

MA Food Policy Council Minutes

March 23, 2018: 9:30 – 12:30

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

In attendance:

Jeff Cole, Direct to Consumer Marketing

Senator Ann Gobi

Rob Leshin, EOESE

Representative Steve Kulik

John Lee, Farmer

Commissioner John Lebeaux, Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner

Commissioner McCue, Dept. of Transitional Assistance

Eric Stocker, Distribution

Danah Tench, Dept. of Environmental Protection

Lea Susan Ojamaa, Dept. of Public Health

The meeting was called to order by Chair Lebeaux at 9:53 when a quorum was established.

Acceptance of Minutes: A motion was made by Jeff Cole to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion was seconded by Senator Gobi. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Officers Reports

Officer reports

Chair:

The 2017 Council annual report has been sent electronically and hand delivered to the various parties as specified by the enabling legislation. It will also be posted on the Council website.

The Draft White Paper on Regulatory issues has been reviewed by Dr. Samuel Wong. Next it will be reviewed by DPH and then sent to the FPC.

At the last meeting several topics were identified that will be revisited in upcoming meetings. A general consensus was to focus on the six priority areas from 2017 with a deeper dive this year that can begin at the May meeting. In the meantime, it made sense to focus on the Farm Bill at this time.

Commissioner Lebeaux provided an update on the Draft HIP White Paper, sharing more important matters with the program have required placing it on hold.

Commissioner Lebeaux asked Commissioner McCue to share a HIP update. The status is unchanged since the previous meeting. The program has been immensely successful and is effectively out of funds. The program will be suspended on April 15th. Communications will go out in 15 languages to clients. The current FY 19 budget includes funds to restart the program July 1. Based on the program's history, those funds would last until the beginning of August. Outreach is occurring to private partners for support as well as organizations transferring Bounty Bucks to HIP. He thanked Senator Gobi and the legislature for their support including funds for next year's budget that are foundational.

Various council members expressed desire to support HIP and noted there is a letter of support issued by The Food System Collaborative.

Commissioner Lebeaux responded to Council members' interest in signing onto the HIP letter of support. He suggested that while state agency members are not in a position to sign up, other Council members can.

Representative Kulik understands the position of the state agencies but as a legislative member of the House Ways and Means committee, has heard strong, meaningful and effective advocacy by a delegation of stakeholders for HIP that was very productive. Since this the budget process is happening currently, advocacy is very important now. There is value to the FPC weighing in on these topics and others as relevant. One of the roles of the Council in the enabling legislation was as an advisory body to the executive branch and legislators. HIP is one of the best programs we have. Representative Kulik moves that the secretary be directed to draft a letter to send to the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House, and Chairs of House and Senate Ways and Means, and stating the Council recommends that the HIP program be funded at sustainable levels. The motion was second by Senator Gobi.

Discussion: The legislation that made the Council was very clear and that was done for a reason and the motion should be discussed and considered. Comment: We're respectful of the Council role and are clear and consistent about the value of the program and what has been accomplished. State agency Council members stated their need to abstain from the vote but see great value in HIP and support a vote. They allowed that they can provide an educational component about the outcomes and are already on record for support of the HIP program. The November Council meeting and statements in those minutes can be referenced in addition to the Council's focus on HIP as one of the two top priorities for the year.

A roll call vote was called:

Eric Stocker- Yea

Lea Susan Ojamaa, Dept. of Public Health - Abstain

John Lee, Farmer -Yea

Commissioner John Lebeaux, Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner- Abstain

Representative Steve Kulik- Yea

Commissioner McCue, Dept. of Transitional Assistance- Abstain

Jeff Cole- Yea

Senator Ann Gobi- Yea

Rob Leshin, EOESE - Abstain

Danah Tench, Dept. of Environmental Protection- Abstain

The motion carried with a vote of 5 for, none against, and 5 abstentions. The Collaborative was enthusiastic about this action and shared that time is of the essence. Representative Kulik requested that the letter be drafted within the week. As Vice Chair of the Council, he will sign the letter.

Program

USDA Farm Bill

Christopher Bosso, Ph.D., Professor of Public Policy; Director, Master of Public Policy and Master of Public Administration Programs, Northeastern University, and author of *Framing the Farm Bill: Interests, Ideology, and the Agricultural Act of 2014* (University of Kansas Press, 2017)

Annika Nielsen, Program Coordinator, Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic (FLPC), and law students **Irène Grialou** and **Amy Chyao**.

The Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic has spent over a year and a half coordinating the Farm Bill Law Enterprise (FBLE), a national partnership of law schools working toward a farm bill that reflects the long-term needs of our society. FBLE has conducted research and developed recommendations for the 2018 Farm Bill, and recently published in three reports: (1) Diversified Agricultural Economies; (2) Food Access, Nutrition, and Public Health; (3) Productivity and Risk Management. FLPC also released a report entitled “Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill,” which was not developed by FBLE. The minutes will include a link to the information: https://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Opportunities-to-Reduce-Food-Waste-in-the-2018-Farm-Bill_May-2017.pdf

Professor Bosso:

- Parts of the bill are significant to MA- specialty crops and SNAP. The Farm Bill described in broad strokes including a general overview of the sections and its history of attempting to influence ag viability through supply and later through demand through the Ag Adjustment Act of 1949. Subsidies manage price fluctuations more than supply.
- How and why SNAP, food equity and public health topics are in the Farm Bill. Came out of negotiations around passing the Ag Adjustment Act and future re-authorizations of the Farm Bill.

Annika Nielsen:

- Background on the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic’s farm bill reports
 - Farm Bill Law Enterprise (FBLE) released 3 reports:
 - Diversified Agricultural Economies
 - Food Access, Nutrition and Public Health
 - Productivity and Risk Management
- Brief overview of FLPC’s *Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill* report
- Resources to access and understand the Farm Bill
 - FBLE website: <http://www.farmbilllaw.org/>
 - Blog posts, background memos, additional reading material

Irène Grialou and Amy Chyao:

- Salient recommendations from “Diversified Agricultural Economies” report (note: there will be copies of the executive summary for all reports, as well as a few full report copies)
- Aspects of the farm bill that most affect MA

- Farmers Market Promotion Program, Local Food Promotion Program and Specialty Crop Block grants. These revolve around access to markets.
- Access to crop insurance. Two aspects crop and whole farm income. The latter better suited to diverse MA farms overall.
- Access to Credit. Noted Farm Service Agency and private lenders do not meet the demand from beginning farmers. Suggests increase in funding for micro loan program and exempt term limits of micro loans.
- Access to Land. Less than 3% of ag land is available to non-relatives. This drives prices up at the same time it decreases access. Recommends expansion of professional service support to farms in transition.
- Overview of MA agriculture stats, use of relevant farm bill programs.

Question: What is the definition of a small farm? Answer: USDA's definition of a small farm is \$250,000 or less in sales.

Comment: Advocacy can change based on what might be politically viable. The funding increase recommendations aren't actually that big. SNAP can be spun as nutritional assistance or a program to assist with commodity surpluses. A question will be from what program should funds be cut to support this one? Conservation may offer some options with a common application for example that could decrease administration costs.

Comment: Make sure advocacy is coalesced around topics and with other groups. Timing is also critical considering that some Entitlement programs may be considered insulated and a negative strategy is to try to run the clock out and keep from engaging in the conversation. Some of the SNAP advocates are getting broad support with "Food As Medicine," or the economic development angle of the program depending on which message the audience may be most receptive to.

Comment: From a strategy perspective, considering advocating for increased expenses in NIFA during the appropriations process without specific allocations but instead a single ask that encompasses many of the priorities for MA.

MA Food Policy Council Legislative Members update on relevant food and ag legislation:

Senator Gobi : The Environmental Bond Bill public includes aquaculture for example. She encouraged attendees to come to the hearing. With all the changes in the Senate, she encouraged attendees to connect with Senators Spilka. She is supporting a veterans and warriors programs to be involved in agriculture, funded through the gaming commission. Farmland protection and viability is important, as is "Breakfast after the bell," with efforts to be implemented statewide. In Ware, 90% of students are eligible for the program. Serving breakfast after school starts removes any stigma. Now 80% of the kids are participating and test scores are improving. The Supplemental Budget is being considered to support HIP.

Representative Kulik: Increasing the dairy tax credit legislation is a priority from about \$4 M to \$8 M. MA has 117 dairy farms that could use the support. The Energy Bill addresses anaerobic digesters. H2738 would allow farms to use tractors/trucks etc a half mile from their farm without having to register them. Other legislation focuses on a Commission to enhance culinary tourism options for farmers. H2618 would deal with agricultural land and estate taxes when land is passed on. There is a

very closely worded language now in the environmental bond bill. Ag omnibus bill sent to House Ways & Means, will move to Senate Ways & Means next.

Public Comment on Farm Bill Discussion

Question: How are these topics communicated to the MA DC legislative office? A: Many agencies have had strong interaction with the MA legislative offices, including briefings. Q: Can the FPC get input to that staff? MDAR will deliver its input through the secretariat. Other agencies may follow their own path.

Old Business

New Business

MA Food Systems Collaborative Update, Winton Pitcoff, Executive Director: HIP advocacy has been a priority. A recent legislative day included 80 SNAP advocates. Comments all around are that it is an important, impactful program. Agencies that work on the HIP programs should be really proud. The MA Local Action Plan has informed and educated legislators on many topics. That coupled with the Food Plan has generated many bills. A full list will be included in a White Paper released at Ag Day. Winton thanks the Council for all of their support. House 2465 – Ag Commission input on BOH regulation-, House 3327 and Senate 836 on food donations are three bills resulting from FPC work. Request for 1.5 million for HIP in supplemental budget has been made.

Council member updates

Public Comment

Question: How can the public support pushing the supplemental budget into action next week?
Answer: It is mostly an internal process. Advocacy is better served for the appropriation budget in April.

Announcements

March 27, 2018 Ag Day at the State House, Boston

April 7, 2018 PVGrows Forum, Immigration, Food Access, Land Access, 9:15 am-4:15 pm,
Gateway City Arts, Holyoke

April 21/22, 2018 Council of State Governments Conference on Ag Tourism, Providence, Rhode
Island

May 4, 2018 MA Food Policy Council meeting: 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, UMASS Amherst

Adjournment was at 12:17 PM. A motion was made by Representative Kulik, seconded by John Lee and passed unanimously.