

Minutes: Massachusetts Food Policy Council Meeting

Thursday, March 10, 2016 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Leverett Saltonstall Building
100 Cambridge Street, Conference Rooms C& D
Boston, MA

In attendance:

Jeff Cole, Direct to Farm Marketing
Jana Ferguson, Deputy Director, MA Department of Public Health
Anne Gobi, Senator
Representative Steve Kulik
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MA Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner
Frank Martinez Nocito, designee, Dept. of Transitional Assistance
Vivian Morris, Nutrition & public health expert, Boston Public Health Commission
Danah Tench, designee, Dept. of Environmental Protection
John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center
Timothy Wilkerson, designee, MA Office of Housing and Development

The meeting was **called to order** at 9:50 AM by FPC Chair John Lebeaux. A **motion to accept the minutes** from September 8 as presented was made by John Waite and seconded by Tim Wilkerson. The **motion carried on voice vote.**

December minutes: A correction was made to the December minutes by John Waite; to include a thank you to Bonita Oehlke expressed regarding the food systems planning. A **motion to accept the minutes as corrected** was made by John Waite and seconded by Frank Martinez -Nocito. **The motion passed on unanimous voice vote.**

Reports of Officers

Chairman and Commissioner Lebeaux thanked Kerry Bowie who has been a long time and dedicated participant in the MA Food Policy Council. He is leaving his position at the MA Department of Environmental Protection for the private sector. Chairman Lebeaux welcomed DEP designee Danah Tench, an attorney at that agency. He also welcomed Senator Anne Gobi to the council, who was appointed by senate president Stan Rosenberg.

FPC Food Plan/Implementation Discussion

Chairman John Lebeaux described a ranking template sent out prior to the meeting. He asked members to share their priorities. MDAR approached this by going through each section to prioritize recommendations for the Food Systems Plan with an alignment of the Departments mission and goals. A few priorities from Tier I were described including an evaluation of MDAR and state logos and brands; strengthening the Commonwealth Quality Program which allows small producers to gain market access including regulatory certainty with the FSMA in a reasonable way for small farms; reinvigorating an Ag Innovations Center; and to develop a task force for farmland protection on farms that are not currently eligible for existing programs based on soil quality.

Amanda Kinchla sent a document with priorities that included support the UMASS Food Science program, the Extension Programs, the Waltham Center for Sustainable Urban Ag, and nutrient management issues.

Vivien Morris shared that the Boston Public Health Commission has fully supported this endeavor from the beginning. There are several areas where the Commission is already working which will be highlighted and others that are in progress. The funding of the MA Food Trust is important as well as the FINI project and earned income tax credits. Much of the Commission's work is in food access and security. They support increasing the minimum wage. They are doing a health impact assessment in collaboration with federal programs; supporting city-wide farmers market programs, the Boston Housing Authority work to promote SNAP; and bringing all Boston farmers markets on-line for digital EBT systems.

Frank Martino-Nocito shared recommendations for DTA. He thanked Winton Pitcoff for his assistance in the process. The focus includes restoring SNAP benefits to eligible MA residents; hiring of staff for applications and renewals; and pursuing a simplified application pilot. A focus is to work on the SNAP GAP and capital investments as well as the FINI/HIP incentive grant in partnership with DPH and MDAR to maximize the program. The April 2017 statewide rollout is still on track. A goal is to engage additional partners to raise additional matching fund between now and Oct. 31.

Jana Ferguson also commented on Winton Pitcoff's help to facilitate the process and glean through the goals and recommendations. Many of the chapters play into DPH re: food safety, food processing, distribution and access. Jana worked on the food safety and processing side, while Michael Moore works Food Protection Program. Some of the DPH priorities address multiple goals. For example, the MA in Motion program has items that connect with food access. The Food Plan complements the regulatory review that the state is engaged in. DPH is evaluating the retail food code with draft amendments and will utilize the collaborative as part of stakeholder engagements. Many recommendations were taken to heart for example, inconsistent standards. Addressing some of the goals with boards of health and municipalities allows education and outreach. FSMA is being evaluated and grants funds used for contract work to understand the implications of FSMA on small food businesses. DPH supports a facilitated work group with a broad range of representatives regarding public health. There are many cross agency goals and DPH looks forward to reaching mutual goals as well as support agency priorities.

Danah Tench was a first time attendee at the Food Policy Council. DEP is working with other bureaus and will be completing this document soon

John Waite shared his appreciation for all the goals relating to food processing. He also highlighted the MA Food Trust and financing for implementation; and Farm to School.

Representative Steve Kulik reported on a presentation at the state house for legislators and staff that was very well attended and raised the profile of this project. Some legislators will pursue continuation of funding.

Tim Wilkerson shared that his office is considering how the plan fits with innovation mapping through the state and with the rural agenda, as well as seafood economic development on the seacoasts. Many aspects of the plan coincide with agency activities - hand in glove. The Regulatory Review has a deadline

at the end of April. Having a patch work of 351 cities and towns creating their own patchwork is very nerve racking for companies.

Jeff Cole shared that the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers Markets wants to pursue the strategies that provide technical assistance to farming and processing.

Wendy Mainardi from the Division of Marine Fisheries shared goals from the MA Food Plan, including that fisherman's access to markets is available; permits are bundled to make businesses more fluid; retail infrastructure is identified; and a grant is formed to support program and educational curriculum for eating local seafood, including a tool kit for consumer education to promote locally caught seafood.

Funding the work of the Food Plan: The FPC will be establishing major priorities of the members and then of the FPC. These will be made known to the administration, general court and public at large to see what traction is gained and who will be a champions for which goals. FPC members were asked to submit priorities to MDAR by 3.25.16, using the spreadsheet template they provided.

To present the Plan to the Governor's office, it would be efficient to have a document with priorities, in tiers, from each FPC member or agency including contact information. This is anticipated to be quite long.

From a legislative perspective this would be very helpful as well. The house budget will be out mid-April. There is considerable interest by many members around the state who would like to advance recommendation in this year's budget. Budget information is not required at this time, though FPC agency members might develop cost estimates. Legislative aides can, if needed, reach out to stakeholders to formulate budgets.

A motion was made that MDAR put together a summary document of all FPC member input that then can be reviewed and approved by John Waite, seconded by Representative Kulik. The motion **passed on unanimous voice vote.**

Winton Pitcoff, MA Food Plan Collaborative update:

Winton is happy to continue working with FPC members as needed. Collaborative update: It's been three months since the FPC accepted the Plan. The MA Food Plan Collaborative has focused on organizational development work in these early stages with support from the Sudbury, Boston and Kendall Foundations to promote, monitor and facilitate the plan.

The Collaborative is developing a communications strategy for stakeholders. A funders briefing was held. Representative Kulik was present and 40 funders. The Plan can be used as a foundation to review grant proposals. There has been one meeting of a Collaborative Advisory Group and all members are well connected to the broader food system. There has been a lot of outreach at many ag commission meetings, municipal food policy councils and at many other gatherings.

Input has been given by all of the agencies on the Council as well with Fish and Game. Meetings were also held with Senator Ann Gobi and Representative Paul Schmid. Representative Kulik and the Ag Caucus will be briefed on Ag Day at the State House on April 5th.

The Collaborative is reviewing projects to take on. One focus is cross sector/cross agency topics that don't or may not have a specific home. Developing a state identity/brand program might be interesting to review and officially raise money to build that identity/brand and to facilitate others plugging back in, connecting, and intersecting in a statewide food brand.

Local Board of Health topics continue to be contentious. The collaborative would like to bring in a professional facilitator to address these issues. The Collaborative is also considering economic development issues and plugging into the Governors economic development plans. Facilitating a discussion around Urban Ag issues; public procurement and metrics (how can how much is grown and how much ends up on MA consumer plates be measured?) perhaps with UMASS Dept. of Economic Resources as a partner. The Collaborative may track recommendations and progress. The Collaborative will develop priorities and compare how they mesh with FPC priorities and work where the greatest impact can be made.

Commissioner Lebeaux was thanked for how explicitly the plan has been described in talking points during events.

The plan is a strong road map. The Collaborative is willing to help the FPC consider its roles, consider topics that cross agencies and may be discussed at FPC meetings, and is very willing to assist wherever needed.

Comments:

Q: How does this plan fit into regional planning efforts, such as Harvest New England? Creating an identity doesn't have to mean it only applies within our state border. The collaborative connects with the Regional Plan.

Other states see Massachusetts as the most important source of customers. We can be supportive but also need to carve out our own space to connect our local consumers with our local producers.

An area where stakeholder engagement could be stronger is in processing, manufacturing and distribution. Larger private sector businesses in these categories were not at the table, perhaps because the Plan had a local perspective. But the issues highlighted are just as important to them.

Unfinished Business

Commissioner Lebeaux asked FPC member to consider topics and experts or information about agency or organization programs and services which could be added to upcoming FPC agenda that support work towards the goals of the plan.

Program

Scott Richardson gave a presentation on behalf of the Eos Foundation: Update on school survey re: school Commissaries and synergies with the MA Local Food Action Plan. This initiative shared many overlaps with the MA Local Food Action Plan objectives

New Business Role of the FPC moving forward

Meeting six times instead of four times is a good chance to regroup if there is too much time between meetings and efficient in an effort to support implementation of the Plan. The bylaws would need to be updated. Opinions about where the meetings should be held can be shared separately, as well as topics and speakers for future meetings, especially those that relate to implementation of the Plan.

Member Announcements

Rose Arruda, MDAR, reported that the Urban Ag Conference is already oversubscribed! There is also a academic gathering and municipal planner meeting prior to the event.

April 5, Ag Day at the State House

April 6, CDI, MDAR and FMFM "Rooted in Community" market managers workshop at Tufts Vet School in Grafton, including signup tables for SNAP retailers.

Public Access

A suggestion was made that agencies include action plan goal numbers from the MA Local Food Action Plan in the matrixes.

A motion to adjoin the meeting was made by Vivien Morris and seconded by Jana Ferguson. **The motion carried on voice vote and the meeting ended at 11:55 AM.**