

December 3, 2025, minutes

Massachusetts Food Policy Council meeting

9:30 – 11:30 (remote)

In attendance:

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Doug Botelho, office of Representative Donahue

Matthew Connolly, Senator Dylan's office

Director Anne Gobi, EOHED

Representative Hannah Kane

Rob Leshin, DESE

Acting Director Cole, DTA

Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

John Waite, Food Processing

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Not in attendance: Dave Dumarsqu, Senator Fattman, Bruce Hopper, Amanda Kinchla, Caro Roszell

Agenda:

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Chair Ashley Randle at 9:34 AM.

Acceptance of minutes: A vote to accept the minutes was made by Director Gobi, seconded by Ayn Yeagle and passed: Jessica del Rosario, Doug Botelho, Matthew Connolly, Director Anne Gobi, Bruce Hopper, Representative Hannah Kane, Rob Leshin, Acting Director Cole, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, Phoebe Walker.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Representative Hannah Kane. Thirteen priority bills are in committee. Representative Blais spoke at the Collaboratives' Forum about the Omnibus Bill. The Caucus held an event with Spoonfuls, New England's largest food recovery organization about diverting food to those in need and the effects of waste on the environment. The Caucus co-chairs met with Project Bread about the impacts of the government shutdown and continued to meet with them and the Governor's

Anti-Hunger Task Force. Though it's not formal session until the new year, there is lots of work going on in preparation. Sadly, Massachusetts recently lost Representative Margaret Ann Ferrante, an amazing advocate and champion for fishers and across the food system.

MA Food System Collaborative: Becca Miller. Massachusetts also lost Senator Edward Kennedy, an important advocate for Mill City Grows and the Middlesex district. Before, during and after the government shutdown DTA has been doing heroic work. The Collaborative recognizes that the federal Big Beautiful Bill provides many opportunities for advocacy. The Local Food System Resiliency group has listening sessions coming up re: the Anti-Hunger Task Force, to learn how the state needs to support anti-hunger work. The Collaborative will be providing comments too and looks forward to the recommendations. The Collaborative is tracking legislation progress. Priority goals include the following:

- An Act relative to urban farmland. Sen. Adam Gomez [S.61](#) / Rep. Pat Duffy [H. 121](#)
- An Act to promote food literacy. Sen. Jason Lewis [S.392](#) / Reps. Andres Vargas and Mindy Domb [H.735](#)
- An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination. Sen. Jo Comerford [S.56](#) / Rep. James Arena-Derosa [H.109](#)
- An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts (FARM bill). Sen. Jo Comerford [S.2801](#) / Rep. Natalie Blais [H.112](#)
- An Act promoting equity in agriculture. Sen. Jo Comerford [S.53](#) / Rep. Natalie Blais [H.111](#)
- An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program. Sen. Jo Comerford [S.104](#) / Reps. Mindy Domb and Andres Vargas [H.222](#)
- An act supporting the Commonwealth's food system. Reps. Dan Donahue and Pat Duffy [H.120](#)
- An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need. Sen. Jo Comerford [S.1043](#) / Rep. Hannah Kane [H.4373](#)
- Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands. Sen. Jo Comerford [S.11](#) / Reps. Natalie Blais and Hannah Kane [H.71](#)

The Forum was a success with 300 attendees and a waiting list of 70. Thanks were given to Senator Comerford and Natilie Blais for their well-attended program describing current legislation and next steps. Slide presentations and notes from the Forum are available. Comment: The Forum was a success including the FSIG mapping. It would be helpful to understand gaps and opportunities at a future Council meeting. Comment: Other grant award information will be incorporated into the map, soon to be on-line for further analysis.

Officer and Committee Reports

Chair Randle congratulated the Collaborative team and their board for the Forum's uplifting program that supported continued momentum in food system work. Everyone had positive feedback and at least one important takeaway. The timing was amazing during such a heavy year. Everyone was exhausted after the government shutdown. A statewide perspective is underway to foster coordination that aligns

with the Anti-Hunger Task Force. There are three working groups, meeting regularly. Everyone attending the Council meeting that contributed to this work was thanked. Draft recommendations and a draft report are in progress to share with ANF and the Governor's office, with a goal of gaining budgetary support in January. There are three more listening sessions, plus a virtual session to walk through the recommendations to be sure all long-term sustainable solutions and lessons learned during the government shutdown are included. By the end of the year, MDAR will share an FSIG five-year report and lookback including opportunities and challenges. MDAR's food security team hosted a virtual meeting focused on statewide collaboration with an emphasis on the MEFAP and LFPA programs. Farms and fisheries were included. An in-person follow-up session is expected in February, hopefully to compare with the Anti-Hunger Taskforce recommendations. November featured a first-time aquaculture proclamation and event with DMF that included oyster tastings, to support this fast-growing agricultural sector. A Green Week event to promote local Christmas trees generated strong publicity. Several growers reported being sold out already. Torry Katsiroubas Stamm was recognized for her work to support the Local Food Count survey, in partnership with New England Feeding New England.

Letters of Support/Advocacy Committee, Phoebe Walker. The Advocacy Committee is a new subcommittee based on the desire from several Gubernatorial appointees (non-agency appointees) to be more politically active in support of the food system. The committee has met twice since the last Council meeting and is advocating support for several bills:

- a. HB109 (HD3814) - An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination (in Agriculture and Fisheries Committee)
- b. HB112 (HD3621) - An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts (in Agriculture and Fisheries Committee)
- c. HB130 (HD270) - An Act relative to membership updates for the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (reported out – now H. 4418 and in House and Ways Means)
- d. HB222 (HD2197) - An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program (in the Senate Ways and Means)

A letter in support of the HIP bill was shared with the Council. Becca Miller noted the appropriate contacts to send the letter. In addition, the committee met with MDAR attorneys to understand better responsibilities and limits under the Open Meeting Law, and with Becca Miller to understand how to best be involved and support the work of the Collaborative. The committee has benefited from the engagement of several members of the Council's Advisory Committee and would like to include them as voting members. A motion to decrease the number of Council members on the Advocacy Committee to five and add three Advisory Committee members for a total of eight was made by Phoebe Walker and seconded by John Waite: Jessica del Rosario abstain, Doug Botelho, Matthew Connolly, Representative Hannah Kane, Rob Leshin abstain, Acting Director Cole abstain but in support, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle abstain, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, Phoebe Walker.

Advisory Committee, Ayn Yeagle. Suggestions were requested regarding how the Advisory Committee can best support the Council. They are integrating support for existing work including the Farmland Action Plan, Food Security Task Force and MA Food System Collaborative for example.

Program

Cultivating connection: Local Food Works in North Central Mass:” Ayn Yeagle, Executive Director, Growing Places; Miranda Jennings, Program Manager, HEAL Collaborative; and Jorge Marzuca, Whitemarz Farm. Ayn described the north central Massachusetts region re: population, farms and food security. This work began after the closure of a large supermarket in the area. It was clear that a food system review was needed. Root causes and social determinants were identified from production to sales. The region had some 180 farms with scattered relationships and no aggregation. HEAL collaborative, funded through MA in Motion, has been very impactful in work with regional organizations such as Growing Places and health care institutions, engaging the community for a sustainable effort. Actionable initiatives were identified. Instead of a food hub, a food campus based on existing infrastructure and partnership was a priority. HEAL and Local Food Works integrated farmers and institutional buyers into the system. A USDA grant supported a charette. There was strong interest in purchasing local food, however systems were lacking. Engaging farmers was successful. Jorge Marzuca, a local grower, started working with the system in 2019. Growing Places has become more than a client. He meets with them annually for production planning, and discussions on how to reduce waste and promote sustainability. The LFPA program was important. More produce was grown this year, but earnings were less without the program. There are 29 growers that are part of the program. Value-based purchasing is foundational. Small local farms are prioritized. A strategic plan with collective impact helped to identify an automated distribution system as an outcome. Tiered based purchasing is part of the values-based food system. The LFPA helped growers scale up their operations. A processing center was launched in Gardner to support regional schools and institutions in January 2025. A beloved product is freeze-dried apple chips, important since the north central part of Massachusetts has the most orchards in the state. The work is having important food system impacts with a shared goal of working towards business sustainability. It has been exciting to see the results after all this planning. Comment: It’s important that it’s possible to be able to access large produce orders from Growing Places. Comment: It’s clear how careful the work has been, and how much listening has gone into it in such a specific way. All funders were recognized.

MDAR State-owned Land Leasing Program update, Ryan P. Burke, State Agricultural Lands Licensing Coordinator. MDAR is actively licensing several properties, totaling some 1,055 acres. The RFR asks how the farmer applicant will use the property and to suggest a price that suits the land but that is also affordable to them. Price isn’t the main consideration. Making the licensing process efficient is a priority. The program supports land access and how to better support farmers on properties, including infrastructure improvements such as temporary fences and structures and wells for irrigation, an essential need. A property in Southeast Massachusetts includes over \$1M in infrastructure investments including irrigation for several tenants. The land was previously farmed by a few growers but is now in smaller plots supporting multiple growers. Licenses are granted for up to five years initially but can be renewed for an additional five years. Then the lease needs to go out to bid, however the current farmer can be included in the bidding. Several success stories including high tunnel infrastructure and connections with local distributors. The program has been around for 45 years but now includes greater support for more farmers and closer monitoring of land. Over 100 acres have returned to production.

Ryan's work was praised by several attendees, including the strong infrastructure projects and support for historically underserved farmers, providing an incubator.

Updates

MA Farmland Action: Katherine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator. Implementation is a priority including building partnerships, looking to future goals and learning from past programs. An implementation matrix has many options. The program offers monthly newsletters, drop-in sessions, events and meetings related to specific tasks. The web page has lots of resources. The Plan looks overwhelming but is broken down into digestible pieces. The Farmland Partnership Program to help implement the Plan had fourteen applications. Awards will be announced soon. Sign up for the Farmland Action Plan Newsletter. In the next few weeks, look for the 2025 progress report.

Council member updates

Announcements

- Upcoming Council meetings: Jan 8, 2026: Annual meeting, Rm 428, MA Statehouse, 11 AM- 1:30 PM including MA Grown & Fresher reception.

2026 dates, 9:30 – 11:30 AM: March 12, May 8, July 10, Sept 10, Nov 11

Annual meeting, Jan 7, 2027, 11AM – 1:30 PM.

Public Comment

Adjournment: A vote to adjourn was made at 11:01 AM by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Torry Katsiroubas Stamm and passed: Jessica del Rosario, Doug Botelho, Matthew Connolly, Director Anne Gobi, Representative Kerry Hannah Kane, Rob Leshin, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, Phoebe Walker.

This meeting is being held remotely via teams in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 signed by Governor Healey on March 28, 2025