

## MA Food Policy Council Minutes

September 12, 2025, 9:30 – 11:30 AM remote

### In attendance:

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Doug Botehlo, office of Representative Donahue

Dave Dumaresq, Farmer

Senator Dylan Fernandes and Matthew Connolly, legislative director

Director Anne Gobi, EOHED

Bruce Hopper, MassDEP

Kerry Shea, office of Representative Hannah Kane

Rob Leshin and Denise Courtney, DESE

Senator Fattman, and Josh Tavares, legislative aide

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Margaret Moulton, Direct to Consumer

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

John Waite, Food Processing

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Not in attendance: Amanda Kinchla

**Call to order.** The meeting was called to order at 9:35 AM by Chair Ashley Randle.

**Acceptance of minutes.** A motion to accept the minutes was made by Bruce Hopper, seconded by Caro Roszell and passed unanimously via voice vote: Jessica del Rosario, Matthew Connelly, Ann Gobi, Bruce Hopper, Kerry Shea, Rob Leshin, Senator Fattman, Commissioner McCue, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, and Phoebe Walker.

**MA Legislative Food System Caucus:** Senator Fattman joined the meeting from Water's Farm, Sutton, and noted crossing paths with Bruce Hopper at the sugar shack there. The Senator is working on a capital plan for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the farm. He joined Congressman's McGovern's tour to World Farmers, Lancaster. He commented on how impressive the operation is and encouraged Council members to visit. The farm has had strong support from USDA and legislative earmarks. He noted that Whittier Farm, Sutton, opened a new coffee shop featuring local products, another opportunity to have a wonderful Blackstone Valley experience. His legislative director, Matthew Connolly, shared a few highlights re: the Joint Commission on Agriculture and Fisheries including support for healthy soils, support for the impact of climate change on agriculture with funds to mitigate effects such as storms and flooding. Included is mitigation to support lobstermen when waters are closed between January and June for right whales. Other topics include legislation to support oyster shell recycling, cranberry farmers being able to resell water permits, and a PFAS relief fund. Farmers engaged in farming would be exempt from litigation. Legislation to standardize regulations between municipalities for cottage foods is also a topic. Phoebe Walker noted concerns re: cottage foods business that she will discuss.

Kerry Shea, legislative aide, office of Representative Kane, highlighted Caucus priority bills:

***Food access/insecurity***

H3154/S1043/S1141 An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need

H222/S104 An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program

H1466/S939 An Act establishing the hunger free campus initiative

***Farming and Food System***

H71/S11 Proposal for a legislative amendment to the Constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands

H121/S61 An Act Relative to Urban Farmland

H112/S55 An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts

***Economic Development***

H3130/S2023 An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture

The Caucus held a briefing on July 17 with the Greater Boston Food Bank re: their survey showing an increase in food insecurity. The Governor's Antihunger Task Force includes Senator Comeford and Representative Kane.

**MA Food System Collaborative:** Becca Miller, Legislative Director. It was a busy summer with strong support from the MA Food System Caucus. It was good news to hear Commissioner McCue announce that HIP is back to \$40, \$60 and \$80 levels, depending on household size. The Collaborative joined many summer agriculture tours hosted by the state's Buy Local organizations and Senator McGovern. Becca attended a meeting in Maine to learn about their approach to PFAS and the state's \$60M investment. She is involved with the Governor's Anti-Hunger Task Force and working groups. At Tuesday's hearing,

many of eight of the Collaborative's priority bills will be heard including An Act relative to Urban Ag, promoted during MDAR's Urban Ag Week. Testimony is appreciated.

### **Program**

- "Year of Youth in Agriculture," a statewide effort to celebrate and engage the next generation of agricultural leaders.

The MDAR Youth Council was introduced by Commissioner Ashley Rande, to inspire young people to become involved in food system work and become future leaders. This is the program's second year. There are 15 junior and senior high school students involved from across the state, from traditional and non-traditional agriculture backgrounds.

Cecy Yazwinski, MDAR Youth Council, Deerfield Academy High School. Cecy is from a farming family formerly in dairy, now livestock and crops. Witnessing floods and droughts in western Massachusetts led to her interest in climate change and the impacts of legislation and policy in these areas. Through MDAR's Youth Council, she has been exposed to many different types of farms adopting to climate change. For example, a microgreen farm using solar energy. A meeting with the Food Project inspired her to understand communication between rural and urban growers. She recognized that urban growers could rely on rural growers for crops that require a lot of space, and that urban growers can grow niche products that require a smaller space with distribution in the nearby community. Cecy commented that the Youth Council has helped her to understand the role of government in agriculture, including support for economic viability.

Bristol County Agriculture High School, Dighton. Derek Costa, Superintendent/Director described their mission to prepare the next generation of farmers through work force development. He thanked Commissioner Randle for creating the Youth Council. The school has been in operation for the past 100 years, supporting future growers and the protection of natural resources including water and land. Food literacy is integrated into the curriculum. The Science and Dairy program support cooperatives. Last year the school was awarded a grant to support a flower and vegetable greenhouse program, to understand crop rotation and integrate items into the dining hall's menu. A recent renovation supports modern facilities including a robotic milker. The school has a clear impact on workforce development programs. Plan to attend the School's Oct 18-19 open house see it all firsthand.

Lauren Decoste, senior Equine Science student, is an FFA leader, a member of the drill team, and a student worker for the large animal science program. She cited her wide exposure to many opportunities in agriculture. Through school, she has a deep appreciation of the availability of food, agricultural sustainability, and the production of animals and plants as part of the food chain.

The Food Project, with locations in Dorchester, Lincoln, Lynn and Wenham. Introduction: John Wang, Co-Executive Director. The Food Project focuses on developing active leaders who focus on access to fresh affordable foods and bringing young people across different communities into an intentional pathway for youth leadership. Some 72% of the Food Project's students are engaged in leading food system and social change. The Food Project has 70 acres of land across their locations. They are building 100 raised beds in Lynn and Boston. They host an annual National Institute for youth, with attendees from across the country to connect on this work.

Rex Tejada-Lemus, former Academic Root Crew Assistant Supervisor and senior at UMass Boston. Rex worked to guide other youth to take charge in the community. As assistant supervision, he helped, along with his crew, to build one of the Food Project's farms in Lynn from the ground up. The site is fully functional, with support from the surrounding residential area who have access to what's grown on the farm. He commented that it was impactful to understand how his work has influenced growing local food. He feels comfortable leading a team, seeking out leadership roles, and empowering other students to become leaders. Commissioner Randle noted that during Urban Ag Week and through the Urban Ag Program, the work of the Food Project was recognized.

Eastie Farms, Boston. Introduction: Kannan Thiruvengadam, Executive Director. This is an ecosystem that works together to make positive changes. It is easy to focus on what isn't working in the current political climate, but it's important to emphasize what is positive, especially in Massachusetts, including MDAR and the City of Boston. Eastie Farms has an innovative CSA program that's supporting youth and addresses food security in a manner that eliminates stigma. Eastie Farms has new infrastructure including a mushroom farm, adding training opportunities and more Massachusetts grown food. Kannan shared his gratitude to partners including the MA Food System Collaboration and MDAR. He commented that the youth work is a commitment for the long haul. It's not possible to solve problems with the same set of thinking.

Vedant Ramesh, Eastie Farm Climate Core, and East Boston Junior High School student. He shared thoughts about Eastie Farms and food security. In East Boston, there are many immigrant families and food is expensive. Eastie Farms has a new CSA program for the area with tiered pricing. During the summer, the community came together, bagged produce, and distributed it to the community. Being involved in the food system helps him to think differently about how food is grown and distributed. A tour to Graining Ground, Concord, was informative to see how organic food is grown and distributed for free. He commented that a youth's angle is different than an adult, which is needed. Eastie Farms geothermal greenhouse was conceived in part by a young community member who wanted a place to grow plants year-round. Youth have fresh eyes and ask why can't we make changes? That optimistic angle and point of way to make change will help us tackle today's issues in ways that we may not imagine.

Commissioner Randle commented that rarely is she speechless and that today's testimony has been inspiring. What is keeping more young people from being involved in agriculture in Massachusetts? Cecy suggested that there could be more opportunities to connect young people and the agriculture sector. Bristol Agricultural High School, FFA and 4-H are also options. Vedant commented that one of his first memories of moving to East Boston was Eastie Farm. There typically aren't a lot of growing spaces in urban areas. If you dig deep, there are people who care about the same things. He commented that seeing someone in my age group invested in this work can be an inspiration. John Wang commented that the Food Project recruits students from diverse interests and areas to build relationships with the land. All of these students go through this transformation together.

Rob Leshin informed the young panelists of DESE's work to build up universal school meals and buttress these efforts while recognizing the ROI for significant funding. DESE is working to build excitement about agriculture and the state's food system. He thanked the panelist for their inspiring comments.

- Governor Healy's Anti-Hunger Task Force. Christina Maxwell, Director of Programs, Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Chicopee.

The Task Force was formed in July in response to the Reconciliation Bill, which includes devastating cuts to the food system. The Task Force's first meeting in August identified a cross-agency approach to mitigate the challenges. She shared her gratitude for the many groups in Massachusetts working collaborative re: food security. The membership represents a wide variety of sectors. Four objectives include:

1. Providing recommendations for mitigating the direct and indirect impacts of federal SNAP cuts and program changes to Massachusetts;
2. Initiating and deepening collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit sectors for alleviating hunger and food insecurity, with a specific focus on those communities and populations most impacted by federal action;
3. Exploring opportunities for partnership and collaboration across northeastern states,
4. Providing recommendations for long-term, sustainable solutions for mitigating hunger and food insecurity, preserving food systems, and bolstering local economies through cross-cutting initiatives, including public-private partnerships, coordinated state responses, and data-driven reforms to policies and practices.

Massachusetts has an existing strong foundation across many organizations and programs. Targeted work groups were identified including direct food assistance, rural resiliency, and funding and scaling through philanthropy and policy. Commissioner Randle mentioned next steps including four in-person and one live listening session prior to the Hunger Action week in November. The goal is an open dialogue to meet the January timeline for recommendations. The sessions will be facilitated by Monte Belmonte, a long-time anti-hunger activist and fundraiser for the Western Massachusetts Food Bank.

- Local Food Count Project: Kristina Pechulis, Executive Director, MA Food System Collaborative. The Project will review data to understand how much food is purchased in Massachusetts and serve as a metric as a goal for 30% local food consumption by 2030. Local food purchases made in 2025 will be researched in 2026. Buyer contacts from schools, supermarkets, restaurants and distributors are being updated for the work. Kristina is happy to share additional information.

## **Reports**

- Officer reports. Commissioner Randle yielded her time since the meeting was running late.
- Letters of Support/Advocacy Committee: Phoebe Walker. The Committee wrote two letters of testimony for upcoming hearings H.112 / S.55, An Act fostering agricultural resilience in Massachusetts, known as the F.A.R.M. Bill and S.56/H.109 An Act protecting our soil and farms from PFAS contamination. There is interest in supporting HIP legislation HB 194/h222 at the upcoming hearing. Any Council advocates can provide testimony.
- Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle. The Committee is exploring how to add voices to the Advocacy/Letters of Support Committee and how to become engaged with MDAR's Food Security program, and the Farmland Action Plan.

## **Council member updates**

Bruce Hopper and Danah Tench shared an update on the Gap IV Energy Grant announcement.  
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-gap-energy-grant-program>

Caro Roszell reviewed a presentation connecting the state's drought history to farm viability and climate change. Caro shared information about drought issues, cover crop failure, and wilting in drought tolerant plants for example. Climate change impacts are worsening and putting additional stress on growers. Help farmers build soil health. Climate change is causing costs to increase for growers.

Commissioner Randle commented that it is inspiring to see grants that support building soil health. Growers are appreciative.

Rob Leshin shared that close to \$500,000 in MA Fresh Grants will be announced soon. The grant provides funding for schools and pantries to support local food purchases and food education. DESE has proposed a session for the Massachusetts Food System Forum relating to food literacy and education.

Commissioner McCue commented that the future of food system work is in good hands, based on youth presentations at this meeting. He shared his appreciation of good news in food system work including DTA key staff and food security stakeholder's success to restore HIP funding to previous levels. The work is a major step regarding ease of use for staffing and clients and eliminates confusion and additional stigma. There have been steps with DTA's new vendor for more meaningful receipts, so clients know their HIP balance and managing their purchases. Mia and her team did a great job. At the last Council meeting, changes in the Reconciliation Bill were discussed, including radical changes around healthcare. We're working to implement changes. SNAP recipients that have been on extended certification periods have affected overpayments and underpayments. For clients who fail to share changes in income, DTA is reinstituting interim reporting to understand household circumstances. This isn't about fraud, but challenges relating to overpayment and underpayment to be able to address the state's error rate, to avoid \$400 M in costs. This will increase the level of engagement and communication to get to a standard that doesn't put us in a challenging situation that would threaten our ability to run the SNAP program as robustly as we would like to. This is likely the first step of many. We'll be actively partnering with our clients for this work.

DPH is working on a grant application to support public health, due in November. Separately, now available is the Final Report of the Special Legislative Commission to Study Poverty:  
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/SD3122>

### **Announcements**

- Upcoming Council meetings: Wed, Dec 3rd: 9:30 – 11:30; Jan 8, 2026: Annual meeting, Rm 428, MA Statehouse, 11 - 1:30
- November 21, 2025 [Save the date](#) - annual Massachusetts Food System Forum, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester

### **Public Comment**

EOS Foundation's Breakfast in the Classroom Grant <https://eosfoundation.org/nourishing-kids-initiative-breakfast-in-the-classroom-2/>

### **Adjournment**

At 11:40 AM, a motion to adjourn was made by Bruce Hopper, seconded by John Waite and passed unanimously via voice vote: Jessica del Rosario, Dave Dumaresq, Senator Dylan Fernandes, Director Anne Gobi, Bruce Hopper, Kerry Shea, Rob Leshin, Josh Tavares, Commissioner McCue, Margaret Moulton, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, John Waite, Ayn Yeagle, and Phoebe Walker.

55 in attendance

*This meeting was held remotely via teams in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 signed by Governor Healey on March 28, 2025*