

## **Minutes MA Food Policy Council**

**November 6, 2019** Room 428 Massachusetts State House, Boston 9:30 – 12:30

Jeff Cole, Direct to Consumer  
Senator Jo Comerford  
Mark Reil, Senator Fattman's office  
Brian Ferrarese, Chief of staff, DEP and Danah Tench, DEP  
Dr. Anna Goldenheim, Public Health  
Representative Hannah Kane  
Commissioner John Lebeaux  
John Lee, Farmer  
Rob Leshin, EOESE  
Bobby Mallin, EOHED  
Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH  
Melissa Pullin, Acting Commissioner, DTA  
Eric Stocker, Distribution

### **9:48 AM** Call to Order, Introductions

Senator Bruce Tarr office's chief of staff, Hiram Shah, provided welcome comments. The Council is grateful to the Senator for facilitating the use of this space for their annual meeting at the statehouse to engage legislative staff.

Acceptance of Minutes: A motion was made by Hannah Kane, seconded by Jo Comerford and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Notes: Best wishes and thanks to former DTA Commissioner Jeff McCue were expressed. He is now the chief of human resources offices for this administration. He played a tremendous and very active, engaged role on the Council. MDAR and DTA work very closely together especially related to the HIP program. There have been some great accomplishments with DTA as the lead agency through his leadership.

This meeting has a focus on climate change which is in the spotlight of the current administration and an integral part of the MA Local Food Action Plan and the work that's being done in the Massachusetts food system.

### **New Business**

- **10:00** MA Food Caucus Activities with climate change focus: Representative Hannah Kane and Senator Jo Comerford

Representative Kane welcomed the group and shared praises for former Commissioner Jeff McCue. She described activities from the past year including Hunger Action Month and communications to USDA opposing changes in the broad-based requirements for SNAP. The Food Caucus is the second largest at the state house. There was universal support for the letter to USDA from the bipartisan group. The Caucus also hosted a briefing on HIP program summary, highlighted at the last MA Council meeting.

Senator Comeford hosted a day in western MA with a tour at Just Roots and then at Greenfield College for a hearing on food as public health. A World Food Day editorial written by Winton Pitcoff was featured in the Boston Globe. Senator Comeford also hosted a second oversight committee meeting. Representative Kane spoke at a Massachusetts Funders organization, which supports the Collaborative. "You need to have a lot of repetitive conversations before topics are really absorbed and impactful." Representative Kane thanked dedicated and passionate staff on all these efforts.

Senator Jo Comeford shared comments that the Food Caucus is an important force within the state house. She thanked Representative Hannah Kane, Phil Korman and Winton Pitcoff for their support for priority bills with many that cross over with public health and climate change, an acknowledgement of the centrality. Bills in the spotlight include healthy soils and acknowledging the importance for funds for to lower no till practices, important to sequester carbon. This climate bill is also a food security bill. Other legislation focuses on farmland protection and an action plan to compile data on land use trends for policy and investment. Maintaining open space is important, as well as light and solar. Finally, a bill for a special commission to focus on resiliency for farms in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was described.

- **10:15** MA Food System Collaborative Update, Winton Pitcoff, Director

The HIP program has \$3.5 M spent so far in the first quarter out of a \$6.5M budget. There is a focus on a year-round program. The amendments didn't go through, but efforts continue. Food Waste work continues with a policy report, case studies and policy implications forthcoming. The Collaborative will submit comments on the Solid Waste plan for lower thresholds and support bills to encourage more donations of edible food. Chapter 61A is capped at five acres. With the growth of urban ag and smaller farms, the threshold could be lowered. A funder briefing was important to keep support informed for this community level food system work. Another project focuses on growers, food businesses and local boards of health. This is especially difficult for mobile food vendors. A pilot is in place to regionalize an approach with reciprocity.

Commissioner Lebeaux comment: Our farmers are dealing with climate change every day - this topic is extremely important.

**Program: Focus on the food system and climate change mitigation:**

- **10:30** Building food system partnerships and models to mitigate climate change with institutions, municipal partnerships and food access groups, Ruairi O'Mahony, Director of Sustainability, UMass Lowell

Food is relatable in terms of climate change. UMASS is an anchor customer for Mill City Grows. Negotiations with ARA have been enhanced since the contract says they will purchase local whenever possible. Metrics are being developed.

- **10:55** A framework of technical assistance programs for growers to more effectively mitigate climate change, Gerard Kennedy, Director, Ag Conservation and Technical Assistance, MDAR

Increased variability in our weather patterns is the new norm for growers who depend on the weather. Agriculture can play a role in greenhouse gas reduction through land protection and carbon sequestration. Programs can broadly be categorized under mitigation, adaptation and resiliency. Soil and vegetation are important to sequester carbon. Over 70,000 acres of land have been protected. There will be five meetings for review of the APR program in 2020.

Comment: MDAR programs are important. The game changer is climate change. How do you support MDAR with the staff to coordinate good programs? Is the APR funded 100%? Is there land available that can't be funded? What's the time line for an APR? Answer: Two – 3 years. Is there strong outreach? These programs are always oversubscribed. Sometimes applications can be difficult for growers to complete. We're happy to talk with any groups beyond Farm Bureau. Land trusts play an important role.

- **11:20** Intersections of the MA Solid Waste Master Plan with climate change and the MA Local Food Action Plan, John Fischer, DEP Greenhouse

John provided a detailed update on this topic including upcoming hearing details. Recycling Works program is critical for a success rollout of the ban.

- **11:50** Climate change preparedness priorities from the Collaborative Working Group: Jeff Cole, MA Food Policy Council member & Collaborative staff

Jeff shared priorities in farming, land, inputs, fishing, processing and distribution from the MA Local Food Action Plan. Extreme rain, snow, drought, extreme heat, erratic early/late season frost/thaw dates, new/increased pests, new /increased disease pressures, perennial crop species migration, changes in foods shipped in and out of MA, hypoxia in coastal waters, and increases in water contaminants are issues. A policy initiative for the Collaborative is to support increased grant funds and support for MDAR. The total number of requests always exceeds the value of the programs. From a policy perspective there is interest in the rural food plan and the MA Local Food Action Plan. On average, 109 businesses per year are funded through MDAR. There are at least 2,500 farmers that are the key focus for this type of support. Additional funds and staff are needed.

#### **Local Council Presentation:**

- **12:00** The food system and climate change: Community engagement, improved access to food and space to learn & grow. Norris Guscott (Director, Lynn Food and Fitness Alliance), Aparna Raghu (Organizational Research Fellow, The Food Project) and John Wang (North Shore Regional Director, The Food Project)

This informative overview highlighted the interconnectivity between the organizations including challenges and successes.

### **Public Comment**

At the international maple syrup contest held in October, Massachusetts producers won more awards than any other state.

### **Announcements**

Fri, Nov 22, 2019 3rd Annual MA Food System Forum 9:30am - 4:00pm Worcester, MA

Fri, Jan 31, 2020, MA Food Policy Council meeting, Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Visitor Center, 9:30 – 12:30, 3 Paul Clancy Way, Worcester, MA 01607 [BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org](http://BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org)

**Adjournment 12:30** A motion was made by John Lee, seconded by Eric Stocker and passed unanimously.