

## Minutes

MA Food Policy Council virtual meeting  
Friday, September 22, 2023  
1:00 – 2:30 PM

### In attendance:

Senator Comerford  
Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Development, EOHEd  
Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Distribution  
Rob Leshin, ESE  
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer  
Commissioner Ashley Randle, MDAR  
Jessica del Rosario, MA DPH  
Danah Tench, MassDEP  
Kerry Shea, Office of Representative Kane  
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health  
Brittany Mangini, MA DTA Associate Commissioner of Food Security and Nutrition Program  
John Waite, Food Processing  
Phoebe Walker, Public Health

Absent: Representative Donahue, Bill Fredericks, Amanda Kinchla, Caro Roszell

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 PM by Commissioner Ashley Randle. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Mackenzie May, seconded by Phoebe Walker, and passed by voice vote: Senator Comerford, Kerry Shea, Anne Gobi, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Commissioner Ashley Randle, Jessica del Rosario, Danah Tench, Kerry Shea, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, John Waite, Phoebe Walker.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Senator Comerford and Kerry Shea, Office of Representative Kane. Senator Comerford's staff Rachel Klein is now fully focused on food and farm policy. The Caucus now has 138 members. The 21 Century Agriculture Commission intersects on many topics with the Caucus - appreciation was shared to those who are working on both. Food system bills have been the focus. The Caucus has 28 priority bills. MDAR was thanked for getting \$15 M out for climate disaster relief, and the the house and senate leadership for moving the funds through the system. Climate change is upon us, and in a very short period of time there have been two very devastating climate events.

MA Food System Collaborative: Rebecca Miller, Policy Director. J Harrison is bridging the gap as interim director for the Collaborative while the search is in progress. The Collaborative has been part of the NEFNE food planners' group, with a report that has been shared across the region to align with state policy. The Collaborative is working with NEFNE on the state brief draft for the research report with implementation steps. There is concern that HIP hasn't been fully funded. Plan to attend the Collaboratives Dec 8 Forum that will focus on climate resiliency. The Collaborative appreciates support for the food literacy efforts. Comment: DESE has an FY 24 \$1M earmark for food literacy and is meeting with partners on how best to use the funds with instructional support. A portion of the funds may support school wellness coaching and school gardens. For some additional grants to school districts to support school gardens etc. Q: When will those applications for the grants and workshops be posted?

A: The funds haven't been released yet. Norris Guscott was recognized for his leadership in testifying for Ag Equity legislation.

Officer Reports: Commissioner Randle: The Natural Disaster program closes Sept 29. Application reviews are planned during October with expectations for awards by November 1. The issues aren't just the loss of crops but also longer-term challenges. The Farm Resiliency Fund launched with United Way has reached over \$3M in donations. The first round provided funds to farms with awards of up to \$10,000. This fund focused on the flood event, but as a long-term program, would support any type of future disaster. Gratitude was expressed for the unprecedented prompt response by the legislature and the community to support farmers in climate resiliency. Upcoming programs include a soon to be posted RFR for a farmers market language access course in Spanish. The eight-week on-line course will focus on words and phrases spoken at markets, available to growers and to interested staff. A workforce development RFR is also in progress for agricultural education and to build out an agriculture high school in central Massachusetts, due to the high need and demand. A climate corps program at the community level will be developed to complement the agricultural high school programs. MDAR staff are engaged at the Big E which runs through October 1. Thanks was shared to the Governor, Lt. Governor, legislators, Director Gobi, and other officials who attended Massachusetts Day.

Strategic Planning Subcommittee: Commissioner Randle. The committee's overarching goal is a road map to end hunger in MA, inspired by the program in Maine. There are on-going conversations including Project Bread to align interests for a complementary strategy. An in-person meeting with Maine's Commissioner Beal is being planned. The subcommittee will work with various secretariats, legislature, and non-profit organizations to be sure all are all updated.

Nominating Committee: Mackenzie May. The five members of the committee will review four candidates for the advisory committee prior to the next meeting for a formal vote.

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle. The advisory committee looks forward to the Nominating Committee's slate at the next meeting to be able to fill open positions to easily fill a quorum.

The open farmer position for the Council is still with Boards and Commissions.

#### Local Food Policy Council grant awardee reports

- **Just Roots:** Laura Fisher, Executive Director  
The Franklin County Food Council was established over ten years ago, mainly for local solutions for local problems and sharing resources. A 2019 inventory reviewed work compared to the MA Local Food Action Plan. This grant supported the collection feedback on progress and next steps/models, including a Policy Summit, which helped to invigorate priorities for food system stakeholders. Providing a meal was a big draw. Several food access representatives, food processing and marketing representatives attended. In the future, more farmer engagement is a priority. "If we're not involved in policy, policy is created for us." Franklin County is a uniquely rural county with unique challenges and opportunities. Quarterly committee meetings will continue and outreach to increase members. A policy round-up is being planned. Future funding will keep this moving forward.
- **Salem Food for All:** Kerry Murphy, Health and Wellness Coordinator, Salem Board of Health

The Council was created in 2016 as part of MA in Motion to conduct a community food assessment, published in 2018. The assessment led to many important partnerships and the emergency response during COVID. Membership fluctuated since the organization was grass roots without much structure. In 2022, the group moved to become an advisory committee to the mayor to build visibility and partnerships. The grant was important to work with two food system consultants to create a prioritized work plan and working groups, and to increase engagement. A plan for assessment and regular metrics was included. A goal is to add more underrepresented groups to the Council. An outcome included a developed a detailed operation manual including reporting, briefs, and position statements. The mayor was impressed with the manual. An urban ag guide for citizens who would like to grow and sell products was also development. There was a public event with Salem Public Schools to promote food literacy and school programs including many exhibitors. Hopefully this will become an annual event and also include school gardens. Kerry shared thanks for the funding which supports the MA Local Food Action Plan and the City to be able to support this work.

- City of Lynn Community Food Assessment: Norris Guscott, City of Lynn Public Health Coordinator, Health Division & Food Security Task Force Leader and MAPC partners Sarai Zelada and Jessika Brenin. Some 20% of households in Lynn experience food experience, which was amplified during COVID. The population is very diverse with a high percentage of Spanish speakers. A community food assessment and transition from a task force to an official food policy council has been the priority for the grant, as well as help with the City's food hub to streamline decision making. MAPC supported the City of Lynn with their food assessment shared vision, and how to make strategic changes with health equity and intervention in mind. There were three main outcomes – community engagement, community food assessment, and the development of a food action plan for how to collectively improve food security. Norris shared his gratitude for this grant funding.

## Program

- Public Health Focus: Local Boards of Health role in the food system and the state's Public Health Excellence Grant Program: Phoebe Walker.

Massachusetts has the most de-centralized local public health system in the country, without dedicated state funding, and without performance and workforce standards. A 2019 report from the Special Commission on Local and Regional Health (available at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/blueprint-for-public-health-excellence-recommendations-for-improved-effectiveness-and/download>) included four buckets of recommendations. Council member Phoebe Walker, a member of the Special Commission, reported on those recommendations, progress on achieving them, and how the food system is impacted by local public health. There has been progress towards the recommendations: 1) With the large number of local public health entities, sharing professional staff is a recommendation. ARPA funds of \$200M have been used to work on modernizing the structure and providing grants to help groups work together and ensure consistent public health standards. 2) Funds are being used for training to implement national standards now that DPH has adopted performance measures and workforce credentialing requirements for the local public health sector. Ten field training hubs and a large statewide training institute have been funded for this purpose. 3) Another bucket is creating a standardized public health data system, to strengthen the ability to collect and share data. An RFP is going out for a standardized system provider. 4) Developing a consistent state funding stream is important. Progress includes state level

lobbying for local public health line in the state budget, which was cut from last year's \$15m to \$10M by the Governor but overridden by the Legislature.

Public health intersects with the food system on many levels. The federal food code is the basis for licensing and inspections. Residential kitchens must be licensed, though food items that can be made are restricted to protect public health. In rural areas, testing of wells is required. Commercial kitchens are inspected. Fresh eggs, maple syrup, candy, spices, whole fruits, and vegetables are among the few items that do not require regulations. Food trucks need to get a permit from every municipality where items are being sold – a bit antiquated. Temporary food establishment regulations are stricter. A permit isn't allowed for more than 14 days. Farmers market may appear like temporary food establishments, but seasonal permits are allowed. Locally grown and processed meat requires inspection. An issue is that there are only three licensed slaughterhouse facilities in the state. Towns have to have an animal inspector. This is separate from animal control. CBD foods are not technically legal in MA. Question: In the future, it would be interesting to learn about which organization to contact for what process.

Please promote this survey and also take this survey: <https://www.mass.gov/chei>.

- Root Cause Solutions Exchange – building local capacity to improve community conditions: Kim Etingoff and Jessica del Rosario, DPH, will share an update at the annual meeting.

#### MA Food Policy Council member updates

- Denise Courtney, ESE will share an update at the December meeting.

#### Announcements

December 7, 2023 10 AM – 12 Noon- annual meeting of the MA Food Policy Council, room 428 State House (hybrid: remote & in-person) 12 – 1 PM Massachusetts local reception – bring your favorite Massachusetts based product.

December 8, 2023 MA Food System Collaborative Forum, Holy Cross, Worcester.

#### Public Comment

A motion to adjourn was made at 2:38 PM by Ayn Yeagle, seconded by Torry Stamm Katsiroubas and passed by voice vote: Rachel Klein, Kerry Shea, Anne Gobi, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Commissioner Ashley Randle, Jessica del Rosario, Danah Tench, Kerry Shea, Ayn Yeagle, Brittany Mangini, John Waite, and Phoebe Walker.