

MA Food Policy Council - Minutes

Thursday, November 17, 2022, 10 AM - 12:00 Noon Room 428, Hybrid Meeting (in-person and virtual)
Massachusetts State House, 24 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02133

In attendance:

*Doug Botelho & James Davis, Office of Representative Donahue
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Fattman
Sophia Flioni, Office of Representative Kane
Jared Freedman, office of Senator Comerford
Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Distribution (virtual)
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MDAR
Rob Leshin, ESE
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer
Jessica del Rosario, DPH
Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils
Commissioner Martin Suuberg (and Danah Tench) MassDEP
John Waite, Food Processing
Phoebe Walker, Local Boards of Health
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health
Lorraine Ward, DTA's Director of Food Access & Nutrition*

Absent: Amanda Kincha, John Lee, Bobby Malinn.

The **meeting was called to order** at 10:10 AM by Chair and Commissioner John Lebeaux. He reminded the Council that the meeting is recorded. He thanked Senator Bruce Tarr and his staff including Michael Dougherty, for access to the State House facilities and technical and logistical support. Council members introduced themselves.

Acceptance of minutes: A motion to accept the minutes was made by Mackenzie May, seconded by Phoebe Walker, and passed by roll call: *Doug Botelho, Bill Fredericks, Sophia Flioni, Jared Freedman, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Commissioner John Lebeaux, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, Commissioner Suuberg, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Lorraine Ward.*

Legislative members shared comments: Representative Mindy Domb, Acting Chair ENRA, (virtual) is supportive of the Massachusetts Food System and Partners, recognized farmer responses to mitigate climate change issues and urged completion of the FSIG survey. Results can be shared at the upcoming Council meeting. Senator Rausch shared that much has been done but there is much to do to bolster food systems in the state.

MA Food System Collaborative: Winton Pitcoff. Massachusetts maple producers won many awards at a recent competition! The Food System Forum was sold out, with 2/3 of the participants there for the first time. Summaries are on the website. On the legislative side, the Collaborative is pleased that the \$25M Economic bill passed including admin funds for the Food Trust and school food. Advocacy for outside sections will be refilled. Some 32 organizations are supporting the Collaborative's food literacy campaign which will include a funding request for new staff at MDAR and DESE. Children should graduate with an understanding of how the food system works. A briefing is being organized for new

legislators. New session priorities include literacy, farmland protection, and working with the new administration on the next environmental bond bill. Commissioner Lebeaux was recognized for his leadership of the Council.

Officer Reports Chair Commissioner John Lebeaux announced that the **Local Food Policy Councils RFR** has been posted and encouraged wide promotion. This one-time grant of up to \$20,000 provides support for local councils and food system groups. For the **Council's Annual Report**, each member and state agency are welcome to provide up to two pages of information on letterhead by December 7, that will be an addendum to the annual report. For over ten years, a trade dispute prevented the sales of mussels and oysters between the European Union (EU) and the US. The market opened in early 2022. **Massachusetts shellfish growers** met with importers and buyers in the Netherlands and France at the end of September, to build trade. The aquaculture industry in MA is valued at approximately \$30M and growing, so new markets are important. MDAR has a talented GIS staff that is enthusiastic about food system mapping opportunities. Check out MDAR's **Food System Mapping RFI** and please share examples of how mapping could support your community assessment goals or other work. A **survey regarding the impacts of the Food Security Infrastructure Grant** is being conducted by the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. Since the program's inception, the Legislature has appropriated over \$100M in funds for its operation: <https://tinyurl.com/FSIG22> **The Farmland Action Plan** is under review.

Deputy Commissioner Randle shared additional updates: The USDA **Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA)** award of \$7.5M for purchase of food from underserved farmers had 35 applications. Sixteen have been awarded contracts for these grants that run through 2024. A press release will formally announce the winners. The **USDA Northeastern Regional Food Business Center Partnership** will be supported by MDAR with Cornell University (?), NEASDA (?), and other partners as the leads. Any food system organization can sign on. EEA released their **Environmental Justice** program. A November 21 meeting for input is open to the public.

Vice Chair Mackenzie May and Nominating Committee chair described the Council's focus on equity and climate change in programming, as well as the reinvigoration of the Council's Advisory Committee. Ayn Yeagle is the lead for the Advisory Committee and encouraged Council member engagement. The next Advisory Committee meeting will be December 6.

Comment: The Council might communicate with the new administration to promote current objectives. During the January meeting, develop topics for the year to support legislative issues and consider connecting with the White House Five Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health five pillars of action.

Program: Improved Access to Fresh Healthy Food in Disadvantaged Communities of the Commonwealth - Massachusetts Food Trust update: Rebecca Busansky, Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) and Jose Luis Rojas, Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF)

A state map showed areas where there is a lack of healthy food available. MA has a low number of grocery stores statewide. MPHA (?) has an important partnership with the MA Food Trust. Most Food Trust projects accept SNAP, HIP and WIC. A four-year review of projects across the state including case studies was shared. Q: What are the biggest barriers to starting a new retail store? A: We start with assessing if a new supermarket is the best strategy. Q: Are these projects complemented by FSIG funds? A: The programs are very complementary. Pioneer Valley Grows is also important to help identify

sources of funding. Q: How do these programs support schools? A: A portion of the FSIG program was awarded to support summer meal programs. Food Trust programs have also focused on schools.

Comment from Commissioner Lebeaux: Success has many partners including MDAR staff Rose Arruda, who first approached him with an idea that developed into the FSIG program. She also works closely with the Food Trust program including interviews with all applicants and conducting site visits

Update on Massachusetts Food Waste Disposal Ban: John Fischer, MassDEP. Effective Nov 1, the waste ban dropped from 1 ton to ½ ton per week which will double the number of businesses subject to the food waste ban to 4,000. Food waste represents more than 1/5th of our trash. MA 2020 goal for total food waste diversion was 450,000 tons (an increase of 350,000 tons). The 2030 goal increases the annual diversion by 500,000 tons over the 2018 baseline of 280,000 tons (780,000 tons). Food waste that is diverted may go to a variety of different uses such as: compost, animal feed, anaerobic digestion (AD), food donation or other types of processing. The message, there are many options to divert food from landfills to other beneficial uses. MA has seen progress to date in that the rescue of fresh and perishable foods is up more than 50%. The total capacity for food waste exceeds current goals and the food in trash is down from 26% in 2016 to 21% in 2019. Other benefits to food waste diversion are that it supports the local economy and contributes to job growth.

Comment: The Public Health Excellence Program includes standardized food training. It would be interesting for them to know more about this work. Response: Public health officials have been very helpful in outreach.

MA Food Policy Council Advisory Committee: Danielle Collins, A focus of the Committee will be local communities and making connections to the state, including through the local food policy councils. The Committee has identified key values equity and climate change which will support all goals. The expertise of each committee member is valued. Elections were held and officers were elected.

MA Food Policy Council member updates:

Commissioner Suuberg and Designee, Danah Tench discussed the Gap Energy Grant program which funds energy efficiency and clean energy improvements to buildings. This year, for the first year the grant was open to non-profit food and ag operations and small food businesses. There were several farms and food pantry applicants. MassDEP thanked the MDAR staff who assisted them with the development and expansion of the Gap Grant into the ag sector. Special thanks were given to Bonita Oehlke, Gerry Palano, and Rose Arruda. Awards will be announced soon.

Rob Leshin described DESE priorities including cultivating safe and healthy learning environments and meeting the basic needs of students including housing, mental health, and food and nutrition. A \$1M ARPA grant will support scratch cooking, high need schools, and meal expansion. The LFPS \$3.5M grant has generated positive feedback from USDA to support an infrastructure for farm to school, connection school districts, farmers, and fishers. Lisa Damon is an important partner through the MA Farm to School program. DESE applied for funds in hopes of hiring a food systems specialists coordinator partner. Economic development funds are supporting local food procurement for schools. MA is one of five states that continue to provide free school meals with an earmark of \$110M. Participation is high with \$23M already spent. Additional funds may be required. Foodservice professionals have provided positive feedback, including the benefit of eliminating the stigma of participation. The revenue pours

back into the school nutrition program allowing the update to some kitchens, increased staffing, and increased wages for this group that is typically the lowest paid of school employees.

Q: What are resources for schools to improve the quality of the food? A: DESE, Farm to School and the John Stalker Institute have professional development training. If the school is operated by a management company, they will have resources as well. Q: How can more seafood be included in school meals? A: DESE will follow up independently but including seafood in school menus is important.

Caro Roszell shared an update on the Healthy Soils Action Plan. Three main focuses include the release of the Plan, the development of a statewide Healthy Soils Program, and a transition document for the new administration for priority actions. If the Plan isn't released in this administration, the first ask of the transition paper will be for the Healey Administration to release the Plan. The Plan was completed 18 months ago and describes the state of the Commonwealth's soil carbon stocks and priority actions for enhancing food security and climate resilience through approaches to protect and build healthy soils across land uses. While the Healthy Soils Action Plan was being drafted, the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Bill passed in January 2021, creating a seat on the Council and a MA Healthy Soils Program under EEA including a \$100,000 program appropriation in the FY22 budget. An implementation program is forthcoming, based on the release of the Plan. Meaningful ways to move forward with developing the Program without the Plan are also being explored. A coalition letter to release the Plan has 39 signatories including key conservation, climate, and food policy organizations. Attendees were invited to sign the letter to move this plan out of review and enable its recommendations to be adopted by the EEA and to inform conservation organizations in their work. Once adopted, a Healthy Soils Implementation Committee will develop a strategic plan to guide agency actions, garner the required funding, and coordinate with allied advocates and organizations. At the same time there are discussions around decoupling short-term implementation from the release of the Plan. There have been meetings to brief the public on the contents of the Plan. The lead author of the Plan could provide briefings to support the current Healthy Soils Implementation Committee to move forward with priority actions and next steps. These actions range from helping towns identify and implement bylaw changes to protect and support soil health to creating incentive programs to fund equipment procurement to enable farmers, municipalities, and others to manage their lands in accordance with healthy soils principles.

John Waite reported that the MA Agriculture Innovation Center, a network of business assistance programs to support value-added production, is active and has worked with 42 businesses so far. An example is dried butternut squash noodles and oil, products in development in partnership with a vegetable grower.

Commissioner Lebeaux was recognized for his work and dedication to the Council and the Food System. In eight years, he missed just one meeting.

Announcements:

January 27, 2023, MA Food Policy Council meeting, 9:30 – 11:30 AM (virtual)

April 12, 2023, Agriculture Day at the State House, 10 AM – 2 PM

Public Comment: Commissioner Lebeaux shared his gratitude to Council current and former members, the Collaborative, Ruth Goldman, and to the system at large. He also thanked his staff including Bonita Oehlke.

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 12:10 PM by Phoebe Walker, seconded by Ayn Yeagle, and passed by roll call: *James Davis, Bill Fredericks, Commissioner Lebeaux, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Caro Roszell, Commissioner Suuberg, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, and Lorraine Ward.*