

Minutes

MA Food Policy Council remote meeting

Friday, March 17, 2023, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

In attendance:

Bill Fredericks Office of Senator Fattman

Sophia Flioni, Office of Representative Kane

Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Distribution

Amanda Kinchla, UMass

Rachel Klein, Senator Comerford's office

Commissioner Ashley Randle, MDAR

John Lee, Farmer

Rob Leshin, ESE

Bobby Malinn, MEOHED

Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Chelsea Gazillo for Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Danah Tench, MassDEP

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Brittany Mangini, DTA Associate Commissioner of Food Security and Nutrition Program

Phoebe Walker, Local Boards of Health

Absent: Representative Donahue, John Waite

The meeting was called to order at 9:33 by Vice Chair Mackenzie May.

Acceptance of minutes: A vote to accept the minutes was made by Phoebe Walker, seconded by John Lee and passed by voice vote: Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Amanda Kinchla, Rachel Klein, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Chelsea Gazillo, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, and Phoebe Walker.

Officer Reports

Vice Chair: Mackenzie May congratulated the new Commissioner of the MA Dept of Ag Resources, Ashley Randle. She explained the **process to fill the Council chair open position**. Former Chair & Commissioner Lebeaux's term ends 11/23. "The Council may fill vacancies in offices by ballot vote for the remainder of a term. The Nominating Committee may nominate individuals to fill vacancies and nominations may also be made from the floor. A minimum thirty-day Notice must be given for a vote to fill a vacancy." Interested Council members can share their nomination for the Chair position by April 28 by email to Mackenzie May or Bonita Oehlke. A vote will be taken at the May 12 meeting. Regarding the agenda, a discussion on opportunities and processes for the Council to support food system policy discussion will be postponed until the May meeting. **Acceptance of the Council's annual report:** A motion to accept the report was made by Ayn Yeagle, seconded by John Lee, and passed by voice vote: Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Amanda Kinchla, Rachel Klein, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Chelsea Gazillo, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, and Phoebe Walker. **Council member John Lee resignation:** Commissioner Randle recognized John Lee, retiring Council member for his passion, contributions, and collaborative spirit to make Massachusetts agriculture accessible and productive for all. John has been the "farmer" member

of the Council since its inception, offering practical and sage input. John Lee shared his gratitude to everyone working to move food and farming ahead and into the spotlight, and his hope and confidence for agriculture and the food systems moving forward. Suggestions for the farmer position can be emailed to Commissioner Randle or Bonita Oehlke. Names will be forwarded to EEA.

Secretary report: Danah Tench suggested that every other meeting have all Council members meeting in person, with a virtual option for members of the public to attend. She shared the many benefits and options to meeting in person. The other meetings would be 100% remote. **A motion to have every other Council meeting with live member participation** was made by Danah Tench, seconded by John Lee, and passed unanimously: Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Amanda Kinchla, Rachel Klein, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Chelsea Gazillo, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, and Phoebe Walker. The next meeting, May 12, is confirmed for a hybrid meeting in MDAR's office conference room at 258 Turnpike Road, Southborough.

MA Food System Collaborative: Winton Pitcoff. For the first time, the State Legislature has an ag committee, previously ag has been included with the energy and natural resources committee. The Collaborative's focus is to elevate conversations about agriculture and identify co-sponsors. Bills are being assigned and moving pretty rapidly. It's good news that the Governor's budget includes \$25 M for FSIG and language that it should be a permanent program. There are also funds for additional MDAR staff to support farmland conservation, as well as for additional DEP inspectors to enforce the organic waste ban. The Collaborative is lobbying for level funding for HIP - \$24M, and a new request for \$1.25M for a food system literacy pilot to be run by DESE. See the Collaborative's legislative and budget priorities: <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/current-legislative-activity/> Agriculture Day at the state house is April 12, the first time in-person event since 2019, please register https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdiezvGpiulWIo4O04Q7tuor_3jmvBT3DgSW7RWWb7fRNHAVg/viewform March is maple month, and the sap is flowing. All citizens should partake fittingly in these activities!

MA Food Policy Council Advisory Committee report: Andy Varela and Danielle Collins. The Committee has identified three areas of legislation for a focus relating to climate change and equity: an Act to promote food literacy, an Act strengthening local food systems, and a Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands. The Committee suggested that the Council pursue an amendment to the enabling legislation to be able to offer stipends and to add a fisheries seat. Stipends would support diversity and equity for participation in the Committee. Seafood is an important part of the food system. Winton Pitcoff noted that there is a bill already filed that would add the commissioner of fish and game to the FPC. Since that bill is already under consideration, it would be a good vehicle to add other suggested structural changes to. Rep Schmid is the sponsor, so reaching out to him as well as to the committee with testimony would be one possible strategy. <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H99> Ayn Yeagle, Council member and Committee facilitator, recognized the Advisory Committee and their efforts to support the Council with their professional lived experience.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Sophia Flioni, Office of Representative Kane, and Rachel Klein, Office of Senator Comerford. Commissioner Randle was congratulated and welcomed in this position. There is a focus on the Governor's budget. The legislature is aware that the HIP budget is low. The Caucus is working to increase it. Bills were recently sent to committee. Q: How can members who can do advocacy work help to push legislation forward. A: The Caucus has a website

<https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/> with priority legislation for each session. Bills will be having hearings and providing testimony is important, as well as reaching out to the filers on how legislation can be supported.

Program:

Christopher Bosso, Professor of Public Policy and Political Science, Northeastern University: Understanding and Preparing for the Farm Bill with a lens on equity and climate change

Professor Bosso congratulated Commissioner Randle in her new position, and recognized John Lee for his contributions to the food system and Allandale Farm where he shops at the farmstand. He provided a history of the Farm Bill, policy changes and priorities over the years, and the status of the current Bill. He shared that pre-pandemic; SNAP was funded at \$60B annually. Funding has doubled since the pandemic. USDA redefined the thrifty food plan for the first time since 2006, which raised benefits that boost SNAP spending.

Q: Can the Inflation Reduction Act be explained? A: There is a budget of \$20B for conservation which might be swept into the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is a collection of programs and things get put in to get votes – even if items have been authorized elsewhere. This is classic legislative behavior. SNAP continues since it is an entitlement program and has to be funded unless Congress limits spending. Congress has not tried to restrict spending on SNAP in 30 years. Comment: The Massachusetts SNAP caseload is 42% higher than before COVID. States have some autonomy on how SNAP is run. In Massachusetts, the focus has been on access, so folks don't fall off due to programmatic issues. SNAP funds mean federal funds coming into to MA to support the food system. It's not a trivial program. Q: Will the White House conference on Hunger Nutrition and Health and the five pillars affect the legislation? How much of that wish list gets put into effect? A: Due to politics, there might not be much action since there are different ideas about how to affect change. The 1969 White House Conference led to dramatic changes because Congress was leading the way on the legislative front on anti-hunger programs. This Conference may not have much effect on legislation but will be important for the food system lens. Public comment on the Farm Bill: There are a number of national organizations calling for transformation in this Farm Bill including re: racial equity. Don't give up, there are lots of opportunities for transformative change. A: That's correct, there are many advocacy opportunities for change. Put your effort into the Senate side.

Commissioner Randle shared highlights of USDA supported programs that have resulted from the Farm Bill. MDAR's MassGrown and Wellness program was supported by the Farm Bill and is now a part of the state budget including a staff position for a behavioral health specialist. Other examples include the HIP program, which is critical to our state, with Massachusetts setting a model for other states. The Urban Agriculture program is funded through the Farm Bill, including the Urban Ag Innovation program, and the critical funds for Specialty Crops.

MA Food Policy Council member updates:

Chelsea Gazillo provided a Healthy Soils update: Funding of \$1.02 M has been requested for the implementation of the Healthy Soils Action Plan which includes stakeholder engagement, updates, distribution of planning tools for MA soil health, staffing for agencies, and direct support to landowners. <https://farmland.org/healthy-soils-action-massachusetts/>

Phoebe Walker: Local boards of health are working towards consistency to modernize the Massachusetts local public health system. At a future Council meeting, a status report will be shared including statewide training and how the Council priorities can be shared with additional stakeholders.

Rob Leshin: DESE has several farm to school grants from USDA and MDAR. The NE Food for Schools program is funded with \$3.5 M from USDA. Efforts are in place with MA Farm to School set up a process for school districts to expand relationships with local suppliers. Over 200 districts requested \$9M in funding. There is a huge demand for local food in schools. Several programs support expanding the capacity for Farm to School activities. Universal Free School Meals update: \$65 M has been approved for the current school year. DESE is waiting for this to be signed so there won't be a pause in reimbursement and is working with A&F to include this funding through a supplemental budget filing. Statistics this year show that 6 of 7 students are eating school lunch, and it's been gradually increasing month to month.

Brittany Mangini: DTA is mindful of the supplemental budget process for SNAP support and is ready to move when it gets passed. Massachusetts is one of five states to join a mobile EBT pilot. Working to get the technology on everyone's smart phones which will add more efficiency to the program and a level of security to avoid fraud. Lost benefits can for the first time be replaced, and DTA is working to get that process implemented.

Commissioner Randle: The Seafood Expo North America trade show was held in Boston earlier this week. A Massachusetts Avenue exhibit area at the show, organized by Wendy Mainardi, DMF, and Bonita Oehlke, MDAR, included aquaculture, commercial fisheries, and value-added producers promoting their business to domestic and international buyers. A Massachusetts delegation including EEA Secretary Tepper, EEA Undersecretary Cooper, legislators, and agency representatives met with exhibitors to learn more about this sector and explore challenges and opportunities. The Local Food Policy Council grants have been approved by the Healy-Driscoll administration, and contracts are expected to be sent out by the end of next week. To supplement the \$7.5M Local Food Purchase Assistance Program award to MDAR, an application for an additional \$7 M has moved forward, in hopes of having additional funds for groups who buy food from socially disadvantaged farmers and producers to provide to underserved communities. Commissioner Randle encouraged the Council to attend Agriculture Day at the state house.

Announcements

April 12, 2023, Agriculture Day at the State House - 10 AM – 2 PM

May 12, 2023, MA Food Policy Council, in-person for Council members and also remote - 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM, MDAR office Southboro

Public Comment

A motion to adjourn was made at 11:22 PM by John Lee, seconded by Ayn Yeagle and passed by voice vote: Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Amanda Kinchla, Rachel Klein, Commissioner Randle, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Chelsea Gazillo, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, and Phoebe Walker.