while others point to continued networking, pending legislation and future legislation. Priorities will fit into buckets of some sort, without a right way to parse it out. There will be the over arching values to hold the priorities up against. Other elements will be education and monitoring based on metrics derived from setting goals and measuring progress. At the public sector level, - everyone has a huge workload and counterparts within different agencies don't always connect, but connections will be helpful .

It was noted that there have been good examples of state agencies working together, with efficiencies from cross agency work. In other states, the statewide food plan resulted in the establishment of a FPC. Having the FPC in place puts MA in a better position for implementation.

Winton was invited to an upcoming FEAC meeting by Suzanne Condon, to share information about the Food Systems Planning and meet industry leaders from the private sector, that have been less engaged to date. There has been a wait and see attitude from the private sector.

Commissioner Lebeaux emphasized the importance of agency review of the MA Food Systems Planning chapters to date. "It's not something that will be done to your agency and your engagement is important now."

Unfinished Business

FINI (Food Insecurity Nutrition Initiative) Grant status: Frank Martinez Nocito, MA Department of Transitional Assistance was not able to attend, though it was mentioned that work will tentatively start this month. An update will be provided at the next FPC meeting.

New Business

An overview of a newly released study: Food System Resiliency in Boston was presented by Austin Nijhus, Initiative for a Competitive Inner City
<https://www.icic.org/research-and-analysis/resilient-food-systems>

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 PM. A motion was made by Representative Kulik, seconded by Vivian Morris and unanimously passed.