

Minutes: Massachusetts Food Policy Council

May 8, 2026

9:30 – 11:30 (remote)

In attendance:

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Julianna Kramer, office of Representative Donahue

Dave Dumaresq, Farmer

Director Anne Gobi, EOHED

Bruce Hopper, MassDEP, designee

Rob Leshin, DESE

Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Food Safety

Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

John Waite, Food Processing

Shelly Yarnie, DTA designee

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Not in attendance: Phoebe Walker, Board of Health. Representatives from the offices of Senator Fattman, Senator Dylan, and Representative Hannah Kane since this meeting coincided with legislative budget deadlines.

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

Acceptance of minutes: A motion to accept the minutes was made by Director Anne Gobi, second by Shelly Yarnie and accepted by voice vote: Julianna Kramer, Dave Dumaresq, Joshua Tavares, Director Anne Gobi, Bruce Hopper, Rob Leshin, Amanda Kinchla, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Kerry Shea, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Shelly Yarnie.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus, Jacob Kaminsky, Research Director, House Joint Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries

Jacob reported that it's a tight legislative budget cycle. Universal school meals legislation was funded and is likely to make it into the final budget. Other legislative items include the Fair Share supplemental budget, a big-ticket item that contains a \$5,000 fully refundable tax credit for the full and fair value of the food. Advocacy groups who supported this work were thanked. An Act to Build Resilience for Massachusetts Communities has highlights including \$120M for FSIG for five years, \$7.5M for the Food Trust, \$42M for APR and adding the director of the Division of Marine Fisheries and the director of

UMASS CAFÉ to the MA Food Policy Council, and several items from the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan. The MA Food System Caucus organized an April 10 briefing on the 21 Century Ag Commission. On May 6, the Greater Boston Food Banks shared their latest report based on thorough data collection. There have been a series of budget hearings to create priorities.

MA Food System Collaborative, Becca Miller, Policy Director. From the advocacy perspective, much has happened since the last meeting of the Council. In March, a HIP lobbying day included some 80 advocates with statewide representation. Though there is broad support for food systems work, an amendment for biosolids relief, a working capital loan program for MDAR and CDFI, and an Urban Ag budget were not adopted. Becca thanked Commissioner Randle, one of the three co-chairs of the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force. Implementation is an important piece of advocacy to be sure that as much is being done as possible re: local food security. A Food Policy Council's meeting led to a focus on supporting DTA work. These Councils have eyes and ears on the ground. Advocacy groups supported legislation including Food Literacy funding, a state funded LFPA program, and additional hiring of DTA workers. SNAP is the bedrock of our food security landscape. HIP doesn't exist without SNAP. Massachusetts HIP is going to reach \$100M worth of incentives, likely the first in the nation, a huge accomplishment which will be celebrated. The Collaborative is planning the 2026 Forum, scheduled for November 19. Emily Fidanza, the Collaborative's Network Manager is developing a food literacy white paper and reviewing food system education efforts. An upcoming meeting will focus on food recovery. There will also be urban agriculture site visits this summer. The Collaborative is hiring a policy specialist to provide additional capacity for this work. The Collaborative is interested in effects from the early April frost and from increased costs such as fuel and fertilizer, to consider what actions can support production agriculture.

Comment: UMASS Extension has a survey to collect grower data and assess April frost damage.

Officer and Committee updates

Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force recommendations discussion: Commissioner Ashley Randle

The report was released about three weeks ago. The task force was established last July by Executive Order in response to SNAP cuts and new challenges at the federal level. The timing aligned with the Greater Boston Food Bank reported cases of hunger increased across the state, and effects on community members. Recommendations centered on five areas. The state can't fill in for all the cuts, so public private partnerships are critical. Implementation is already progressing including increased funding levels for HIP and exploring the feasibility to add vendors. With new case workers hiring, DTA is doing a tremendous job. Efforts are in progress to build a data dashboard re: nutrition program participation. It's a multiagency effort with plans for release this spring. MFEAP funding is likely to increase. MDAR hosted a food bank procurement webinar for farms, fishers and food businesses to supply this network. FSIG recommendations include codifying the program. The latest FSIG round closed on Monday with great demand. The program actively supports building resiliency in the local food system. The Terrific Tray (DESE) and Northeast Food for Schools is being promoted. Work with Ocean Spray Cranberries has led to a reduced sugar dried sweetened cranberry, eligible for school foodservice. Recommendations to reduce college food insecurity have started to be implemented

through an iterative process prior to the report's release. Implementation is now key, with working the groups focusing on this area. Some 10 – 15 recommendations have already been implemented. Working group leaders are taking on implementation tasks and focused on how public private partnerships can be developed. Working group meetings start next week. Reach out to Commissioner Randle or other Task Force co-chairs if you're interested in being involved.

Commissioner Randle described the 1,000th APR award in the state, celebrated at Bartlett Farm in Salisbury, one of the oldest in the Commonwealth and an early participant in the program. APR supports food security and climate protection. MDAR's team has been planning for the June 7 – 10 NEASDA meeting in Amherst when regional state agencies, stakeholders and federal partners connect on agricultural issues, timely topics and to exchange knowledge. She thanked MDAR staff including Mackenzie May, Jack Sisson-Manning, and Winton Pitcoff for taking the lead on planning and organizing this event. The theme is "Massachusetts agriculture, a growing revolution."

Program

Mass Wildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest Program. Martin Feehan, PhD, Deer & Moose Project Leader. The program started in 2022. Deer are important to manage due to their impact on the food system and forest and ecosystems. An overabundance of deer leads to a loss in biodiversity and forest health. Deer have impacts on human health and safety from ticks and vehicle collision.

Also 4.4. M meals to MA residents. Program goals for successful hunters to help meet management needs and increase visibility of meat. Increasing the number of processors has provided a sustainable source of protein, and to address food insecurity and deer management needs. Hunters can donate the entire deer at no cost, resulting in additional free permits. Partial donation reduces the cost of the processing (great for a single household or for specific cuts) and based on the amount of donated meat, the cost of processing is reduced. There are strict food safety requirements. Processing must occur within four hours after being shot and legally reported and tagged, and inspected, and uniquely labeled for complete tracability. There are over 25 food distributors including several food banks in a range of sizes. It's been a milestone to reach 100,000 meals and growth from one to 18 processors. Indigenous people are included, being culturally important. This portion of the program has also grown to build infrastructure for tribes to become partner processors for external users. Southeastern MA and the islands have the highest deer density, which corresponds with the growth of the processors. Parts of the state don't have processing availability which is being addressed with exploration of drop-off areas. More may be added to address gap in the regions. Many processors focus on deer, but other processors are interested when their inventory is low. Connections are being made between processors and local departments of public health. The FSIG grants and federal grants for tribal support have been helpful. The program offers an outlet for farmers dealing with deer damage permitting, to hunt deer outside of the season and donate the meat. There is ongoing work to build additional slaughter/processing capacity, especially on the islands who have unique challenges with a high deer density and a low number of predators, in addition to a lack of processing. Nantucket Land Bank purchased land to create a food security hub including a basement for processing including deer, with an intent to add USDA inspection. Then the Nantucket food bank can distribute the products – an integrated system. Martha's

Vineyard has six towns. Working with Island Grown to add their Hunt Club as a processor with increases from 20 – 100 deer being donated. Also collaborating with Tick Free and Me to address deer damage and food security. The last season was a year of record with 428 deer donated, more than the previous three years combined.

Director Gobi: There may be agency programs to support adding processing in rural areas.

John Waite: The WMFPC has trained butchers, how can they be involved? Martin: contact me

Caro: Especially in SE Massachusetts, growers deal with damage from deer to their crops. Is this program expected to grow? A: The program is growing exponentially, and the agency has very aggressive goals while not overextending resources. Many opportunities were unforeseen when the project started.

What is the concern about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), considering that it is in NY state? CWD prevention and surveillance is an important part of the work. Though the cases in NY haven't been in wild deer, there is still concern. The prions which spread CWD exist in the environment forever. For free ranging deer, the nearest case is in Pennsylvania. DFW conducts prevention and surveillance monitoring and works closely with regional and national partners. If CWD arrives in MA, the program can still operate. Processors have to test the deer until the deer has been tested. The venison release is delayed until testing is completed.

John Waite: What can be done with deer hit by a vehicle? A: Deer hit by vehicles are not allowed in the program.

Local Meat Processing: Reducing Bottlenecks, Increasing Opportunity: Jake Levin, Local Food Systems Program Manager, and Shannon Smith, Director of Lending and Finance, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

Shannon Smith shared that BAV is non-profit organization, offering technical assistance and low-cost loans. Meat processing is a special area of work for BAV. In 2021 BAV received a federal grant to support the meat sector. Over the past four years, BAV has had success including in-depth technical assistance to five processors including access to their low interest revolving loan fund. There have been ten livestock group meetings over three years for farmers involved with meat production. Resources and tools including an on-line farmer resource guide, a Meat literacy Guide, and a list serve dedicated to the meat supply chain. There is a free HACCP hot line and cost reduction calculator. BAV has also focused on female owner/operators who form the backbone of meat processing in the state including Reed Farm, the first and only USDA poultry processor in Massachusetts. BAV is also working to support value added products including bone broth, jerky, and pet treats. Stillman Farms is being supported as they add red meat processing to their facility, as well as USDA co-packing for other farmers. FSIG funds have been instrumental to all three of these businesses. Adams Farm is one of the largest meat processors in the state and Chelsea represents the third generation.

“International Year of the Woman Farmer” spotlights local women in agriculture, coinciding with the United Nations’ global initiative. Some 43% of Massachusetts principal farm operators are women. Chelsea White, Co-owner and Manager, Adams Farm, Athol. Jake introduced Chelsea the Adams Farm as

part of the backbone of processing for many growers in the area. With a deep history in Athol and being a third generation of women farmers, Chelsea has always planned to be a part of the family business. She started with entry level work, and after high school studied accounting to honor her dream of keeping the business in the family. Chelsea and her sister currently comprise the Farm's leadership. They have a have a passion for working with the farmers in the area and note that some of their long-term customers are retiring. With deep relationships in the community, they work with many farmers daily, trying to help both businesses be profitable. Q: In this "Year of Women in Agriculture – what unique aspects do women bring in this male dominated field? A: Women bring respect, considering that it takes a special kind of person to work in this field. Comment: BAV didn't intend to target women processes, however many of the businesses in meat processing that the organization support have woman ownership and leadership. In general, women processors are very open minded and open to input and recommendations. Updated packaging is a new project which will be an asset to farmer product sales. Q: What are next steps to support meat processing facilities such as yours? A: The cost of raising animals and cost of raising animals and cost of processing is challenging. Comment: FSIG has been instrumental in supporting Massachusetts processors and helping to keep it viable. The next strategic steps include institutional sales. Adams Farm is a critical part of bringing local beef to our schools, a huge opportunity for aggregation. Cornell just released a report that there is a huge economic opportunity for grass fed farmers though aggregation, stronger distribution and cold storage as capacity expands is needed.

John Waite commented that FSIG is critical for these expensive projects. The PV Grows loan fund can help to offset debt. Director Gobi thanked Chelsea for her support for farmers in the region and noted that Adams farm has always been helpful educating legislators. Rob Leshin said that school meals are enthusiastic for more local protein and timely for K-12. DESE is happy to connect Farm to School with Adams Farm. Commissioner Randle thanked Chelsea for all her work to support farms across the state.

Council member updates

HIP update, Shelly Yarnie, Associate Commissioner for Food Security and Nutrition Programs, Department of Transitional Assistance. There is no update yet re: adding HIP vendors. Information will be shared as available. HIP growth usage is back on track following restored funding. Program usage has steadily rebounded to pre-reduction levels, with consistent growth in the number of households using HIP. Technical improvements have been made to ensure customers have better user experience. HIP available amounts are printed on the client receipts and reflected in improved customer service messaging. HIP participants have met in focus groups to provide advice for easy navigation. Top messaging ideas from the focus groups will be shared with partners and clients for final messaging. DTA is moving forward with EBT chip tap cards as part of a statewide effort to reduce fraud. A pilot will be held this summer in Worcester to resolve issues prior to a statewide rollout. Vendors have been engaged in the process.

Farm and spring planting update, David Dumaresq, Farmer and Founder, Farmer Dave's, Dracut and Tewksbury. Impacts remain from the 2025 drought with low surface water levels. Spring rains are critical, though some farmers are already irrigating. The cold damaging freeze on April 21 impacted crops

such as asparagus both ready to harvest and emerging. Three acres of asparagus were lost. Apples were also damaged though it was location specific based on the apple bud stage and the apple variety. Damage can't fully be determined until the buds open. Massachusetts experienced one of the coldest winters in years, making it expensive for greenhouse growers, compounded with a high number of cloudy days. There's good news ahead with Mother's days is expected to be strong for sales of bedding plants. There has been a slight decrease in sales of flowering plants compared to bedding plants, reflecting consumer preferences. Rising fuel, fertilizer and labor costs are causing a lot of anxiety since growers don't feel that they can raise prices, causing a bit squeeze. They're also anticipating costs of irrigation. The planting season has been strong with good weather and already emerging crops – off to a good start.

John Waite: Plan to attend the June 4 block party celebration to highlight the 25th anniversary of the Western MA Food Processing Center.

Rob Leshin: Today is the last day to vote for the Terrific Tray of the year. Council members are welcome to vote.

Ayn Yeagle: The LFPA working group includes the MA Food System Collaborative as state funding is sought. An amendment was not added to the final budget, though there is support on the Senate side. Ayn and Margaret Moulton will be sending details to support this initiative.

Public Comment

Christopher Lyon, USDA Rural Development, USDA, announced the new USDA Office of Seafood. Fishermen are enthusiastic to access USDA programs and services. He looks forward to advocating for fishers in Massachusetts and at the federal level.

Announcements

July 10, Sept 10, Nov 13, MA Food Policy Council meetings (remote) 9:30 – 11:30 AM. Annual meeting, Jan 7, 2027, 11AM – 1:30 PM, MA State House.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 11:17 AM by John Waite, seconded by Director Anne Gobi and passed by voice vote: Jessica del Rosario, Julianna Kramer, Dave Dumaresq, Director Anne Gobi, Rob Leshin, Amanda Kinchla, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Shelly Yarnie, Ayn Yeagle.

This meeting was held remotely via teams in accordance with an Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations ("Act"), signed on July 16, 2022, and extended pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to June 30, 2027.

50 in attendance