

Minutes

MA Food Policy Council

Friday, September 21, MA Food Policy Council Meeting, Richard Cronin Building of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Room 108, Westborough

Senator Anne Gobi

Dr. Anna Goldenheim, Community based nutrition and public health

Representative Hannah Kane

Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Food Science

Jared Freedman, Commission Kulik's Office

Commissioner John Lebeaux, Dept. of Ag Resources

John Lee, Farmer

Rob Leshin, representing Commissioner Riley, designee, EOESE

Commissioner McCue, Dept. of Transitional Assistance

Eric Stocker, Distribution

Danah Tench, designee, DEP

John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center

Sam Wong, Local Boards of Health

Call to Order: 9:44 AM by Commissioner and FPC Chair John Lebeaux

Acceptance of Minutes: A motion to accept was made by Representative Kane, seconded by John Lee and passed unanimously.

Officers Reports

The MDAR Assistant Commissioner position has been filled and was approved by the Board of Agriculture yesterday. The new assistant Commissioner is Ashley Sears Randall, a fourth generation farmer from western MA with a career in agriculture public policy.

Commissioner Ron Amidon was thanked for the use of the LEED certified facility for the Council meeting. Commissioner Amidon described his agency which oversees four different areas. Fish and Wildlife has an issue with wild game salvage and how it can be utilized. People today are very interested in foods that are natural from the land. For example, there was a very large fish kill in several areas this past summer. How can these fish be utilized for bait in other fisheries or perhaps feed for dog food and cat food? Wendy Mainardi talked about the Seafood Marketing Program at MA Division of Marine Fisheries to increase consumption of local fisheries. She oversees a grant program that has given awards to groups including for cooking demonstrations at farmers markets. There is interest to have Fish and Game on the Council which has been advocated for in the past and will be a focus again.

Old Business:

Commissioner McCue, Division of Transitional Assistance: HIP Update

There is a lot of support from DTA in N. Andover and Lawrence with a focus on families affected by the gas explosions. DTA is working in the area, especially for those who have lost utilities and have had their foods perish. DTA can coordinate SNAP replacement and have already completed 1,400 transactions in that area which can continue seven days out from the disaster.

Council members were encouraged to use networks to promote continued funding of this program. DTA will be implementing an annual cost of living adjustment for 770,000 people across the state. Last year many seniors saw their SNAP benefit decrease but this year the cost of living adjustment for all SNAP clients is positive and is being implemented.

DTA is working to be more transparent re: activities of the HIP program. Partners and clients have shared that HIP updates are important. DTA will have a monthly fact sheet that will be on the website starting next week. It's a work in progress and feedback is welcome.

HIP will be operating on a seasonal basis until the day before Thanksgiving. Communication has gone out. The turn on date is expected to be Memorial Day weekend in the spring. Would it be possible to have the program start two weeks earlier to allow sales of seedlings?

HIP processing with mobile markets continues to be an area of interest. New York State set up support for Nova dia, the processing company, through February. USDA has identified some tools but none provide the desired HIP functionality.

? Can excess funds be rolled over? Not automatically but there can be a mechanism with legislative support. \$1.04 M is the amount that could be rolled back. Representative Hannah Kane has been supportive of excess funds being rolled back. A two year budget would be a great asset to the program.

How are local growers responding to these programs? What if farmers markets were only serving SNAP recipients? Farmers are rising to meet the demand. They're asking if they should be heating their greenhouses. Some farmers planted fields that previously had been fallow.

Statewide food policy councils met recently to discuss issues experienced by some SNAP recipients which have social justice overlays. There is training that could help and DTA would be happy to be involved. USDA FNS is also aware and interested in this area and currently does some retailer education. The Collaborative is looking at funding for training to be able to work with market managers. In some of the markets, this program has generated lines which in some cases have been difficult to manage. It's been a culture change for some of the markets.

No new vendors (retailers) can sign up at this time. Previously, vendors were added first come, first served. When the program was stopped, some retailers were in the progress of onboarding.

Regulatory White Paper update: DPH is taking the lead with a draft expected before the November meeting.

Education White Paper: Overview and request for comments: Shani Fletcher, FPC Intern

A suggestion was made to add the shared use kitchens that offer educational and technical support. To consider support for UMASS, it's important to increase the resource base and identify the technical means to move forward. For example, methods that have been effective in the past include contracting

with Extension for specific pieces of work through MDAR. This perspective could support the call to action in the White Paper.

The Educational White Paper has lots of information about the farming base. Could language be included for food processors as the nexus for value added? There is a need to include food safety and processing that is affecting the value added community very strongly. It's an important area for education. A revision will be available in the next few weeks by Shani Fletcher, FPC Intern, prior to the November meeting.

Commissioner Amidon described the agency he oversees. Fish and Wildlife has an issue with wild game salvage and how it can be utilized. People today are very interested in natural foods. For example, there was a very large fish kill in several areas this past summer. Could the fish be utilized for bait in other fisheries or perhaps feed for dog food and cat food? The Seafood Marketing Program at MA Division of Marine Fisheries was described by Wendy Mainardi with a goal to increase local consumption of local fishery products. The program includes a grant program to support this agenda. For example, seafood cooking demonstrations have been held at farmers markets.

Efforts to add a seat on the Council for Fish and Game through legislation have not been successful, but will be a focus moving forward.

Program:

- 1. Going back to local food infrastructure - what actions can FPC members support?** *“Support and grow local food system infrastructure. Target opportunities to access capital, incentives, and technical assistance through agency partners /programs, private organizations, and universities.”*
 - Kira Bennett Hamilton, The Carrot Project:
“Local Food System Infrastructure as a Driver of Economic Development” Business development case study with growers and Building a strong business tech assistance network: “The Blueprint”

The Carrot Project supports growers and value added producers throughout New England and the Northeast. Business training and access to capital to build infrastructure is a focus since it is a significant barrier for small farms. The Carrot Project is a springboard lender with microloans, offering 1:1 business technical assistance and advisement. A yearlong research project is in progress to identify and prioritize needs, which the Council can review to support this work. The program is quickly expanding and the loans have a 96% success rates. Western MA CDC administers the loans. There are 25 loans with 100% repayment. The technical assistance is what's key to make it work and avoid delinquency.

?Perhaps the Council could support a Farm & Food Accelerator program? Valley Ventures in western MA focuses on tech but it would be great to have one for food.

Comment: The people who most need the help are the least likely to ask for help. Perhaps grant recipients could be required to receive technical assistance.

- 2. Preparing for the next legislative session:** current topics and priorities:

- Senator Anne Gobi

The Bond Bill is important and has funds for aquaculture innovation centers in Gloucester and New Bedford. Representative Kulik's work on the dairy tax credit has been important, especially since there are just 112 dairy farms remaining in the state. There will be zoning regulations that will be coming up in this next session. Marijuana and hemp topics have been highly visible. Raw milk was not supported but there is still some hope that it can move forward. Going into this session, there will be a loss of institutional knowledge including legislators Rosenberg, Kulik, Siback, and others. There will be many new faces. It's important to be in touch with these new legislators to be fierce advocates for the region on both the house and senate side.

- Representative Hannah Kane:

A replacement for Representative Steve Kulik is important, considering his long time work and support of food systems and the Council. Efforts continue to get the Food Donation bill out of House Ways and Means before the end of this session. Wide support is expected. If it doesn't move forward, efforts will focus on finding a Senate member partner. Current efforts also focus on getting House Ways and Means to carryover unspent HIP funds. HIP is a priority with a high level of awareness lately. There will be significant changeover in the house staff which requires some time to welcome new colleagues and get them up to speed on relevant topics. The House and Senate will have new chairs.

- Representative Jared Freedman from Rep Kulik's office:

The Bond Bill includes the agricultural estate tax exemption to reduce the estate tax burden which was signed into law. An amendment to the Bond Bill can be used to develop a statewide farmland plan. Unfinished is legislation to support ag commissions having input on Boards of Health decisions before a regulation is implemented. MA Public Health, Farm Bureau and Collaborative support this legislation.

- Winton Pitcoff, MA Food System Collaborative priorities and Collaborative Update

A priority of the Collaborative is a three year report for progress on the Plan to be promoted on Food Day, October 24. Minimum wage was a key recommendation in the Plan and there has been progress. Increased funding for Buy Locals has occurred as well as inspectional authority for MDAR for the FSMA food safety program. The Bond Bill represents great aspirations that frequently don't get spent. Progress can be measured when the funds are appropriated. There are some bills that we're hoping move including an Urban Ag Tax Credit which allows municipalities to show they value urban ag. Other priorities include having Ag Commissions get input into Board of Health decisions, a new seat for fisheries, HIP support and food waste. Various sectors are being organized to meet to recommend what the Collaborative's priorities should be.

? Should economic development agency ties be explored? Regional planning commissions get funding for technical assistance. Could it be for farm and food community projects?

MA Food Collaborative progress report: A review of three year progress by the public sector is on-going. In June about 40 stories about non-profits doing work on the Food Plan were collected which show good progress. A guide to advocacy and campaigns was recently published with a grant from the Conservation Law Foundation. The Collaborative also worked with MAPC and MMA and Health Boards for a guide for municipalities regarding local food systems, which has been added to the website. An

intern from UMASS looked at affordability at farmers markets and found that in many cases produce was less expensive than nearby supermarkets. Works continues to network local food policy councils to share resources which may lead to training relating to HIP at farmers markets. Two new staff will be added thanks to grant support, one with a focus on working with ag organizations and the other on HIP.

New Business

Council member updates

This is a sentinel moment in the Farm Bill, which has major ramifications on DTA programs. It may not be passed until 2019. There are active discussions around compromise including work requirements for SNAP.

Could a position be added to the Council for UMASS Extension? This has been discussed in a previous meeting and will be reviewed. .

Rob Leshin reported on the July Tour with Congressman McGovern to raise awareness of the over 200 summer food programs. Commissioner Jeff Riley spoke at several round tables re: summer meals. Issues focused on access; getting food to students in rural areas, especially in sites where there is open eligibility. During the hot summer days attendance was low and at some parks the site directions were difficult. A new partnership with UMASS to use one of their food trucks "Baby Burke" in the greater Amherst area reached over 300 meals per day - a great success which will be expanded upon next year.

Public Comment

Announcements

October 3, 2018, MA Farm to School Awareness Day, Massachusetts State House, 11 AM – 1 PM including the annual Kale Blazer award

October 23, 2018, Farm to School training: Keeping it Local for school business managers and nutrition directors including a panel discussion on how to incorporate local foods into menus. 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM, Framingham University, John Stalker Institute

October 24, 2018, Food Day

Watch for the date/details for the Massachusetts Food Trust Announcement

November 1, 2018, MA Food Policy Council Meeting, 9:30am-12:30pm, Room 428, Massachusetts State House, Boston MA 02133

November 9, 2018, Scaling up for Sodexo's supply chain. Mandilyn Beck, Sodexo, requests recommendations from farmers and producers.

Dec 12, 2018, Massachusetts Food System Forum, Leominster

Adjournment was at 12:15 PM based on a motion by John Waite, seconded by Senator Anne Gobi and passed unanimously.