

MA Food Policy Council minutes
Friday, March 18, 2022, 10 am – 12 noon

In attendance:

Representative Donahue
Sophia Flionis, Office of Representative Kane
Jared Freedman, Office of Senator Comerford
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Fattman
Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Distribution
Commissioner Kershaw, DTA
John Lee, Farmer
Commissioner Lebeaux, DAR
Rob Leshin, ESE
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer
Jessica del Rosario, DPH
Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils
Danah Tench, MassDEP
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health
John Waite, Food Processing
Phoebe Walker, Local Boards of Health

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 am by Chair and Commissioner John Lebeaux. He thanked Danah Tench, MassDEP for the remote hosting of this meeting.

January Meeting Minutes - John Lee made a motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Kershaw, and passed unanimously by voice vote: Sophia Flionis, Representative Donahue, Senator Comerford, Bill Fredericks, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Commissioner Kershaw, John Lee, Commissioner Lebeaux, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker. With meeting conflicts, the Caucus and Collaborative updates began the agenda.

MA Legislature's Food System Caucus - Senator Comerford and Representative Donahue gave updates. The Caucus appreciates the Council's and advocate's work. The current focus is on the legislature budget process. The legislature is quite supportive of HIP. The Caucus sent a budget letter for \$20M line item to both houses, MEFAP at \$30M, UMASS Extension at over \$620,000, local food policy councils at \$250,000, and several other line-item support priority recommendations on behalf of the Caucus. FSIG is a priority, a triumph of the pandemic. Efforts are in place to extend the amount of time grantees have to complete their projects. Representative Donahue shared the same sentiments and focus on budget. He encouraged advocates to connect with legislatures and share support for specific line items.

MA Food System Collaborative, Winton Pitcoff

Farmland Action Plan, Climate Change initiative and NE Feeding NE. Winton, also the director of the MA Maple Producers Association, wished everyone a happy maple month and encouraged visits to maple producers. Farmland Action Plan is ongoing for farmland protection and access with goals through 2050. 250 people have participated so far in this engagement process. Visit mass.gov/agr for a link to the Farmland Action Plan Survey. A visioning session for goals and working sessions starts next week with a focus on viability, protection and viability, an analysis of past plans, reports, and existing laws. The Collaborative is coordinating a focus on climate change and agriculture. This has been a NOFA agenda for a while. Messages for advocates, policies, a catalog of state resources, and working lands committee is promoting the message that agriculture is part of the solutions. NE Feeding NE is focused

on extensive research to establish baselines to measure against future progress. Anyone is welcome to join quarterly meetings <https://nefoodsystemplanners.org/>. Norris Guscott of the Collaborative is building a network of farmers of color. With elections on the horizon, the Collaborative is developing food system messages for advocates to share with candidates. The Collaborative priorities mirror those of the Caucus including the FSIG at \$30M funds would support four positions. MA must require a one-to-one match for the allocation of funds for land grant universities. MA lags behind other states for the match for science-based research and technical assistance. This would be a step to get us a little closer.

Q: Please explain more about the challenge with the climate change conversation? A: Since the size and scale of ag is small compared to that of forestry, there are questions about what ag can bring to the table. It's a bit harder to get the message through of what ag can contribute.

Officers Reports: Commissioner Lebeaux
Update on LFPA Program

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service has announced a new and exciting program, the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA). The purpose of the program is to support local, regional, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers through the purchase of domestic local foods. MDAR is developing an application to submit to USDA to implement the LFPA for Massachusetts. The due date was extended to May 6th. Should MDAR's application be approved by USDA, Massachusetts anticipates receiving up to \$7.5 Million to implement the program. As part of the application process, MDAR hosted a listening session to engage with stakeholders. The team is using the feedback to develop a thoughtful, equitable, and impactful proposal. MDAR will also develop resources to build sustaining connections between farmers and communities across the state. To stay up-to-date on the program, be sure to subscribe to the Farm and Market Report, or visit [the LFPA website](#) on Mass.gov.

Massachusetts Ave at Seafood Expo North America, Boston (DMF & MDAR Collaboration)

MDAR worked with DMF to organize the third Massachusetts Avenue at the SENA trade show in Boston, to highlight Massachusetts businesses at this event, a first-time opportunity for in-person business since the pandemic began. MDAR also worked with USDA FAS funds and USDA cooperator partner Food Export USA Northeast to facilitate meetings with EU shellfish importers and MA shellfish dealers with the market being open for the first time in ten years. Aquaculture in MA is valued at over \$28M, and is the fastest growing ag sector, so new markets are important.

Food Security Task Force update

A cross secretariat team and public/private leaders Leadership changes and a new long-term vision for the Task Force will be shared. To build on the work of the Task Force, administration has continued support with an inter secretariat team – chaired by Commissioners Lebeaux and Kershaw and meeting quarterly to identify key sectors and priorities for an interagency working group, which meets monthly. The group has deep expertise to focus on tactics to advance priorities, examine issues, identify strategies, and implement, and monitor/evaluate and engage with stakeholders for advice on impacts, on-going communications, and quarterly briefing to the leadership team.

Council members in the spotlight

Meet new Council members

With all of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council positions filled, this is a good opportunity to learn more about new Council member expertise and experience, including priorities and connections to the MA Local Food Action Plan. At upcoming meetings, other Council members will be in the spotlight in an effort for us to all become more acquainted and understand the talent and resources of the Council for efforts moving forward.

Jessica Del Rosario, DPH designee
Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils Expert
Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Food processor and distributor
Phoebe Walker, Local health department representative
Ayn Yeagle, Community based nutrition and public health

Council's advisory committee update: Ayn Yeagle

The committee met and shared background information and priorities and discussed a process and framework for future meetings with a focus on climate change and equity, both important issues which intersect, especially in environmental justice. This committee can highlight issues for the Council and is welcome to provide recommendations and report out at meetings. The Council makes recommendations to the Governor. The advisory committee makes recommendations to the Council. The MA Local Food Action Plan has specific recommendations as a foundation and though implied, not specifically on racial equity and climate change. The committee discussed meeting parameters and will review existing resources in anticipation of the next meeting.

MA Food Policy Council member updates

John Waite, Ag Innovation Center update. The AIC will assist producers to add value to products to increase business viability. There will be a focus on coordinating existing resources and filling gaps such as research, product development and partnerships with shared use kitchens. USDA required a board of directors that represent commodity groups in MA and supporting partners. The AIC is in the process of hiring a project director. It's a virtual center, planned in advance of COVID.

Goals:1) To provide agricultural producers in Massachusetts with comprehensive support to innovate and accelerate the production and sales of value-added agricultural products while maintaining food safety. 2) To be the coordination point for all agriculture producers in Massachusetts that are interested in engaging in the production and marketing of value-added agriculture products. 3) To conduct additional applied research and develop new value-added opportunities. 4) To strengthen existing commercial kitchens and support the development of others.

Board of Directors: MA Farm Bureau, CISA, State Representative Susannah Whipps, Representatives from entities representing four commodities in Massachusetts: New England Vegetable and Fruit Growers Association, Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association, MA Aquaculture Association, Maple Producers

Partners: Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), The Carrot Project, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources, UMass Extension

Services for value added producers: general Business Assistance, Financial Management and Decision-Making, Creation of Advisory Boards, Loan Packaging, Product Development, Feasibility Studies and Market Research, Operations Analysis, Food Safety, Legal Assistance, Insurance Guidance, Customer Validation and Buyer Strategies – retail, wholesale, restaurants, institutions, and distributors; Marketing Strategies/Branding, Pricing Strategy.

Comment: Making value-added products is an important topic of discussion. We want to be sure Buy Locals are getting the info to promote. It's a two-year program with an opportunity for additional USDA funding.

Q: Are local boards a health a part of this and someone from DPH's food safety program? A: These groups will be engaged.

Commissioner Kershaw shared that Brittany Mangini, DTA's Director of Food Security and Nutrition Programs, has been selected to receive this year's Patrick Hughes Award for Social Justice from Project Bread. Rob Leshin, Director of the Office for Food and Nutrition Programs at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), also received this prestigious award. The award recognizes individuals with an unyielding commitment to driving meaningful change by addressing the causes of hunger.

Commissioner Kershaw announced that she will be leaving DTA and moving to the Department of Early Education and Care. She thanked Commissioner Lebeaux for the FSIG task force vision that led to the cross-secretariat collaboration and program. She shared her satisfaction with how these programs have moved forward and cited HIP, now with a focus on how much it will be funded versus if the program will continue to exist. She looks forward to working with everyone from her new position. Brittany Mangini will be the new DTA designee.

Rob Leshin thanked Commissioner Kershaw, "who shouldered the FSIG task force like Atlas," and will be missed. School meals have been an important source of nutrition for students and families over the past few years. The Federal Omnibus bill didn't include an extension of free universal meals past June 30, 2022. In addition, meal reimbursements are lower. Meetings were held with the USDA national office to express concern. USDA is committed to use their waiver authority. Rob's office is working with school districts and USDA for guidance.

Under a tight deadline, DESE applied for a USDA noncompetitive grant. The grant focus is in partnership with the Greater Boston Food Bank and the Western MA Food Bank for priority areas including statewide research and a food bank shared data shared platform, expansion of the Western MA Food Bank's support for lunch, and translation of TEFAP materials.

A local food cooperative agreement program includes \$200M available nationwide from USDA AMS, with an allocation of \$3.5M to Massachusetts for cooperative agreements for purchase of locally produced food with a focus on socially disadvantaged farmers. DESE will connect with MDAR os on strategy for this opportunity with a June 17 deadline.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared that he been appointed by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack as one of 12 new members to serve on the newly established Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Federal Advisory Committee (UAIP-FAC), to advise the Secretary and Director of the Office of Urban Agriculture

and Innovative Production on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production practices, among other duties. Launched in January 2014, MDAR's Urban Agriculture Program is one of the nation's first state-wide initiatives dedicated to urban farming. The first meeting will be next week. MDAR's urban ag program is almost all due the indefatigable Rose Arruda, who encouraged Commissioner Lebeaux to apply to showcase MDAR's work.

Announcements

May 13, 2022, MA Food Policy Council meeting, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

Public Comment

Adjournment: A motion was made to adjourn at 11:35 by John Lee, seconded by Mackenzie May and passed as follows: Rep Donahue, Sophia Flionis, Bill Fredericks, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Commissioner Kershaw, John Lee, Commissioner Lebeaux, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker. Commissioner Lebeaux ended the meeting by encouraging visits to maple producers during maple weekend!

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") meetings are being conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access.