

MA Food Policy Council minutes, meeting held remotely
Friday, September 18, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

In attendance:

Jared Freeman, Senator Jo Comerford's office
Denise Courtney, DESE
Representative Daniel Donahue
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Ryan C. Fattman
Representative Hannah Kane
Commissioner Amy Kershaw, DTA
Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety Specialist
Commissioner John Lebeaux, DAR
John Lee - Farmer
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer
Bobby Malinn, EOHD
Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH
Eric Stocker - Distribution
Danah Tench, DEP
John Waite - Food Processing

Call to Order, Introductions, Chair & MDAR Commissioner Lebeaux called the meeting to order at 10:31.

Acceptance of Minutes A motion to accept the minutes with the spelling of Brandeis corrected by John Lee and seconded by Representative Hannah Kane. In favor based on roll call vote: Jared Freeman, Denise Courtney, Representative Daniel Donahue, Bill Fredericks, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Bobby Malinn, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, and John Waite. Mackenzie May abstained since she didn't attend that meeting.

Officers Reports: Commissioner John Lebeaux welcomed everyone. This meeting was not recorded.

Vice Chair John Waite reported on the Nomination committee and Structure, Roles and Bylaws Subcommittee. As chair of the Nominating committee, John Waite nominated John Lee, Amanda Kinchla, Eric Stocker and Representative Kane as members. Danah Tench has volunteered for the Council secretary position, to be discussed at the annual meeting in November. The Nominating committee will also assist with the Bylaw committee since changes are needed. Commissioner Lebeaux and John Waite were voted in last year for two-year terms, however a Secretary is outstanding. A motion to accept the four members of the Nonimating committee was made by John Lee and seconded by Amanda Kinchla. In favor: Jared Freeman, Denise Courtney, Representative Daniel Donahue, Bill Fredericks, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Bobby Malinn, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, John Waite, and Mackenzie May.

The Council Structure, Roles and Bylaws subcommittee met prior to the Council meeting with notification posted according to the Open Meeting Laws. There is interest to elevate the Council with a more direct line to the Governor's office, based on Representative Ferrante's legislation. More work is needed to rework the bylaws for example, the Advisory Committee. Members of this subcommittee

include Winton Pitcoff, Bonita Oehlke, Emily Leab Broad, Jeff Cole, and Danah Tench. Mackenzie May also attended. A motion was made by John Waite and seconded by Eric Stocker to add Mackenzie to the subcommittee. In favor: Jared Freeman, Denise Courtney, Representative Daniel Donahue, Bill Fredericks, Representative Hannah Kane, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Bobby Malinn, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, John Waite, Mackenzie May and Danah Tench.

Program: Local Food Policy Council: Working with local restaurants to bring meals to at-risk populations, Elizabeth Wiley, Executive Director, Marion Institute <https://www.marioninstitute.org/>. On the south coast, there is a strong focus on building healthy environments. The South Coast Food Policy Council is newly formed with over 200 stakeholders, based out of a previous food security organization in New Bedford. The mission provided was a good foundation when COVID-19 hit. An updated food assessment by the Island Foundation was conducted by Holly Fowler. The Coastal Food Hub and SEAMAP helped to pool resources. When the pandemic happened, the report was put on pause, and a GAP analysis was conducted to identify priorities. Food Finder and Food Alert are web-based apps that are hyper focused for the south coast. In April, several restaurant programs were launched, first in New Bedford with funding from Harvard Pilgrim. Cooks for Community initiative focused on Wareham and Fall River. United We Feed targeted Fall River. Homeless populations (groups that weren't being serviced by other programs) immigrant groups, elderly, immune compromised, front line workers and students not accessing meal programs were the focus. Over three months some 91,000 meals were served, 16 restaurants were employed and worked with 37 community partners dovetailed into the distribution of over 3,000 USDA food boxes representing over 600 pounds of produce, with Sid Wainer and Son, School systems distributed elder boxes. The huge influx of product from USDA meant fewer people went to farmers markets and there was lower HIP utilization. Work moved ahead with the Coastal Food Shed to purchase meat and produce for local food pantries totaling over 75,000 pounds of product, showing the importance of local economies. The work over the past seven months has shown that food insecurity is a health crisis and should be labeled as nutritional insecurity. It would be helpful to have more local incentives to support local producers and retailer. The USDA boxes were helpful but we would like to support our local farmers moving forward. The influx of funding was wonderful to support grass roots responses but were band aids for the chronic problem. Greater resiliency is needed before the next crisis.

MA Food Caucus update: Representative Hannah Kane and Jared Freedman from Senator Jo Comerford shared an update. The Food System Caucus continues to be active with September being Hunger Action Month. The Caucus is 136 strong and bipartisan. Work over the summer focused on encouraging USDA to continue support of the meal sites through the end of the year. Fifty-one Caucus members signed a letter to prioritize programs that make a critical difference in the lives of those that are food insecure. Increased MEFAP funding and continued legislative efforts for HIP legislation as well as food donations bills have been a priority. The priorities are the same as last year and are in Ways and Means part of the COVID-19 focus. A briefing by the Food Security Task Force included 72 people with a focus on the building awareness of the Grant Program, a HIP update and other recommendations. Representative Kane and other co-chairs were on Facebook to highlight the Caucus and community work. Examples included the work of schools feeding their students as well as food banks and pantries. Representative Schmid talked about a bank that encourages all employees to take paid time to work at a pantry. Caucus members were asked to tweet out for their communities and tag other organizations to build

broad awareness of the resources and partnerships. Senator Comeford and Representative Kane are working with Representative Ferrante and Senator Tarr and Dan McKiernan from the Division of Marine Fisheries regarding seafood processors and the commercial fishers and relevant support. The pandemic has put stresses on every element in the food system. Representative Kane stated her appreciation for all the work everyone's doing.

COVID-19 including MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program

DTA: Update on the work of the Task Force and HIP, Amy Kershaw, Commissioner and co-chair of the Food Insecurity Task Force. The Task Force focus was for immediate relief which continues but building long term sustainability and providing good nutrition is also important. There were five sub-recommendations. The USDA food boxes were critical to deal with an acute need. DTA is working with the food banks to see if this strategy should be repeated. There is an existing terrific partnership with food banks and DTA is working with MDAR to think more proactively. The network of food pantries is very diverse. Increasing the number of local products and increasing the quality to meet the needs of the community is critical. The pandemic required a whole set of planning that the state hasn't really undertaken before. There had been a significant uptick for SNAP and then a brief decline and now an uptick again as federal benefits discontinue. It's clear that DTA clients are not able to sustain themselves on SNAP alone, so they're likely connected with other resources such as school lunch and food pantries. WIC has also seen an uptick which is more nutritionally based rather than just financial assistance for food.

On the school meals side especially with remote learning. Waiting for some waivers from the federal gov. Lots of good partnerships with food banks and school meals, and summer meal sites delivering through the year. EBT for free and reduced lunch cards are focused to get out. Big headline is the HIP program expansion. Of the \$56 M, an additional \$5M was allotted on June 11 to bring new vendors into the program with a focus on communicates geographically and at risk. There were 91 applications and 39 were selected representing 12 of 14 counties. Twenty-three of the vendors serve towns that had no HIP. The selection process was robust including at risk clients, issues of food securities and inequities, and if vendors could sell culturally relevant foods, and other criteria. All \$5M of the funds went to HIP benefits, with the Grant supporting and needed infrastructure. A training was held in Spanish. The DTA Finder can clients make broad connections with new features to understand is how HIP works and where they resources can be used, by city and county, including the ability to search by order options with all the information in one place. Separately, information is being collected directly from the farmers through a HIP sign up.

Commissioner Lebeaux stated his delight with the expansion of HIP.

DPH: COVID-19 Community Impact Survey, Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-community-impact-survey>. The Community Impact Survey has just become live, to hear directly from the community to address existing issues to avoid additional impacts from this pandemic and beyond. With this data DPH can better act and partner with communities to address needs now and in the future. The pandemic impact goes beyond health. Respondents do not have to had COVID. The survey is open for three week and takes 10 – 15 minutes to complete or can be administered by someone else. All information in anonymous. Resources are embedded into the survey

that is available in six languages. Please take the survey yourself and promote the survey to your contacts. Resources are forthcoming to assist in promoting the survey.

Commissioner Lebeaux encouraged everyone at the meeting to take the survey and spread the word.

ESE: Current activities relating to COVID-19, Denise Courtney, Nutrition & School Wellness Coordinator. On August 31 the USDA extended flexibility to allow schools and community organizations to offer free meals at open sites across the state. ESE is working to transition meal services to operate open sites out of school districts and other locations, seven days a week in some areas, and over vacation and holidays. Anyone can pick up a meal at no cost. Parents and guardians can pick up meals even without a child. There has been a drop in school meal engagement due to the change in the meal service model. A new Meal Finder service has been launched <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>. Please help spread the word about this resource and the flexible options available through Dec. 31, 2020.

DMF: Industry status during COVID-19, Dan McKiernan, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries. Dan mentioned that with direct contact information for all seafood permit holders in the state, DMF can aid in outreach to build awareness of DPH's Covid Impact Survey.

For the seafood sector, the pandemic impacts have been very substantial but there is some product starting to move. Some of the biggest losses were to products mainly consumed in restaurants. Congress approved \$300M and MA received the largest share on the east coast - \$28M based on the economic activity of the state. Payments are based on scale and sector losses and are expected to be distributed to the industry by the end of November. USDA has tariff relief funds for companies whose products suffered due to tariffs on Europe and China, and the payments have been more substantial than the CARES relief based on the program criteria. DMF has a database of all permit holders and their landings, so releasing those funds will be happy by the end of the year. Processors including oyster growers that are licensed dealers are eligible. There are about three dozen oyster growers who are also dealers. In addition, the Massachusetts Food Infrastructure Grant program has been very helpful for oyster farmers.

There has been a great response to local seafood during the pandemic. The Seafood Marketing Program, coordinated by Wendy Mainardi, has new resources to promote seafood recipes. October is national seafood month. Oyster farmers are being encouraged to participate in the MassGrown Exchange.

MDAR: Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program status: Ashley Randle, Deputy Commission. The Grant was one of the recommendations of the Food Security Task Force. Overarching goal is long term solutions for a more resilient food supply. Sixty projects representing a variety of stakeholders have been awarded for \$6.2 M. As of Sept. 15, there have been over 1,300 applications. At this time we don't anticipate that another RFR will be going out. We'll fund as many of those funds as possible.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared his pride in this Grant which started out as a small idea at MDAR.

MassGrown Exchange <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massgrown-exchange>: Rick Leblanc, MDAR Exchange Manager and Joao Tavares, MDAR Exchange Developer. The Exchange was launched last month with an EEA virtual press event with Lt. Governor Polito. The Exchange offers a simple and engaging platform to assist farmers, fishers, food buyers, and ag-related businesses to connect,

exchange, and find products and services. The number of registered businesses continues to increase. The Exchange was developed to address short term pandemic impacts but also to support the long-term objective to build the marketplace for local food, farm and fishers.

MA Food System Collaborative, Winton Pitcoff A focus has been a priorities setting project based on input from more than 35 calls with networks around the state to hear what they're seeing as food system stresses due to the pandemic as well as their vision of a healthy food system. The idea is to freshen the MA Local Food Action Plan for updated priorities. A long laundry list of challenges and recommendations has been developed and is being fine-tuned and ranked by participants for a final report in the fall to inform the Collaborative, the legislature and other stakeholders. Work has continued with the Urban Ag community of practice and with Rose Arruda from MDAR. There's been strong growth in the urban ag sector over the past five years. Farmland protection and access is another focus with comparisons and analysis of existing reports and recommendations for a cohesive strategy. Regionally, work continues with New England backbone collaboratives with funding from John Merk and USDA to support regional food supply resiliency including benchmarks and capacity setting to do a better job of feeding New England residents from New England producers during any future crisis. Previous grants were focused on climate change, but the work has been broadened to being prepared for a crisis. Efforts are underway for a racial justice framework for all Collaborative work to break down some inequities and racial issues in the food system.

Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan survey findings: Brandeis graduate students: Ada Cruz-Torres, Bethelehem Haile, Christian Gochez, Mel Ptacek, Michael Clark

The findings focus on strengthening the food system collaboration in MA based on surveys, interviews, mapping, and benchmarking. Recommendations include that one organization could be more effective in strengthening the system, with a main role to facilitate collaboration on high level issues through a statewide approach. A consortium model can address operational collaboration to build off existing working relationships. Adding staff to the MA Food Systems Collaborative and expanding their role could be a solution.

Announcements

MA Food Policy Council meeting, Thurs. Nov. 12, 9:30 – 11:30: Five-year anniversary of the MA Local Food Action Plan, MA Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program summary, highlights and case studies

Public Comment

12:34 **Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn was made by John Lee and seconded by Amanda Kinchla. In favor: Jared Freeman, Denise Courtney, Representative Daniel Donahue, Bill Fredericks, Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner John Lebeaux, Bobby Malinn, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Eric Stocker, John Waite, Danah Tench and Mackenzie May.

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.