

Minutes: MA Food Policy Council meeting

September 13, 2024, 9:30 - 11:30 AM (remote)

In attendance:

Keath Christensen, Senator Fattman's Office

Jessica del Rosario, DPH

Rob Leshin and Denise Courtney, DESE

Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs

Representative Hannah Kane and Kerry Shea

Rachel Klein, office of Senator Comerford

Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety

Julianna Kramer, office of Representative Donahue

Commissioner McCue, DTA

Commissioner Randle, MDAR

Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils

Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Distribution

Danah Tench, MassDEP

John Waite, Food Processing

Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Ayn Yeagle, Community Health

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 AM by chair Commissioner Randle.

Acceptance of minutes: A motion to accept the minutes was made by Anne Gobi, seconded by Torry Katsiroubas and passed unanimously by: Keath Christensen, Rob Leshin, Anne Gobi, Representative Kane, Rachel Klein, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: The legislature is not in session during August and the economic development bill did not get negotiated before July 31. The Governor moved some of the \$ 5.1 M for HIP forward for 2025. Representative Kane and Senator Comerford reached out to Commissioner McCue to discuss the status of the HIP program to ensure that it can be used for everyone who needs, rather than it being capped. Senator McGovern hosted farm tours with participation from the MA Legislative Food System Caucus. Both are also on the Council's Strategic Planning Committee and advocated for local

food to be included in the mission statement. It was disappointing that it was not, in spite of comments including from Congressman McGovern. Local food does stand as one of the five pillars of the program. The 21 Commission on Agriculture, Kate Hogan House, Comerford on the Senate - looking forward to completing the report. The Caucus is planning for the next session to push the economic development package out, as well as the next legislative agenda including food and farms systems.

MA Food System Collaborative: Becca Miller. The Collaborative is also reviewing the status of priority bills, including those in the economic development bill. The Collaborative will be reaching out to partners for new proposals. They appreciated that the supplemental budget included HIP funds. There have been farmers market visits with legislators. Stories about HIP have been collected from farmers and consumers to share with legislators with the intention of support for increasing the budget. HIP Food system educators shared ideas re: working with LFPC networks re: network building and plans since the LFPC grant was not funded. The upcoming newsletter will focus on equity partners. The Collaborative's forum is coming up in December 17. A newly released [USDA 2021 - 2023](#) report shows a rise in food insecurity and decrease in farm income including [Massachusetts](#).

Comment: There is an important connection between HIP and farm income. The Collaborative has a survey asking all participants how HIP affects them. Anecdotal information shows that HIP has provided an important and helpful income stream. Question: Are there Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) program updates? Answer: The federal funding was for just two rounds which is unfortunate since the program has been important for farm income. Growing Places will be interviewed about this in anticipation of the state budget.

Commissioner Randle: MA Farm to School and DESE hosted 12 USDA officials to see the outcomes of the program. The visits were impactful and insightful. Attendees were blown away by the testimonials and impacts, heard directly from the schools, farms, and partner organizations about the importance of this program continuing. They learned about the program value to the local food system. They were impressed and surprised by the number of new and beginning farmers that the program brought into the system.

Officer Reports

2025 meeting dates were confirmed: Fri, Jan 17th: 9:30-11:30; Fri, March 14th: 9:30-11:30; Fri, May 9th: 9:30-11:30; Fri, July 11th: 9:30-11:30; Fri, Sept 12th: 9:30-11:30, Wed, Dec 3rd: 11-1:30. These will be added to your calendars.

Report from the chair:

Letters of Support and Advocacy update: The MDAR legal team has recommended a process. A subcommittee could be formed around legislation and policy to draft letters to report back to the full body for review and approval. As a next step, anyone interested should email Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov. At the December meeting, the subcommittee will be voted on. Non-agency Council members will be on the subcommittee.

Secretary vacancy: Danah will be stepping down. Commissioner Randle shared appreciation for her leadership and work to support the Council. At the December meeting, nominations will be made for the officer positions, including the secretary.

Also at the December meeting, Representative Schmid will be recognized for his impact on agricultural legislation.

Strategic Planning Committee re: Making Hunger History. Advocacy continues to include “local” in the definition. Congressman McGovern was part of the conversation and helped to elevate farms and “local” in the conversation. Other champions on the steering committee included Representative Kane and Senator Comerford. The next meeting will be in October.

Farmland Action Plan: MDAR staff, Catharine Otto, has joined the agency to focus on this plan and actions. Thank you to all the partners.

Farmers Market Week was successful with USDA, DTA and four site visits and celebratory events and understand the culture of each market and the SNAP and HIP vendors, and attendees re: the importance of the markets for their community.

MDAR released a Ten-year Urban Agriculture [Report](#) written by staff member Rose Arruda. There were site visits during Urban Agriculture week in Massachusetts including recipient testimonials which will inform the future of the program. The visits were inspiring.

MDAR is thinking creatively about the environmental bond bill and considering the important aspects of resiliency, food security, climate change, workforce development and supporting robust local food system.

Bylaw committee: The Council reviewed proposed changes to the Bylaw some of which require legislative action, the following language was discussed and voted:

Council language (which requires legislative action): to add positions for the Division of Marine Fisheries and UMASS Extension and amend the current statutory language to allow for compensation for the Advisory Committee. motion to accept the proposed changes to the Council language was made by Danah Tench and seconded by Phoebe Walker and passed by unanimously voice vote: Keath Christensen, Rob Leshin, Anne Gobi, Kerry Shea, Rachel Klein, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Julianna Kramer and Jessica del Rosario.

Council language which requires only Bylaw changes: the healthy soils position will be added to the current list of positions as it is already included in Section 6C MFPC of MGL. c 20 . A suggestion was made to be able to change positions on the Council during regular meetings instead of just at the annual meeting, and all supporting language would be changed to “a regular scheduled” meeting, taking out references to the annual meeting. The Council discussed changing meeting times to provide more flexibility. The date of the annual meeting which was typically held in December will be changed to another day and month that provides for better coordination with the legislative schedules, considering

that December typically isn't a good time. In Article VI, Section Four of the bylaws, inconsistent language about how the Council operates will be removed, as well as references for the advisory committee and annual meeting. A motion was made to accept the proposed changes to the current bylaws by Danah Tench, seconded by John Waite, and passed unanimously by: Keath Christensen, Rob Leshin, Anne Gobi, Representative Hannah Kane (needs to leave at 10 AM) and Kerry Shea, Rachel Klein, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Julianna Kramer and Jessica Delrosario. Commissioner Randle thanked Danah Tench and the bylaws committee for all this work.

Advisory Committee:

The committee met in early August with John Fisher, MassDEP to learn about food waste. The next meeting will focus on the MDAR Farmland Action Plan, and to seek opportunities for involvement. Advisory Committee member Danielle Collins thanked the Council for the bylaw suggested changes re: compensation for the advisory committee and adding positions for fisheries and extension. The Advisory Committee's secretary is stepping down. The nominating committee will meet to suggest candidates for the position, to be voted on during the December meeting.

Program: Local Food Policy Council report

Mill City Grows, Courtney McSparron and Ali Jacobs. Additional discussion: Health and Flex Services programs and impacts for small farmers. Mill City Grows used funds from MDAR's Local Food Policy Council grant program to convene meetings with interpreters in three different languages: English, Spanish and Khmer. The SNAP GAP in Lowell comprises at least 20,000 people. Mill City Grow's Council is now operating well. Separately, the MassFlex Program has been impactful for resident's health and business viability for farmers. The amount of product available from local farmers to residents in Lowell has increased, however the program is changing in 2025. The new rules and network advocacy means that services need to be provided to everyone, which is not possible by Mill City Grows. Hopefully MassFlex will partner with many other providers to cover their catchment area. Over time there is concern that they will want to work with just one partner. Small local partners that are focused on local foods may miss out, an important concern. MassFlex could partner with for-profit organizations or others from out of state. There's a push to have this done by the end of this year.

Comment: DPH has been part of the ACO (Accountable Care Organization) and Flex Services processes with MassHealth over the years and provides input through work groups including the current changes MassHealth is moving towards. This conversation will be shared with DTA colleagues to discuss with MassHealth. Commissioner McCue: If Mill City Grows is seeking formal community status, DTA can assist with connections to maximize USDA reimbursements. There have been discussions about DTA's SNAP outreach program to onboard SNAP clients. There is has been some difficulty to get DTA's partner site up. DTA can facilitate discussions to get this work off the ground. The funds from MDAR have been incredibly helpful. There are limited windows in which people can apply. DTA works with about 120 formal community partners. Mill City Grows was thanked for bringing these issues to the attention of the Council. Members suggested additional discussion and check in on this topic. Commissioner Randle

Commented [DT1]: Not sure what is meant here. Is Mill City Grows running on "steam", such as no money, or is it running on steam based on prior work done by others?

Commented [DT2]: Should this be DTA?

Commented [BO3R2]: yes

commented that MDAR has had a long-standing relationship with Mill City and appreciates their important work.

Presentation: MA Food Trust, Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF) and Franklin County CDC (FCCD), John Waite. John shared an overview of the six years of the program's existence, joined by Hannah Sobel from FCCD. LEAF partners were not available to join the presentation. Each year there are \$1 M in grants, with a priority on local food. He noted the fantastic partnership with Rose Arruda from MDAR. The program helps to create jobs, addresses food access and insecurity. He is happy for any leads from the Council to promote the MA Food Trust program. Commissioner McCue thanked John for the presentation. He lives close to the [Harvest Homestead](#), an excellent model of the program. He offered assistance for any SNAP or HIP access issues, since John mentioned that some of the awardees find it difficult to get this service.

Council member updates

DESE: Rob Leshin provided an update on the FY 24 supplemental budget and the need for funds to complete monthly claims for school reimbursement. Denise Courtney shared slides about the very successful USDA Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) visits to Massachusetts to learn more about the Local Food Promotion program. Maggie Nowak discussed the Mass Fresh Grant for schools and work with schools' child nutrition programs to be able to secure funding. Mini Coaching sessions are available for schools interested in applying.

DTA: Commissioner McCue acknowledged the partnership with DESE for summer EBT, the first iteration. The application program just finished and to date, will provide benefits for up to 561,000 youth contributing to up to \$68M to the Commonwealth. The second year of the program will be rebranded to focus on the nutritional value of the food rather than the EBT aspect. He thanked the many folks who joined DTA in a very effective HIP advocacy for \$25M in the state budget. There was disappointment that it was reduced to \$15M. With the budget a bit late, DTA is in a spending plan review to identify budget challenges. There will be a clearer direction at the beginning of October. He noted that this lack of clarity is difficult for the farming community who rely on this program. He thanked everyone for their patience.

MassDEP: Danah Tench shared that she is ending her tenure as the Council's secretary and is also leaving the Council. "It's been wonderful serving for eight years, thank you for letting me be a part of this journey," Danah said. She noted that the [GAP Energy Grant Program](#) will continue to be offered, and that DEP will identify a new designee for the Council. Commissioner Randle commented that Danah is leaving a legacy and thanked her especially for getting the bylaw changes across the finish line.

Announcements

MA Food Policy Council annual meeting (remote & in-person), December 4, 2024, 11 - 1:30 PM Room 428 Boston State House. Bring your favorite foods for the MA Grown & Fresher reception/lunch afterwards!

MA Food System Collaborative Annual Forum, December 17, Holy Cross, Worcester, **early registration Oct 1.**

Public Comment

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made at 11:09 by Anne Gobi, seconded by Ayn Yeagle and passed unanimously: Keath Christensen, Rob Leshin, Anne Gobi, Kerry Shea, Rachel Klein, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Randle, Caro Roszell, Torry Katsiroubas Stamm, Danah Tench, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Ayn Yeagle, Jessica Del Rosia, Julianna Kramer.

56 in attendance