

Minutes: MA Food Policy Council meeting
Friday, May 8, 2020, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

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”) convened a meeting on May 8, 2020 at 9:30 A.M. through virtual means that allowed real-time public access. Instructions were provided to enable participants to follow the proceedings of the FPC while those activities occurred.

In attendance:

Senator Jo Comerford
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Ryan C. Fattman
Helena Fruscio EOHD
Representative Hannah Kane
Commissioner Amy Kershaw, DTA
Amanda Kinchla – Food Safety
Commissioner John Lebeaux, DAR
John Lee - Farmer
Rob Leshin, DESE
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer
Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH
Eric Stocker – Food Distribution
Danah Tench, DEP
John Waite – Food Processing

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:36 a.m. by Commissioner/Chair John Lebeaux. He shared tips for remote participation. The meeting was not recorded. Council members were identified by roll call including all votes, reflected in the minutes. John Waite, Vice Chair, hosted the remote meeting via “Go To Meeting.”

Acceptance of the minutes was made in a motion by John Lee, seconded by Danah Tench and passed by individual voice vote as follows. Yes: Senator Jo Comerford, Bill Fredericks, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, Danah Tench, John Waite. Abstain: Helena Fruscio.

Officers Reports: 2019 annual report acceptance by Commissioner Lebeaux. Representative Kane shared updates which have been incorporated. A motion to accept the 2019 annual report was made by Representative Hannah Kane, seconded by Senator Jo Comerford and passed unanimously (yes) by voice vote as follows: Senator Jo Comerford, Bill Fredericks, Helena Fruscio, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla,

Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, Danah Tench, John Waite.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared appreciation for everyone participating remotely. (There were 71 participants, in addition to 20 participating via phone.)

COVID – 19 Food Security Task Force, Access to food and resiliency of food supply chain:
Commissioner John Lebeaux, Working Group Chair (Winton Pitcoff, Co-chair)

Commissioner Lebeaux described the fast moving Food Security Task Force timeline, which moved very quickly starting on April 22 with daily meetings through May 3. He reviewed slides that summarize the working group outcome, shared with the Command Center. High level bullet points address the problem and establish the wide scope of the issues relative to food security, which can be viewed on the separate document.

Principle areas were identified, goals and a management structure was established, and a project management team identified from the Command Center. Some 30 participants on the Task Force included Council members Representative Kane, Senator Comerford, Rob Leshin, Commissioner Kershaw, John Waite, DPH and MDAR. Three work groups were established; each led by a government employee and non-government employee. Commissioner Lebeaux and Winton Pitcoff led the “Access to food and resiliency of food supply chain” working group. Four wide recommendations were made with action steps which are under review.

Discussion: Commissioner Kershaw shared that the idea for a task force to address the growing food security crisis, understand the economic impact and immediate and long term recommendations was raised by Commissioner Lebeaux. For many people, seeking food assistance is new, so closing the gaps is important. Connecting dormant restaurant workers and farmers with surplus food is critical. This is a deep issue that crosses so many sectors. She thanked Commissioner and his team and Council members who served on this tight timeline that was deeply exacerbated by the current public health crisis. She shared an enormous amount of gratitude for these efforts to put the Commonwealth on a strong path going forward.

Commissioner Lebeaux: About three weeks ago MDAR staff started bringing up these topics. Affirmation from DTA and DPH confirmed that food security topics needed to be elevated. Having established working relationships with these agencies and the Collaborative was an asset for this initiative to move forward efficiently. The three agency secretariats worked together to advance these issues and had a response within 24 hours to create a task force.

Public comment: Pamela Thorton, for the past 20 years has developed food security programs for elders. Q: Have the glean teams been set up to harvest excess and deliver to walk in coolers? A: These topics have been recognized and identified, and we’re waiting for next steps. Liz O’Gilvie commented on her appreciation of food access as a long-time issue, exacerbated by the current situation, with trust that the Task Force will be looking for long term

solutions. Commissioner Lebeaux: There's a focus on advocating for solutions that strengthen the food system for the long term.

MA Food Caucus update: Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Hannah Kane. **Legislation re: new secretariat for Food Resources & Security:** Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante

Representative Kane: The legislature added funding for HIP which allowed lifting the suspension, especially important now. The MA food Caucus includes 131 members of the legislature out of 200. As part of the Food System Caucus, six co-chairs sent a letter outlining legislation priorities to the senate and house, as well as a food system resource document to share with their constituents. The Caucus continues to keep food security front and center to keep colleagues aware of existing programs and support. They also worked closely on the Food Security Task Force. There is a new group of people who don't know how to navigate the system, as well as those who have long needed and relied on the safety net system. There is a focus to be sure efforts are tackling food security as well as farm stability, looking to our state suppliers. Both speakers voiced support for a cabinet level position for food security.

Senator Jo Comerford shared appreciation to DTA for broking down barriers to access and suggested that some actions could happen through executive order or through legislation. Legislative priorities were identified including Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) and the amount of MA grown, more support for farmers and more healthy food to food banks and support at the base of our economy. The Food Trust was also elevated as an important vehicle for strategic food system support.

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante shared her legislation, HB 2697: An Act establishing the Executive Office of Food Resources and Security. She shared that there is an appreciation for the work that's being done but there's a need for a central position to make these changes. The legislation is more of a concept to start the conversation. Food deserves to be at the top of the hierarchy of state government rather than the bottom.

Discussion: Mackenzie May: How would this impact MDAR? **Representative Ferrante:** The legislation is a conversation starter but hopes would be that MDAR would be elevated, as well as a focus on fish. She looks forward to meeting with Commissioner Lebeaux for input. **John Waite:** The Council has a subcommittee to review such a structure and can provide comment after the group meets. **Eric Stocker:** Would it make the structure more confusing? **Senator Comerford** thanked everyone for their important comments and points of view. **Representative Kane** thanked **Senator Comerford** for her leadership and for elevating these issues.

Public comment: **Ellen Fine**, Healthy Yards Needham, helps with food security and food insecurity and asked that food insecurity such as non-GMO and organic, permaculture and biodynamic products be included in these discussions/legislation.

MA Food System Collaborative update: virtual forums, policy papers and work by local food policy councils, Winton Pitcoff, Director

The Collaborative is focused on facilitating connections between agriculture and food security and what gaps exist. Several virtual forums were held and the issues/responses led to legislative recommendations. Work continues on food waste, HIP, and local food policy councils. The Collaborative is also working with other NE states for a regional food resiliency plans. There is more public acknowledgement about food supply disruptions which allows us all an opportunity to engage more people in these conversations. Representative Ferrante's bill is appreciated. In the interim, the Council might consider a full time position to work with all agencies.

Massachusetts Buy Local: Programs and strategies to support food and ag during dramatic market shifts: Mackenzie May, Central MA Buy Local, described the work of the Buy Local organizations across the state who work collaboratively to support the food system. Farmers are pivoting to market their products. Consumers are looking to farmers, an exciting trend. Only a small fraction of the farms are open now and are harvesting less than 10% of what they will be harvesting. The supply will continue to grow. Farmers and farmers markets need PPE, staff, volunteers and support from local BOH's to move the product and avoid an oversupply. Information has been compiled re: direct market supplies. Outreach is ongoing for HIP. We're thrilled that MA has on-line EBT system. Efforts are ongoing to advocate support of local food. "What's Good", is an on-line processing platform. We'd like to support them to provide that service. Market access has the potential to be a significant issue. The Federation of MA Farmers Market has been doing excellent work to provide PPE to managers and webinars are addressing relevant issues. Work is ongoing with local BOHs to raise awareness and confidence that farmers markets are a vital and essential service.

Food system recovery, the Council and MA Local Food Action Plan going forward: John Waite observed that the MA Local Food Action plan has been a good platform for this situation. The Council and the relationships food organizations have formed over the years were a tremendous aid to be able to respond to this situation fairly quickly. Equity issues in the Plan needs to be strengthened.

Announcements:

[Massachusetts Food Policy Meeting - July, 2020 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. \(tba\)](#)

Public Comment:

Jeff Cole: Farmers need to be elevated to the status of supermarkets as essential, especially in light of Board of Health organizations. Supermarkets haven't been closed by BOHs while farmers markets have. **Debbie Schmill** representing the Needham FPC asked that legislation includes a focus on obesity and climate change. **Commissioner Lebeaux:** Many agencies and

organizations have COVID-19 resources. MDAR has two: one for the ag community and one for consumers. <https://www.mass.gov/guides/covid-19-resources-for-agriculture> **Amanda Kinchla** shared that UMASS has many COVID-19 resources as well as colleague working with partners around the globe and WHO re: taste and smell related to the disease. Volunteers are sought who have had COVID-19. **Liz O’Gilvie** shared thanks for John Waite and Winton Pitcoff lifting up racial issues, but noted that the Council doesn’t represent the Commonwealth in terms of people of color and income. Commissioner Lebeaux thanked her for her comment. **Caller from Needham**: Having an agency that represents people of color compared to having people of color represented themselves is important.

Adjournment motion: A motion to adjourn was made by John Waite, seconded by John Lee and passed unanimously at 11:30 by voice vote (yes) as follows: Bill Fredericks, Helena Fruscio, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Eric Stocker, Danah Tench, John Waite.