

Massachusetts Food Policy Council Meeting (remote)
May 10, 2024, 9:30 – 11:30 AM

In attendance:

Rachel Klein, office of Senator Jo Comerford
Denise Courtney, ESE and Rob Leshin, ESE
Jessica del Rosario, DPH
Amanda Hellyar, office of Senator Fattman
Kerry Shea, office of Representative Kane
Julianna Kramer, Representative Donahue's Office
Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs
Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety
Commissioner Ashley Randle
Commissioner Jeffrey McCue, DTA
Caro Roszell, Soils Specialist
Danah Tench, MassDEP
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health
John Waite, Food Processing
Phoebe Walker, Public Health

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Randle, Chair, at 9:43 AM.

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Anne Gobi, and passed unanimously by voice vote: Rachel Klein, Rob Leshin, Jessica del Rosario, Amanda Hellyar, Representative Hannah Kane and staff Kerry Shea, Julianna Kramer, Anne Gobi, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner Randle, Commissioner McCue, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Rachel Klein, office of Senator Jo Comerford and Kerry Shea, office of Representative Kane. Priority and endorsed bills are moving through the process and into the Senate budget cycle. The 21 Century Ag Commission had a hearing recently and is moving towards the report process. Commissioner Randle thanked Rachel for her work on the Commission. Q: What can the Council or food system advocates focus on? A: Track your priority legislative items and reach out to leadership for their support.

MA Food System Collaborative: Kristina Racek Pechulis, Executive Director. The House budget supported \$25 M in FSIG, \$90M in school. Local Food Policy Council Grant budgets were not included or language re: year-round operation for HIP. There is funding for FSIG and MDAR but not at the level requested. Reach out to Senate representatives to ask for full funding for FSIG and MDAR. The Collaborative met with MDAR re: equity, local food policy councils, and urban ag. Climate change is always a priority through all legislation. Q: Can priority amendments be sent to the Council? A: Yes.

Officer reports: Commissioner Randle

This is Mental Health Awareness Month, though it is important all year long. The Farmer Peer Support Network for mental health challenges has trainers located across the state in a variety of agricultural

sectors, including a BIPOC focus. June is dairy month. There will be dairy tours around the state and a day focused on cheese. MDAR's Agricultural Markets Division is working with the MA Office of Travel and Tourism and the MA Dairy Promotion Board to develop an Ice Cream Trail, hopefully in time for national ice cream month.

Vice Chair election: Phoebe Walker has been nominated as the vice chair. Ayn Yeagle had been interested but has declined considering her work with the Council's Advisory Committee. John Waite made a motion on behalf of the Nominating Committee for Phoebe as Vice Chair, seconded by Caro Roszell, and passed unanimously by voice vote: Rachel Klein, Rob Leshin, Jessica del Rosario, Amanda Hellyar, Kerry Shea, Julianna Kramer, Anne Gobi, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker

Commissioner Randle asked for any nominations for the Council's Direct-to-consumer seat today, or by May 17th at the latest. Caro Roszell nominated Susan Murray from SEAMAP. John Waite asked about the farmer seat. Dave Dumaresq from Farmer Dave's is a candidate whose materials have been forwarded to Boards and Commissions.

Committee reports

Bylaws: Phoebe Walker, Rachel Klein, Danah Tench, and Kerry Shea met previously and shared recommendations for discussion. Legislative changes to the bylaws would be filed in January. A vote during the September meeting would meet the legislative deadline. Considerations include increasing membership to include fisheries and the soil specialist. A specific climate change position might not be needed since it is a part of nearly every position. The Committee recommends striking out the section that doesn't allow compensation, to be able to support the Advisory Committee better. Meeting language can be updated to be broader. Questions: Would a position for the municipal sector make sense? Food hubs are a critical aggregator and key partner for ESE. Does the food distribution position include food hubs? Comments: Consider updating duties and responsibilities rather than adding too many people. The responsibilities can have added language, but not too specific to provide flexibility. The Advisory Committee was developed to address climate change and equity and bring these issues to the Council - so these positions may not need to be added. The fisheries seat is a priority, different than any existing positions. Extension is an important position to consider adding, which has been discussed and promoted in the past.

Strategic Planning: Commissioner Randle. Making Hunger History is a campaign led by Project Bread, a continuation of Senator McGovern's priority to end hunger in the Commonwealth. Steering committee voices were added from the MA Food Policy Council, farmers, and legislators. A "Making Hunger History" letter was reviewed that reaffirms including the food system in the pillars of the plan. The farmers voice and food production are highlighted. There is a difference between food access and food insecurity. Naming local food is important to local health. Feedback for the letter is welcome. Commissioner Randle thanked all Committee members.

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle. The Advisory Committee is fully populated. To identify issues around issues around race, climate, and equity issues, Committee members joined a meeting with the MA Food System Collaborative's local food policy councils. Committee members were very interested in working together on these two topics, and to bring outcomes to the Council. Hearing from the Advisory Committee members directly at a Council meeting and if possible, findings/recommendations sent in

advance would be efficient. The Advisory Committee meets between Council meetings and was revived to bring a lens of equity and climate change to the Council.

Local Food Policy Council reports:

Mystic Valley YMCA, serving Everett, Malden, and Medford. Debbie Amaral, President & CEO and Caitlin Middaugh, Senior Director. The Task force that had been meeting since 2018 transitioned into a Council. The City of Medford has made a pledge to be hunger free by 2028. A food assessment recommended a food justice policy, facilitated by Mystic Valley YMCA. The organization oversees three markets (pantries) with 2,000 shoppers with distribution of 2.9M pounds of food, with most shoppers coming three times a month. The LFPC grant was instrumental in hiring a coordinator for the Council. Stipends supported member attendance. A food survey to those using the food pantries showed interest in culturally relevant choices. Critical is shopping with dignity, for example, if shoppers don't want to see beef, this should be respected. The organization also reached out for items to be donated other than food such as household cleaners and toothpaste. Last year's short grant cycle was a challenge, it's better this year. A focus is also on equity and food waste - and keeping food in the city. The work that we like to do is nutrition secure, moving up from food secure.

Boston Food Access Council, Christine Keller, Ph.D. In 2019 the BFAC was reinvigorated with a nine-person steering committee. MDAR funding helped with a model to create effective work products, for community engagement with stakeholders, to review the food landscape and build diversity, and to build awareness of BFAC. For the first topic, a community food collaborative was created for survey work and solution recommendations. A special event "Dignity in WIC, SNAP and HIP transactions" including speakers. There can be bureaucratic trauma in using these benefits. Strategies to break down barriers were suggested. Another event brought together resource providers during the summer months. Virtual participants were incentivized to participate with a \$25 Grubhub benefit. Many folks aren't aware of their benefit options. An Op-Ed article was coordinated with the Greater Boston Food Bank and in partnership with Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative. Outreach included trainings on advocacy, and materials at tabling events including farmers markets and community organizations. The LFPC grant funding was very helpful to move towards reaching current strategic goals.

Comments: The thinking about dignity is very much appreciated. Are there specific recommendations for the Council? Might there be technology updates to avoid challenges connecting HIP and SNAP? It can be uncomfortable to have tech issues while standing in line to make purchases at a farmers' market. Further education for both vendors and shoppers would be helpful to avoid discomfort.

Program: Public health update re: hemp derived THC - a collaborative agency effort: Phoebe Walker. There are many products that are illegal but are commercially available. MDAR and MDPH are meeting re: regulatory guidance. Rachel Klein shared that the Joint Ag and Cannabis Oversight Committee will conduct a hearing June 11 which can be viewed via live stream.

Member updates: Denise Courtney and Rob Leshin, ESE: MA FRESH update and Terrific Tray voting. School Wellness Initiatives for Thriving Health have occurred with several school district partners to create wellness groups in their schools. There have been two "MA More than a Meal Tours, inspired by a Taylor Swift song. Senator Tarr was impressed to tour a school and view a refrigerator filled with locally produced foods. Representative Jones and Senator Lewis along with ESE's Commissioner attended an event to understand school meals - all rallying around wellness in school meals. More of these events will be organized. Today is the last day to vote for the best Terrific Tray, made with local

ingredients. MA Fresh awards are being made to 23 grantees for programs focused on food literacy, farm field trips, inviting a farmer to the classroom, or investing in their food service.

Rob Leshin: The work focused on universal free meals and locally produced foods these past few years is revolutionary. Massachusetts is ranked #1 in the nation for healthiest school meals. The "More than a Meal" tours bringing legislators into schools' foodservice systems have been very effective. It's terrific that the Senate plans to continue to fund free and universal meals - an investment in our students. Summer EBT programs are very close to receiving USDA approval. About 600,000 families have an eligible student, eligible for \$120 in funding, totaling about \$72M in purchases. Unlike pandemic EBT, the majority of recipients will automatically get their benefits without any further action. MA Fresh isn't in the upcoming budget, an opportunity for advocacy for \$1M to be funded again.

Caro Roszell: American Farmland Trust (AFT) and Healthy Soils look forward to hearing from EEA re: soils healthy challenge grants. AFT is working closely with MDAR and EEA to strengthen healthy soils work. Commissioner Randle shared that an announcement is expected in early June.

Jessica del Rosario: DPH's COVID Impact Survey re: community health had over 18,000 responses. Findings are soon to be released.

John Waite: John thanked MDAR for all the recent work re: grants. Commissioner Randle thanked the Council for sharing announcements about the grant opportunities.

Announcements

MA Food Policy Council (hybrid) July 12, 2024: 9:30 – 11:30 AM

Public Comment

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was made at 11:30 AM by John Waite, seconded by Phoebe Walker and passed unanimously by voice vote: Rachel Klein, Rob Leshin, Jessica del Rosario, Amanda Hellyar, Kerry Shea, Julianna Kramer, Anne Gobi, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker.