

Minutes

MA Food Policy Council Meeting
Friday, September 16, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM,
Tower Hill Botanical Garden, Boylston, MA 02130

In attendance:

Helena Fruscio, designee, MA Office of Housing and Development
Hannah Kane, Representative
Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Science Department
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MA Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner
John Lee, Farmer
Commissioner Jeff McCue, Dept. of Transitional Assistance
Vivian Morris, Nutrition & public health expert
Mark Reil, District Director, Senator Ryan Fattman
Danah Tench, designee: Dept. of Environmental Protection
John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center
Tyler Wolanin, Senator Anne Gobi's office

Call to Order: Commissioner Lebeaux, FPC Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:46 AM.

Welcome: Joann Vieira, Director of Horticulture, Tower Hill Botanical Garden gave a brief overview of Tower Hill, evolving from a dairy farm to the lush garden of today and a focus to engage viewers and help people connect with plants. She talked about plans moving forward to recalibrate for the future including climate change and supporting local communities. There are many opportunities to be involved with the Garden www.towerhillbg.org Commissioner Lebeaux encouraged FPC members to take advantage of the beautiful site after the meeting, and highlighted the importance of the nursery & greenhouse sector of the state's agricultural revenues.

Motion to approve the minutes: A motion was made by John Lee, seconded by Vivien Morris and passed unanimously.

Introductions: FPC members and those in attendance from the public introduced themselves and their affiliation.

Officer Reports:

Chair: Commissioner Lebeaux: Overview and next steps

Commissioner Lebeaux commended the FPC for all the work and the larger stakeholder community that moved the FPC to accept the MA Local Food Action plan. This meeting offers an important opportunity to discuss priority action items where collaboration and resource-sharing between FPC members can efficiently and effectively address action items during this Implementation Phase.

The focus of this meeting will be to further hone the list of collaborative priorities for the MA Food Policy Council, to a shorter list that can be shared with the Governor's office and provide a framework for the FPC moving forward. The shorter list can be confirmed at the November meeting, so there will be time for further discussion, getting as close as possible to general acceptance today.

He also stated interest in more clearly defining programming for the MA Food Policy Council moving forward. The FPC's purpose is clearly stated in the legislation that created this body, but how should that be translated into content for upcoming meetings and to support the Implementation phase of the MA Local Food Action Plan?

To get everyone thinking broadly of some of the possibilities and successes achieved by Food Policy Councils across the country, Emily Broad Leib, from Harvard Law School, Director of Food Law and Policy Clinic, was introduced to share some tangible accomplishments that may provide some inspiration.

Program

Actions & Accomplishments of U.S. Food Policy Councils, Emily Broad Leib, Director, Food Law and Policy Clinic, Harvard Law School.

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/boards-commissions/food-policy-council.html> *Look under "Reports" right hand column of the page for the full presentation.*

Question: Are non-government FPCs inclusive of government positions? Answer: It varies but having government more active helps in raising awareness of legislation. For example, the New York state FPC writes legislation, comments on budgets, and cosponsored bills with city council members, and makes recommendations to the Governor.

Question: What is crucial for staffing and support for a Council to be production? Answer: It's beneficial to have staff or to be able to partner with others to take on projects. All Councils reviewed had least a working group structure and working groups with a Council member for leadership.

There are more than 200 Councils in N. America. Emily offered to look into whether more are elected or appointed, and by whom.

Commissioner Lebeaux framed the discussion with the list that follows, based on the overarching goals summarized in letters sent to the Governor and General Court in July. He took the liberty of whittling down the list even more to six action items based on a broad collaborative range, so that all members of the Food Policy Council could naturally be engaged in several of the topics.

Old Business

Facilitated discussion re: shared FPC action items, prioritizes. Winton Pitcoff, MA Food Systems Collaborative

The enabling legislation was reviewed, which focuses on making recommendations. The plan is broad but the legislation for the FPC is specific. "Shall" is the operative word. What's the best way to address the strengths of the FPC membership - what can the FPC do that no one else is doing? An important asset is the composition of the MA FPC and private partnership and many sectors represented. The FPC has the knowledge that the Plan represents engagement from 1,500 individuals- so it's clear there is a lot of buy in. What can the FPC do that no other group can, based on the cross sectors represented by the membership? How can the FPC support each agency member with "enlightened self interest" projects that support existing objectives? What does it mean to take on an issue and get buy in from each agency member - representing the FPC agenda in a much bigger agenda?

Discussion:

From a state agency perspective, the goals espoused in the plan are especially relevant where they intersect with current goals. It's an opportunity to integrate the FPC and an agency's mission. For example, there is strong opportunity in the area of poverty and food security to get research and data to align and forecast outcomes, pivotal for an agency's success. It's important to explore academic linkage to support where programs fit into priorities rather than anecdotal information when resources are scarce in the state budget.

Capitalizing on existing strategies from the priority list to build order makes sense, opting for low hanging fruit and then building on that for a strategy and filling in the gaps.

There are about a dozen FPC's in the Massachusetts working on a variety of products. It would be interesting for the FPC to harmonize with these groups to be rowing the boat in the same direction. In some cases, local FPCs have adopted the MA Local Action Food Plan and are conducting both policy and programming work.

The outcome process identified by the MA Local Food Action Plan is important, including the mandate to review progress. Clarity is important for what's doable and measurable. It's important to include everyone who cares about food for broader mobilization.

What is preventing us from having success on the policy level? Look for what's in common and what are the gaps to find the greatest impact. Showing progress is important in this stage. Progress will look different for different for different topics.

FPC has already done a good job of shrinking down the priorities.

If the FPC can narrow down broad goals and layout some measurable objectives and activities to accomplish the goal, it sets up a good structure to guide the FPC and the stakeholders.

Consider two perspectives that meet in the middle. On the list of six topics, what are local FPCs doing? Consider three goals and several activities/action items.

Many FPC's work is proactive and some is reactive. It's good for the FPC to respond to current issues in a timely manner.

It may be possible to aggregate research, taking advantage of resources that this FPC doesn't have. Consider connecting a larger body with state and local FPCs.

A focus on structural issues doesn't make sense without picking topics.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared that this was a good transition to a discussion to work on a shorter list. After the MA Local Food Action Plan was accepted, the Governor's office reached out asking about priorities. The FPC moved quickly and shared Tier I priorities from FPC members. He has been asked to continue to winnow down the list. In anticipation of today's meeting, he developed a draft short list of priorities for the FPC to consider - six items that reflect the highest priorities of this body. He asked for all designees to make their best efforts to have the actual appointed members attend at the November

meeting. November is important since the Commonwealth will start moving into the budgetary and legislation process - so the timing would be good. Missing the window would be a loss to make a compelling case and develop a course of action.

The Commissioner's goal/action item list follows.

1). Support programs that facilitate access to healthy foods for underserved communities with a focus to provide support to leverage the Department of Transitional Assistance's USDA/FINI grant award which will increase use of SNAP at farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and for community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, providing fresh healthy food for low-income families, and increasing sales for Massachusetts farmers.

Discussion: This is an important cross sector example. MA is a leader but more can be done. There are many programs targeting this goal. Should the goal/action item be specific or broad? It would be useful for the FPC to report on progress being made on this topic. The FPC can be an amplifier for the broad goal as well as supporting programs. Suggest keeping a broad header, followed by more specificity with comments or relevant specific programs to be able to report on what's happening that's achieving these goals. The FPC can be a kind of aggregator to understand policy implications as a state and what needs to change, perhaps through a working group.

It's also an opportunity to link to larger policies. State agencies are already dealing with FY18 budget request documents, and have to organize a level of triage to understand program feasibility. Some things can be easily measured and strategically valued, for example, the \$1.2 B spending on SNAP is an economic engine with huge multipliers for economic impact.

Consider including some suggestions, for example, having meetings over the next year to dig into these in more detail, and choose two or three to focus on. In the upcoming Farm Bill discussions, SNAP is expected to be a big topic. Some states doubt the impact of SNAP.

Healthy retail messages in MA need to be amplified.

Local FPCs can provide feedback and describe their contributions to the MA Local Food Action Plan. For example, there are 19 Mass in Motion groups doing important food work.

Consider a graphic to visually demonstrate these goals that are integral to the entire food system.

2. Reduce food waste through state programs for farmers, restaurants, processors, and consumers with a focus to support the Commercial Food Waste Ban by developing policies and programs to divert food waste from landfills. Support donation programs, conversion of food waste to animal feed, composting, and the development of anaerobic digestion facilities.

This goal has national attention and there are may be potential funding sources. This is a priority for Senator Fattman and he plans to file relevant legislation. Every part of the plan has to do with food waste. Massachusetts innovative legislation, but some fine tuning could make it more effective. For example, more of the waste might be able to be donated prior to going to the landfill. Another example could be a review of the date coding that isn't necessarily related to food safety.

3. Support regulatory policies and practices that allow farms and other food system businesses to thrive with a focus to develop circuit rider positions at regulatory agencies, so that their initial contact with food businesses is in a non-enforcement capacity, in an effort to aid in compliance.

Discussion: Farmers use associations to ask regulatory questions to be able to maintain anonymity and to be able to assist those who wish to act in a compliant manner. Farmers report challenges with certain board of health departments. It would be extremely helpful to have information to educate town and board re: best practices. The FPC could build programming around this topic. Circuit riders could interact with BOHs and university educators for consistency in regulations and training. This action item has a direct cost. There are multiple ways of addressing this topic such as communication through the 351 municipalities, sample bylaws, or help with regulations. This could be a case for a potential budget priority in the future.

4. Support and grow food system infrastructure, with a focus to better target opportunities for food processors and distributors around access to capital, incentives, and technical assistance through MassDevelopment and MOBD.

Discussion: Include processors to widen the scope as well as other agencies, private organizations, CDFIS, and universities, for example.

5. Support increased purchases of Massachusetts grown and produced foods, with a focus to increase purchase allowance for local foods for all State colleges, universities, daycare providers, and K-12 schools and increase funding for state agency and institutional local food procurement and develop standardized contract language for all State and municipal purchasers.

Discussion: What is preventing more purchases? The increased purchase allowance (10%) isn't an issue; it's the cost and logistics. It should be an incentive rather than an allowance. MA has a low purchase threshold (\$25,000) compared to other states. At the federal levels it's up to \$100,000 through informal bids. The language for the MA geographic preference could be clearer.

6. Support educational opportunities for farmers and other food system workers, with a focus to support Massachusetts higher education programs in the development and offering of appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of food system businesses.

Discussion: Higher education, extension programs and Vo Tech schools specifically should be included and highlighted. The EOHE has a Skills Capital Grant Program <http://www.mass.gov/hed/community/funding/massachusetts-skills-capital-grant-program.html> that the manufacturing sector (including food businesses) can apply to. The MA FPC can highlight existing programs that are supporting success.

Overall discussion:

Commissioner Lebeaux will have MDAR redraft the six action items for feedback. He emphasized the importance of this last chance to take advantage of the legislative agenda and the budgetary process.

There has been much conversation on how general or specific these should be. If the FPC is fortunate enough to gain some traction, individual members can assist for example, with precise legislative action or help develop costs for more specificity.

The guidance from EEA for the goals was brevity. The FPC has created something brief that encompasses the entire plan - and that might help to set the direction of what the FPC does next. The November meeting will set the tone.

As has been summarized, Representative Kulik has been a staunch advocate of the plan and wanted priorities out as soon as possible in an open source model for any takers.

Recognizing the NGO's and the important role and well as trade groups is paramount.

As a possible roadmap moving forward, six meetings after November could each be adopted to a priority, with subject experts and FPC members presenting and discussing challenges and existing support. A summary of the outcomes could be available including recommendation for next steps.

Another model could focus on Food Policy Council programming around the recipients of the MA Food Ventures program either in separate meetings or complimentary to the six action items. (An announcement of the awardees is pending.)

New Business

MA Food Collaborative Survey update, Winton Pitcoff, MA Food Systems Collaborative

A survey of state programs that relate to the food systems is being conducted. Parameters were shared with a request for feedback, including other agencies that deal with food system topics.

Announcements

Representative Kane was officially welcomed to the MA FPC by Commissioner Lebeaux. She shared that while growing up in Maine; she had an enormous garden and understood the importance of food. She's a big supporter of growers. She previously worked at Mass Dev and in her current legislative role, services on the public health and transportation committee.

There will be a 15th anniversary celebration of the Western MA Food Processing Center in Greenfield 11.18.16 <http://www.fccdc.org/about-the-center>

Upcoming FPC meetings:

Thursday, November 10, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM, Boston State House, 24 Beacon St, Boston - Room 428

Friday, January 13, 2017, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough

Rob Leshin was not able to attend but through email sent the following announcements:

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the state's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without the burden of collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students participating in state assistance programs (SNAP, TANF and MassHealth). Last school year, 49 school districts participated covering over 200,000 high need students attending schools where lunch and

breakfast were served at no cost. This school year, 66 school districts (11 district increase) will be participating with over 240,000 high need students attending a CEP school. Overall, 25% of the statewide student population will be attending a CEP school where breakfast and lunch is served at no charge.

October is National Farm to School Month and soon it will be officially Farm to School month in Massachusetts as well. A big thank you to Representative Timothy R. Madden for presenting and championing this bill through the legislative process and to Island Grown Schools and the many students who helped make the case for this exciting legislation. The bill has cleared the House and Senate and is now awaiting the Governor's signature. We look forward to celebrating and promoting the farm to school movement throughout the month of October. We will be in touch with more information about ways you can help us celebrate in October! In the meantime, the National Farm to School Network has some wonderful resources for celebrating National Farm to School month on their website.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared that the MA Food Ventures Program administered by MDAR includes the MA Local Food Action Plan in the RFR.

He also commented that at MDAR - it's all drought - all the time. Growers are negatively impacted by the lack of rainfall, however it's important to get the word out that there is lots of great locally grown product at farm stands, farmers markets, and CSA. "We can't make it rain, but we can buy MA produced farm products."

Public comments:

The tomato season has been excellent!

Don't forget to buy MA license plates <http://www.mafoodplate.org/>

John Lee, a board member of Tower Hill Botanical Garden, encouraged everyone to walk through the gardens and appreciate the new sculpture that's recently been installed.

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 12:07 PM by Vivien Morris, seconded by John Waite and unanimously passed.