

## Minutes

MA Food Policy Council, November 1, 2017

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM – Boston State House, Room 428, Boston, MA

### In attendance:

Jeff Cole, Federation of MA Farmers Markets

Senator Gobi

Rob Leshin, EOESE

Representative Hannah Kane

Representative Steve Kulik

John Lee, Farmer

Commissioner John Lebeaux, Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner

Commissioner McCue, Dept. of Transitional Assistance and designee Frank Martinez Nocito

Vivien Morris

Bonita Oehlke, Dept. of Ag Resources, Council planning and support

Ketav Patel, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Eric Stocker, Distribution

Commissioner Suuberg, Dept. of Environmental Protection, and Bethany Card, Deputy Commissioner

Lindsey Tucker, Associate Commissioner, Dept. of Public Health and designee Lea Susan Ojamaa

John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center

### **Call to Order at 9:41 by Commissioner John Lebeaux**

The **minutes** from the previous meeting were accepted with a motion by John Lee, seconded by John Waite, and passed unanimously.

### **Officers Reports**

Chairman and Commissioner Lebeaux asked FPC (Council) members and attendees to introduce themselves. Elizabeth Barth, MDAR intern from Simmons was introduced. She will be writing a White Paper on the FINI HIP program for the Council.

**Old Business:** Discussion for acceptance: Farm to Institution White Paper. The Department of Transition Assistance provided a comment “Considering the potential costs impacting state institutions, a needs assessment is a first recommendation to provide dialogue between partners and on where local farmers may be able to fill gaps or complement the existing supply, with attention provided to patient/resident dietary needs,” which was added to the to the White Paper. A vote to accept the White Paper was made by John Lee, seconded by Eric Stocker, and unanimously passed.

**New Business:** Update on the 2018 MA FPC planning: The original Bylaws were adopted in 2011 and one of the main activities was to develop the Local Food Action Plan, accepted in 2015. A year was spent on priorities leading to six general topics which went to the Governor’s Office, all important work. Since then there have been deep dives into relevant topics. For the upcoming year planning, the Commissioner has broadly discussed topics with six members to date, and plans to try to meet with the other members before the January meeting. Topics under discussion include agendas that would

complement existing priorities, especially for agency and legislative members, possible focuses for the upcoming year, increasing buy in and engagement across agency and NGO members, differences in Council membership roles, the opportunity to revive and engage the FPC's Advisory Committee, and clarifying a complementary relationship between the MA FPC and the MA Food System Collaborative.

### **Program:**

This MA Food Policy Council meeting focused on one of the six goals highlighted from the MA Local Food Action plan promoted for 2017 to the Governor's office and members of the legislature: To support programs that facilitate access to healthy foods for underserved communities including support to leverage the Department of Transitional Assistance's USDA/FINI grant award, known as the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), HIP will increase use of SNAP at farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, providing fresh, healthy food for low-income families, and increasing sales for Massachusetts farmers.

Commissioner Lebeaux noted the strong turnout, to learn about the implementation of the Healthy Incentive Program. Winton Pitcoff, Director, MA Food System Collaborative MA Food System Collaborative, was assigned to serve as moderator for the program presentation and provided an overview of HIP's connection with the MA Food Plan, including the call for state agency collaboration, which has been an integral part of HIP.

### **State agency perspective: Jeffrey McCue, Commissioner, Department of Transitional Assistance**

Frank Martinez Nocito was recognized as a tireless advocate for the HIP program. Partners were acknowledged including Project Bread, John Merck Fund, Sudbury Foundation, City of Boston Food Access and USDA's FINI grant program.

Issues with core SNAP operations at the time DTA was notified of the FINI award required assessing whether or not to turn the grant back, but DTA asked for a year to stabilize SNAP and then build the HIP program, which was granted. The MA SNAP caseload is 750,000 individuals. HIP complements much of DTA's work and facilitates outreach and aids in disruption of multigenerational poverty. It's been a pleasure to talk with growers who have had positive effects -it's been spectacular. To some extent, we're victims of our own success. The incentives projections were based on the pilot project and it was not possible to forecast the success the program has had. There has been incredible support for this program. Efforts are in progress to continue to make this program robust. This has made an enormous difference in the lives of our clients.

**John Lebeaux, MDAR Commissioner**, expressed his **gratitude?** to be involved in this program. HIP jointly benefits Massachusetts low income residents who receive SNAP *and* Massachusetts fruit and vegetable farmers by providing a dollar-for-dollar match for each SNAP dollar spent at participating farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets and CSAs statewide. To date over, \$2.3 million dollars in HIP incentives have been earned with HIP retailers with SNAP redemptions over 4 times higher than last year at these same agricultural points of sale. Since December, 165 new fruit and vegetable farmers have signed up to process SNAP and HIP. There are currently over 400 locations across the state where SNAP clients can access the new HIP benefit. We look forward to hearing from the program partners, market managers and farmers here today on HIP's impact to clients' diets and farm businesses. Farmers are often reserved and stoic but in many instances, have been blown away by the impact. The problems now are lines at farmers markets! The farming community is delighted.

## **Lindsey Tucker, Associate Commissioner, Department of Public Health**

DPH shared their appreciation to be a partner on this incredible program for accessible, high quality produce. Everyone should have the opportunity to be healthy. Good health isn't simply about medical care; it's also about eating healthy foods. Barriers to accessing healthy food need to be removed and HIP is making this a reality that is expected to translate into positive changes in health. Each of the 31 WIC agencies actively promotes the HIP program and includes it in outreach at farmers markets. HIP has become an important resource to share with the 25,000 WIC families. MA in Motion is also supporting HIP and helping to build capacity for HIP at farmers markets. Launched in 2009 MA in Motion promotes wellness and active living and healthy eating in 70 locations across MA with a focus on affordability and access.

### **History and current status**

**James Harrison, Food Project and Collaborative Board Member** reminded the audience of the organizations mantra, "love of land and people." He acknowledged that so many people have planted the seeds for HIP. The Food Project launched a North Shore site in Lynn in 2004. Currently farm sales total almost \$400,000 with a focus on food access. Previously, coupons from the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program made up the bulk of sales. Selling produce at the Lynn farmers markets became a reality for SNAP recipients when one of the first terminals to access SNAP benefits wirelessly was installed in 2005. SNAP sales were dismal at first with lots of technical issues. Project Bread suggested better promotion and incentives at the market and provided a dollar for dollar match which led to a big jump in sales. When financial support ran out, sales stayed elevated. The more money contributed, the better the results. An initiative with the city of Boston to join as a partner as well as the Boston Public Health Commission has resulted in the number of markets accepting SNAP increasing.

**Frank Martinez Nocito, DTA, HIP Project Director:** Six years ago the 14 month Healthy Incentives Pilot program was rolled out on a snowy Halloween day. MA was the only state in the country to receive the award. The pilot was rigorously evaluated. HIP tested the concept and impact of a healthy food financial incentive being automatically placed on the SNAP card after the purchase of healthy fruits and vegetables. Results showed that HIP clients consumed a ¼ cup more of produce compared to non-participants. The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant, the basis for HIP, is administered through USDA NIFA, a sister agency of the Food and Nutrition service. HIP is now one of 70 FINI programs nationally. The MA pilot was the foundation, and used for best practices. HIP is led by DTA with MDAR and DPH as partners, as well as many others. The Massachusetts program is one of the only in the nation lead by a state agency, instead of a non-profit. HIP means more fresh local food for SNAP recipients. Clients need to spend SNAP dollars to gain HIP benefits. Value added fruits and vegetables with no added sugars, salts, and oils products are also eligible. HIP supports a direct transaction for the grower. HIP includes a wide statewide coalition which brings resources and expertise to the program. The early implementation success is impressive, with projections exceeding expectations by over 470%. About 51,000 clients have been able to benefit from this program and 417 authorized farmers and farmers markets with over 435 points of sale. Over 800 SNAP families are in the new Community Supported Agriculture program. Challenges and promising practices were described. It's clear that Healthy Incentives work. The program is shifting focus to more education of clients and producers as well as more support of clients and vendors at points of sale. HIP has brought significant diversity to markets and some farmers have hired bilingual farm staff as a result.

**Senator Bruce Tarr**, whose office sponsored the room for the Council, stopped by to share welcome comments. He recognized Representative Hannah Kane, Council member, and Representative Paul Donato who was in attendance. Anytime there is a program that has exceeded expectations by 400%, that gets our attention. It's inspiring to see the work that this group is doing and which is woven into the food system. He thanked the Council for their "can do" attitude.

### **HIP early implementation stories & stakeholder experiences**

**Client Perspectives: Erin McAleer, Director, Project Bread**, works with DTA with the SNAP hotline to support HIP I in many language. They have received 9,000 calls to date. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. A woman with diabetes was advised to eat healthy and this program helped. Another caller from western MA called to say the program worked since some of the foods earlier would be considered cost prohibitive.

**Christina Maxwell, Director of Programs, Food Bank of Western MA**, gave recognition to Frank for their strong partnership. The Food Banks serves 223,000 people including SNAP outreach and enrollment. The success of the program has demonstrated the demand and that those low income individuals want to eat healthy. One on one conversations with clients have been important in explaining how the program works, especially those who haven't been to a farmers market previously. The program also offers an opportunity to participate in the local economy with growers, who in many cases are our friends and neighbors. Many farmers markets are located in food deserts, with is critical in creating access for healthy foods.

### **Farmer Perspectives**

**Laura Smith, Owner, Lane Gardens & Oakdale**: HIP has made the farmers market a community center since the shoppers come back each week. It's great to be a part of this program. The income is critical for continued growth to the farm business. A certified kitchen on-site is used for value-added food prep to offer at the winter markets. Laura is enthusiastic for next year.

**Justin Chase, Owner, Arrowhead Farm, Newburyport**, thanked Frank from DTA and Mill City Growers for connecting the farm with this program. Justin recently took over the family farm though economies of scale were not on their side. He signed up for the HIP program and had some winter market customers. When the regular season started, they sold \$500 per week which increased to \$1,100 a week, a dramatic increase due mainly to new SNAP HIP customers. The increase in sales has allowed him to hire local plumbers, carpenters, electricians and others to repair and upgrade old equipment as well as to bring fallow fields back into production and hire more farm workers.

**Jessica Van Steensburg, Executive Director, Just Roots; Greenfield**, a nonprofit with a community farm and now with the largest SNAP CSA in the state, has served 230 families with a large number on SNAP. HIP amplifies our impact. **Andy Grant** piloted a three-week mobile farm share CSA program in three key low-income communities. A study is underway to demonstrate healthy impacts and for HIP to stretch further than it does today. HIP offers an opportunity for local farms to increase their market share. The mobile farm share program wouldn't be possible without HIP

### **Mobile Markets Perspective**

**Lydia Sisson, Co-Owner, Mill City Grows Mobile Market:** Initially, outreach was challenging to get SNAP customers to the market. HIP has transformed this process with important implications for social action and social justice. We're thrilled to be a part of it. We're at \$40,000 in sales when previously \$2,000 was an average amount. We're working to add markets outside of Lowell due to the increased demand. Some 98% of the sales have been from SNAP. We even have a volunteer that was a customer and is now an advocate.

**Grace Sliwoski, Worcester Regional Environmental Council** has been coordinating markets in Worcester with a focus on social justice. A mobile market initiative has been launched, along with fund raising for incentives. It has been a time consuming and risky proposition to fund raise for incentives, not knowing what sales might be. HIP has allowed us to focus on other services and supports. There are so many languages in Worcester that a large focus has been on translating basic materials. We are looking to expand with another mobile market. A key strategy between Worcester partners is working to change the central MA food system. This program has had important impacts. This has been an astonishing and profitable year for the markets.

### **Farmers Market Managers Perspective**

**Dawn Dimarco, Market Manager, New Bedford Farmers Markets, City of New Bedford;** Getting the word out about the program has been very important and has been important for our market, and customers are returning.

**Jon Van Kuiken, Market Manager, Brockton Farmers Market; Niki Lankowski, Market Manager, Northampton Tuesday Farmers Market:** For the past few years the market has struggled but with the introduction of HIP, revenues are up over 100%. They shared a story that showed health impacts. "Please keep me healthy with HIP!"

**Evaluation: Tammy Calise, John Snow Inc. Research & Training Institute (JSI)** HIP state evaluation contractor. The external evaluation has been vetted by major universities. Ten percent of the budget is to evaluate the impact of HIP and SNAP at farmers markets, CSAs, mobile markets and farmstands, as well as implementation. Having access of about 1 mile or a ten-fifteen minute walk is true for about 50% of SNAP clients. An estimated 1 serving of fruit and vegetables were consumed per individual per day.

Commissioner Lebeaux recognized Representatives Carole Fiola, Fall River and Gerard Cassidy, Brockton.

### **Next steps: Frank Martinez Nocito**

The program is well ahead of goals with 435 HIP points of sale around the state. Many will come off line and transition to winter markets, CSAs, mobile markets and farmstands. MDAR has HIP locations/retailers listed on the MassGrown and Fresher Map which makes it easier to keep up with the retailer landscape. He graciously thanked all partners, acknowledging that no one can do it alone.

### **Program Sustainability: Winton Pitcoff**

There is a strong infrastructure for this program, which would be useful beyond the three year length of the program. Given better access, HIP participants want healthy food. The growth in markets for local food has not plateaued. In addition to HIP eligible vendors, other vendors at farmers market are also

getting more business. Supporting H3121 would codify the program in statute. Program advocates are working on fundraising and community organizations for contributions. The FINI HIP program is serving as a national model for USDA and getting has earned national media attention.

### **Questions and Answers**

The office of Elementary and Secondary Education oversees the USDA summer meals program and promotes non-traditional sites. Are there any farmers markets that are in the summer meal program as well as the HIP program? There are over 1,000 summer meals programs in MA which may offer a chance for these programs to work together. There is an example of a Youth Urban Farm having the feeding program come stationary markets and working with local CDC program, among others. What percentage of the current funding for the FINI HIP Program is from USDA and how will those funds be replaced? The grant requires a non-federal dollar match. A priority of the MA Food System Collaborative is fundraising. Is The USDA Farm Bill has language for additional funds? There is a bipartisan support for FINI at a national level and Senator McGovern will be submitting a funding program.

What's the status of the bill H3121? It is in a second reading, with no funding attached. With regards to the overlay for HIP redemption and general SNAP benefits, how are they distributed in SNAP and where are the redemptions? This data will be part of the evaluation. The DTA website has SNAP redemption data by zip code. It will be reviewed.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared that the HIP program is a high priority for the MA FPC. He thanked presenters, partners and participants for an inspirational meeting. There's been a lot accomplished but a lot to do.

### **Public Comment**

A question was asked about the status of implementing the Massachusetts Food Trust, based on work done by the Healthy Food Financing group that helped establish the Trust with \$1M for awards and \$100,000 for administration. Response: There are on-going discussions and there will be an update at the next meeting.

### **Announcements**

November 17, 2017: Massachusetts Food System Forum, MA Food System Collaborative. Leominster

November 17, 2017: Western MA Food Processing Center ribbon cutting - new storage facility

December 5 – 7, 2017: Community Food Systems Conference 2017. Boston

March 23, 2018: 9:30 – 12:30, MA Food Policy Council meeting, MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Westborough

March 27, 2018: Ag Day at the State House

The **meeting was adjourned** at 12:25 with a motion by John Lee which was seconded by Commissioner McCue and passed unanimously.