

Minutes MA Food Policy Council  
Friday, September 10, 2021, 9:30 – 11:30 am

**In attendance:**

Denise Courtney, ESE  
Doug Botelho, office of Representative Daniel Donahue  
Jared Freedman, office of Senator Jo Comerford  
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner DTA  
Representative Hannah Kane  
Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Food Safety  
Jason King, Office of Senator Fattman  
John Lebeaux, Commissioner MDAR  
Bobby Malinn, HED  
Mackenzie May, Central MA Buy Local  
Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH  
Danah Tench, MassDEP  
John Waite, Franklin County CDC

*The remote hosting of this meeting via Zoom is again thanks to MassDEP.*

**Call to Order** by Vice Chair John Waite, who chaired in place of Commissioner Lebeaux.

Clarifying edits from Representative Kane have been incorporated into the minutes which are not substantive. Acceptance of minutes: A motion to accept the minutes was made by Representative Kane and seconded by Amanda Kinchla, and passed unanimously by voice vote: Denise Courtney, Doug Botelho, Jared Freedman, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Representative Hannah Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Jason King, John Lebeaux, Bobby Malinn, Mackenzie May, Danah Tench, and John Waite.

**Officers Reports**

Vice Chair John Waite was advised that Commissioner Lebeaux has reminded Boards and Commissions that filling open Council positions is important. Officer elections are coming up: Mackenzie May is a candidate for Vice Chair, Danah Tench is willing to continue as Secretary. Commissioner Lebeaux is happy to continue as chair but is also open to other candidates. Nominations can be provided to John Waite.

**MA Legislature's Food Caucus update** Jared Freedman from Senator Jo Comerford's office, Representative Hannah Kane and Doug Botelho, office of Representative Daniel Donahue.

Representative Kane shared that September is busy with a focus on how Caucus members can elevate the hunger issues that persist, while advocating funds from ARPA to make the food system more resilient. Caucus members have been asked to be vocal about hunger issues and note examples of how it's being addressed, to show local impacts such as HIP and food pantries. A high level of awareness is needed at the local level. There will be several events, both virtual and live including on Sept 21 when, key partners will focus on ways ARPA funds can address systemic causes of hunger. An endorsed bill to promote equity in agriculture will have a briefing on Sept 22 to inform Caucus members of the issues in the bill, including establishing a commission to study equity in agriculture. There will be a rescheduled tour in western MA. There was a reminder to promote all the work that's ongoing in agriculture and

fishing, as well as what needs to be addressed with your legislators. To be involved, go to the Food System Website <https://www.mafoodsystemcaucus.com/> to find endorsed and priority bills, and then can go to [MA legislature.gov](http://MA.legislature.gov) to find the hearing schedule.

John Waite added that Senator Comerford nominated the Western Mass Food Processing Center (WMFPC) as manufacturer of the year. There will be a ceremony on Sept 28. A Sept 22 hearing will be held to add a fisheries seat to the Council, raised by Representative Paul Schmidt. Comment: perhaps other seats should be considered including UMASS Extension and a representative from the emergency food system. Testimony is due that day. Representative Kane discussed how written testimony from the Council would be significant even though state agency members may need to abstain on a vote for a letter to be drafted. A letter from the Council stating that it's critical to have fisheries seat would be important.

A motion was made for a letter of support by Mackenzie May and seconded by John Waite, who will help formulate the letter. The motion passed by voice vote: Denise Courtney abstain, Doug Botelho yes, Jared Freedman yes, Commissioner Amy Kershaw abstain, Representative Hannah Kane yes, Amanda Kinchla yes, Jason King yes, John Lebeaux abstain, Bobby Malinn abstain, Mackenzie May yes, Danah Tench abstain, John Waite yes.

**MA Food System Collaborative:** Winton Pitcoff, Director of the MA Food System Collaborative is part of a team to develop a farmland action plan, ready for the end of the year. Partners include the UMASS Donahue Institute and American Farmland Trust. He thanked MDAR for the support and getting it started, and to the Governor for funding. The Collaborative is attentive to ARPA and is advocating for funds to support agriculture including the FSIG, to supplement the existing \$15M with another \$30M. HIP started up strong in September with wide redemption, with special thanks to Commissioner Kershaw and Mia Kortebein. The Collaborative has hired Norris Guscott, whose current priority is the agricultural equity The Collaboratives December Forum will be held virtually, with sessions over a few days to increase accessibility as well as address safety issues.

#### **Bylaws, Council, and Structure Committee** Secretary Danah Tench

At the last meeting, the focus of discussion was reviving the advisory committee and updating its role with priorities of racial equity and climate change in the food system. The former committee will be thanked and encourage to reapply if they're interested. A slide presentation showed the composition of the committee according to the bylaws. Council members and members of the public were asked to nominate candidates for the committee by the end of Sept to [Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov](mailto:Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov). Question: What about adding equity in this process? How can people who might not have additional time be involved? Answer: the bylaws state engaging committee members who are actively farming. The time commitment shouldn't be huge, and the committee can be flexible in terms of how often to meet and how to meet, including virtually. The Council members don't receive a stipend and there isn't a process for stipends in general, but the topic could be explored. A comment was made that the advisory committee job description include members who represent a larger group than themselves should be spelled out. The advisory committee needs to follow the Commonwealth's Open Meeting Law. Rep. Kane asked that the information about the nominees for the advisory committee be emailed to council members. The information will also be posted on the MA Food Policy Council webpage.

#### **Program**

BIPOC Farmers and Farmland in MA, history of ownership and loss. Melissa Gordon, Agricultural Policy Researcher, M.A., [Urban & Environmental Policy & Planning](#) | Tufts University, M.S., [Food & Nutrition Policy & Programs](#) | Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy presented an informative program on the history and current status of BIPOC farmers in MA. A link to the presentation can be found at <https://tufts.box.com/s/n8vbrg57736fwjtifi8sk9ve5v2olyek> and a link to her research is here: <https://mgordon.shinyapps.io/shinyapp/>

Creating equity in land access: *Maria Moreira*, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Mentor Flats, and Barnabas Forndia, Mentor Flats grower, a program of World Farmers, Lancaster, representing over 350 farmers, was not able to present due to flooding on the farm, however she joined the meeting briefly and asked that policy makers include the participants in their decision making. Land access is critical, and a system that can support small farmers is needed. Henrietta Nyaigoti from World Farmers shared that many growers received 50% of their income from farming and lost their crops due to the recent flooding that occurred on [date]. She discussed the need for land. Maria said that the first time, three Mentor Flats farmers received a lease for state property in Templeton. She acknowledged MDAR's support in this process.

Update on MDAR's environmental justice work: Rose Arruda, Urban Ag, Food Trust, and Food Ventures Coordinator and MDAR Environmental Task Force appreciated Melissa's report and acknowledge the flooding issues at Mentor Flats. Rose is a member of Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Environmental Justice Task Force and referred attendees to the state's web pages describing these programs: <https://www.mass.gov/environmental-justice>. She explained that the task force has been meeting for about a year to discuss how the agencies implement environmental justice (EJ) in MA. She explained that each EEA agency is developing a strategy in which EEA will build into its own Secretariat wide EJ Strategy. The leadership of this program has had a grass roots stakeholder engagement process as part of developing the strategy, and comments are being incorporated. The Collaborative has been a solid partner in this process. Metrics are a part of the discussion in terms of BIPOC resources offered. For FY 2022, all RFR's have language that speaks to disadvantaged farmers including enhanced ranking. Land licensing is also being reviewed. MDAR has three programs that focus on environmental justice communities: Urban Ag (\$2.8M in awards), Food Ventures (\$6M in awards), and through the Food Trust program for low interest loans. Each MDAR division will be creating an environmental justice work group. There are some 7,700 farmers in MA. It would be helpful to know where the 23 BIPOC farmers are, and to develop appropriate resources. Language is a part of the Commonwealth's work, to have information in at least five languages, and more, and how to get the word out. MDAR partnerships are critical to get this information out to communities across the state including which outlets focus on non-English speaking groups.

EJ discussion: Representative Kane noted appreciation for all this work and is interested in sharing this information with the Caucus members including top line information. Rose will assist with this communication. The source of data was the 2017 US Census of Agriculture. Massachusetts doesn't have contacts for all the farms and data doesn't include organizations that represent many farmers. Comment: There are many issues involved - the Council needs to be at the table for legislation that lawmakers don't think impact agriculture, but actually do.

Question: To help struggling farmers, could there be a shared services model that small farmers could benefit from to get out of this cycle? Answer: Organizations including World Farmer and New Entry Sustainable Farming have aggregated many of these services. Question: Does the definition include

vulnerable infrastructure? Comment: The definition of environmental justice is from EEA with federal input. The public is invited to give comment via the web page.

Comment: Consider the intersection of food justice and environmental justice which affects the same people. Using the word minority which marginalizes BIPOC groups, especially when talking about food. It's hard to understand how deep this goes. Invite people who understand system change who don't look like you to make these changes.

**MA Food Policy Council member updates:** Council members share priority projects, topics, and issues relevant to their work, the Council, and the MA Local Food Action Plan

### **Announcements**

September 17 – October 3, 2021, Eastern States Exposition (The Big E)

<https://www.easternstatesexposition.com/>

October 1, New England Honey Bee Update, *Lunch and Learn* Series [Details here.](#)

November 5, MA Food Policy Council annual meeting

December 8, SAVE THE DATE: 2021 Massachusetts Food System Forum:  
Reconnecting and Rebuilding, Sturbridge, MA

### **Public Comment**

**11:29 Adjournment:** a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lebeaux, seconded by Commissioner Kershaw and passed by voice vote: Denise Courtney, Commissioner Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Jason King, Commissioner Lebeaux, Mackenzie May, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Danah Tench, and John Waite.

*On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws, declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus ("COVID-19"). In accordance with the State of Emergency, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("MFPC") meetings are being conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access.*