

Minutes

Food Policy Council Meeting (hybrid: remote and in-person)

March 15, 2024, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

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

In attendance:

Keath Christensen, Senator Fattman's Office
Michael Cole, Deputy Commissioner DTA
Senator Jo Comerford (Rachel Klein)
Denise Courtney, ESE
Julianna Kramer, Representative Donahue's Office
Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs
Representative Hannah Kane
Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety
Commissioner Ashley Randle
Caro Roszell, Soils Specialist
Torry Katiroubas Stamm
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health
John Waite, Food Processing
Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Not in attendance: Jessica del Rosario, Danah Tench

Commissioner Randle called the meeting to order at 9:33 AM.

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Director Gobi and passed by voice vote: Keath Christensen, Michael Cole, Senator Comerford, Denise Courtney, Julianna Kramer, Anne Gobi, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Denise Courtney, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker.

A motion to accept the annual report with Council edits was made by John Waite, seconded by Torry Katsiroubas Stamm and passed by voice vote: Keath Christensen, Michael Cole, Senator Comerford, Denise Courtney, Julianna Kramer, Anne Gobi, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Denise Courtney, Commissioner Ashley Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katiroubas Stamm, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker. Comment: For next year's annual report, a list of recommendations for what the administration should do should be included.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Senator Jo Comerford, Representative Hannah Kane. Though priorities remain the same, this budget cycle is challenging due to decreases in tax revenue and increased costs. March 25th will be a legislative briefing for Caucus members to be more informed and better advocates of food system legislation. Active work is needed to end hunger. Representative Paul Schmidt, a founder of the Caucus, is not seeking re-election. As the only active farmer in the legislature, he will be especially missed. Progress is being made on the eight priority bills of the Caucus, as well as endorsed bills. The 21st Century Ag Commission will include an on-site hearing at Extension, to learn more about the technical resources and support that farmers require. Extension has been underfunded

for their work in agriculture, clean energy, and other area, important with increased climate disasters. Appreciation was expressed for this season's maple tour, which connected legislators with maple farmers.

Q: Is there anything food relating to be mindful of in the Housing Bond Bill? A: Farm worker housing is included, as well as a section on farms, important to keep on the forefront. There are funds for climate technology, an investment that supports rural communities and that aligns with food policy and farming. The Rural Development Fund is also important to support communities. Are NEFNE goals a part of the Bond Bill? Yes, NEFNE briefed the Food System Caucus for these important goals and resources.

MA Food System Collaborative: Policy Director Becca Miller and Executive Director Kristina Pechulis. The Collaborative supports HIP funding at \$25 M, FSIG at \$25M, and \$1M for MA Farm to School. Most groups are seeking level funding considering the budget. Another ask is a third round of grant funding of \$250,000 for the Local Food Policy Council Grant program. The Collaborative will join the MA Food System Caucus during their briefing, and a separate briefing for advocates. The Collaborative's advocacy aligns with the Food System Caucus. Many items are included in an Omnibus legislation filed previously with HIP enabling legislation, food waste, ag equity, APR, and next generation farmer fund. Representative Paul Schmidt is not seeking re-election and will be greatly missed as a champion of Massachusetts agriculture. The latest Ag Census show a continuing trend of losing farms and farmland, though MA ag value has increased, direct sales, and the number of younger farmers. It's more important than ever to support land preservation and the MA Farmland Action Plan.

Comment: The latest ag census shows large increases in ag tourism numbers, reflecting increased consumer engagement with farms. There are more inquiries from farmers interested in ag tourism. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/agritourism-study-commission-final-report/download> The 2022 Ag Tourism Study Commission report includes recommendations to bolster this venue: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/agritourism-study-commission-final-report/download> Ag tourism is important for farm viability. MDAR collaborates closely with MOTT.

Comment: Could the Local Food Policy Council Grant be included in a Bond Bill? Ideally, the process would be more streamlined with more time to execute projects.

Officer reports: Commissioner Randle: Mackenzie May has joined MDAR's Division of Markets. Her work will include working with our commodity groups to have greater engagement. She has resigned from the MA Food Policy Council. Ayn Yeagle expressed interest in being a candidate for Mackenzie's position of Vice Chair. The Nomination Committee will meet to organize a slate for the Vice Chair position for the May meeting. Separately, please share nominations for the Direct-to-Consumer seat to Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov.

MDAR is building a Division of Food Security and is seeking director candidates. The FSIG grant will be moved to under MDAR's umbrella. Other partners will continue to assist with the review process. The Food Security Working Group will support this work. EEA's Environmental Justice strategy was recently released. Stakeholder engagement highlighted work led by BIPOC organizations. MDAR's lead was Rebecca Davidson with assistance from former intern Olivia Palmer who has recently joined the MDAR team. Workforce development is critical for our agricultural growth. A consultant has been contracted to identify workforce needs and the climate core program. The plan is to launch a food systems and climate change program in 2025. MDAR has also launched an Agricultural Youth Council, consisting of a 13-member board of rising high school seniors. The application is not lengthy. The goal is a diverse

Council to inform the work of MDAR re: their perception of barriers and opportunities to pursue an agricultural career. DESE and 4-H have been important partners in promoting the program. Plan to attend the first annual Agricultural Resource Fair on April 12th at DMF's headquarters in Westboro. Stakeholders will offer one-stop shop to access resources, learn about programs, and connect with service providers. Please share widely this opportunity widely. Agriculture Day at the Statehouse is April 3rd. Plan to attend to engage with growers, youth, and members of the legislature.

Committee reports:

Strategic Planning Committee: Commissioner Randle. The Committee met and has been participating in stakeholder interviews to build out a roadmap for an official launch in the next month. Stakeholders are working together to align with residents with lived experience and legislative and administrative support. A major question is how do we define what it means to end hunger?

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle. All positions have been filled. A recent meeting featured Commissioner Randle who shared information on MDAR's initiatives relating to the food system. The group plans to reach out to local food policy councils to understand granular food system issues and will report back to the Council. The Committee continues the Council's focus on climate change and racial equity. The Committee is interested also interested in food waste reduction advocacy. Comment: It's exciting to see this Committee revitalized. The Committee will work with the MA Food System Collaborative who has been intentional and strategic, to leverage resources efficiently and will build on existing work. The Collaborative and the Caucus can assist in the development of a survey, to be able to have a tool to use across all communities that aligns with existing missions. Survey overload is something to consider. It might be valuable to conduct interviews and attend local food policy meetings.

Bylaw Committee - Phoebe Walker: Proposed changes to the Council's legislation including striking out the language that doesn't allow compensation and adding a seat for fisheries which is currently in the Omnibus Bill language. Should there be a seat for housing and livable communities? Are there other seats to be considered, for example extension and an emergency food seat. Striking out language for the seats required by the Advisory Committee would allow more flexibility. Comment: Having flexibility in how the membership is identified is important especially to have diverse representation. This topic will be on the Council's July meeting agenda.

Local Food Policy Council reports:

City of Holyoke: Stephanie Colon, MA in Motion Coordinator, Office of Planning and Economic Development. Holyoke's local food policy council is called the Food Economy Coalition. Through the grant, there were 29 entrepreneurs who were Serve Safe certified in both Spanish and English. Funding was also provided for entrepreneurs to use time at the kitchen. Food is part of economic development, contributing towards a better quality of life. The local Chamber of Commerce and TDI bank were also partners. The grant required a quick turnaround time, but showed how the groups can all work together. The Coalition was awarded a separate grant that's being used to develop a Holyoke cookbook to share with the community including an on-site farmers market and information on using HIP for shopping. In Holyoke, there aren't many places where HIP benefits can be used, and just twice a month. Cooking classes with culturally relevant foods for our communities are in-progress, with adjustments to

make the recipes a bit healthier. We're collecting cultural recipes and stories for our constituents. We are also working with community gardens re: how you can grow your own food in a PDF version and a printed version, working with dietitians on healthy cultural relevant recipes. Food photographers from the local community college are also engaged. The Coalition is goal oriented. This group is fairly new - and are learning what we'd like to work on in the future. This grant helped us support our partners in this work. The Coalition is also very involved, adjusting our bylaws to be very inclusive.

Town of Hudson: Kali Coughlan, MetroWest Food Collaborative Coordinator. This grant was very timely as MA in Motion funding had just become less available. Work was based on a previous community food assessment that included a recommendation for a food policy council. We had assistance from MAPC to develop this Council of 15 members, named the Metro West Collaborative with a focus on nourishing food as the terminology, instead of healthy food. Funds supported internal salaries, as well an intern. There was a focus on hearing community member voices in convenient locations for example, where food is being distributed. Access to info, culturally appropriate food choices, and dignity in food access was important. Gift cards, funded through the grant, were given to anyone who was part of the listening sessions or interviews. The website calendar was enhanced to provide information in multiple languages and for example, what food is available, and what id or other info they need to provide. Funds were also used to translate materials. HIP is important and translated materials helped to convey info on this program. Signage was also developed. Identifying gaps and services was also a priority since SNAP enrollment could be higher. The Council had a first in-person meeting and local strawberries were served. The MA Food System Collaborative presented a policy/advocacy training program. Having conversations with community members was a first step. Offering childcare and food was a huge asset. We're working to identify other resources to continue to expand capacity. This grant helped to springboard us ahead to accomplish this work.

Member updates:

Phoebe Walker. An agenda item for the May meeting will include a discussion about food and drink containing THC as an ingredient and regulatory issues.

John Waite: Be mindful of the upcoming grant opportunities including RFSI grant, Food Venture Grant and the FSIG grant that can all support processing. The MA Farm to Sea to School Conference is March 22nd, at Smith College, the 20th anniversary of the MA Farm to School program.

Caro Roszell: American Farmland Trust is available to support farmer grant applications.

Announcements:

HIP Day at the state house, March 25. There will also be a remote option.

MA Food Policy Council (virtual) May 10, 2024, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

Public Comment

Adjournment

A motion to accept the adjourn the meeting as made at 11:25 by John Waite, seconded by Phobe Walker, and passed by voice vote: Keath Christensen, Michael Cole, Rachel Klein, Denise Courtney, Julianna Kramer, Director Gobi, Keri XXX from Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Denise Courtney, Commissioner Ashley Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katiroubas Stamm, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker.

Attendance: 35 remote, 9 in-person