

**MA Food Policy Council virtual meeting  
Friday, September 9, 9:30 – 11:30 am  
Minutes**

*In attendance:*

*Jessica del Rosario, DPH  
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Fattman  
Representative Hannah Kane  
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MDAR  
John Lee, Farmer  
Rob Leshin, ESE  
Bobby Malinn, EOHD  
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer  
Associate Commissioner Brittany Mangini, DTA  
Caro Roszell, Healthy Soils  
Danah Tench, MassDEP  
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health  
John Waite, Food Processing  
Phoebe Walker, Local Boards of Health*

*Absent: Senator Comerford, Representative Donahue, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Amanda Kinchla, Bobby Malinn.*

**The meeting was called to order** by Chair Commissioner John Lebeaux at 9:34 AM. He shared his gratitude to Vice-Chair Mackenzie May for conducting the July meeting in his absence, the first time he has missed a meeting since joining the body in 2015.

A vote to accept the July 15 meeting minutes was made by Representative Kane, seconded by John Waite and passed via voice vote: *Jessica del Rosario, Bill Fredericks, Representative Kane, Commissioner John Lebeaux, (John Lee), Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Brittany Mangini.*

**Officer Reports**

Chair Commissioner Lebeaux shared comments about the Farmland Action Plan and discussion from the previous meeting: the update was placed on the agenda to keep the Council knowledgeable of activities in the food system space that seem relevant. The Council is not required to take any action relative to the plan. The legislative language that funded the effort appears in the Governor's FY 22 Capital Spending Plan; that language does not require any consultation, review, or action by the FPC. The update was provided as a courtesy.

From the process perspective, MDAR's ambitious goal was to finish the work by June 30, however the deadline was extended through September 30, which leaves sufficient time for review by administration before the end of the term. What may be perceived as too quick of a process to properly engage with BIPOC stakeholders is effectively the effort to complete the project within the constraints of the administrative processes.

Engagement was taken very seriously. A review with the MDAR team managing the process and some of the sub-contractors walked through all the efforts and actions that were made to engage the BIPOC community. The process from the onset was guided by the Environmental Justice work and policies that the Department has undertaken with determined and genuine effort to apply an equity “lens”, as do our project partners in their respective roles.

The Subject Matter Expert committee was composed of a diverse group of 16 members. That group’s second meeting focused entirely on issues of equity and social justice. However, despite best efforts, it was recognized after the first set of listening sessions, that BIPOC voices had not been adequately represented. There were efforts with four different BIPOC organizations and individuals to ask them to conduct outreach and facilitate their own engagement activities on their terms.

MDAR and its partners were guided by the equity lens outlined in EEA’s Environmental Justice Policies. We are working within structures and processes that we all know are deeply flawed when it comes to inclusion. While this is beyond the scope of what we were expected to do with this project, and can’t be resolved overnight, MDAR is aware of, and making efforts to, address this structural inequity.

MDAR and it’s partners went into the process of receiving feedback for the Farmland Action Plan fully aware of the need to address and had participation from people and farmers of color. And importantly, there was positive feedback from communities of color who felt included and engaged. There are certainly places where engagement can be improved. The team is committed to being open to feedback and improving processes.

The Farmland Action Plan will reflect the need to do better. There will be recommendations related to policy – things like targetted farmland access projects for BIPOC farmers, more accessible application processes, building a more diverse network of service providers, ensuring equity on state commissions, etc. The positive impact these changes will have from BIPOC participants and from white contributors to the planning process will be evident in the final report.

Commissioner Lebeaux stated that based on his review, and while again acknowledging that we can and want to always do better, he is satisfied and proud of the actions taken to date.

A few other topics:

- PFAS is a topic coming into clear focus. Resources will be developed, considering that decades-long practices have led to significant issues. MDAR is working actively with MassDEP. MDAR’s compost program prohibits the use of bio solid additions, however it’s not the same with all compost. Understanding the effect of biosolids spread on farmland is an important question. Council member Caro Roszell will join MassDEP’s working group on this topic.
- As you know, we reached out to assess your interest to participate in a Regional Food Policy Council project grant by USDA AMS and several university partners. The program includes making deeper urban and rural connections. We recognized that the timeline was tight during a busy time of the year. We have one Council member volunteer; however, the program stipulates two. The deadline has been extended until September 12. Commissioner Lebeaux ask if there is interest for additional Council members to participate. No one volunteered during the meeting to participate.

- Moving forward, speakers sharing presentations with the Council will be asked to proactively include equity in their discussions: Who is disproportionately affected? How are they engaged/were they engaged in developing understanding of why/what inequities exist? How are they engaged/were they to inform implementation/solutions/decision-making?

**MA Legislature's Food Caucus update:** Representative Hannah Kane: Formal sessions concluded on July 31<sup>st</sup>. There was much accomplished, but one of the largest pieces, the Economic Development Bill, is held up. The Caucus is advocating to establish HIP in statute and for other food system topics to be included in the final conference committee budget. In July, there were a number of items included in the 2023 budget, which has now been signed by the Governor. Items included funding for HIP at a level the Caucus is pleased with, almost \$700,000 for UMASS, and support for Local Food Policy Councils and Universal Free School Meals.

**MA Food System Collaborative:** Winton Pitcoff shared that the [The Food System Forum](#), Reconnecting, Celebrating and Moving Forward will be the first in-person event since 2019, to be held on October 12<sup>th</sup>, at the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center.

### **Program**

- \$250,000 earmark for local food policy councils - MA Food Policy Council discussion/input for MDAR's RFR development: Ashley Randle, MDAR Deputy Commissioner

Deputy Commissioner Randle gave a presentation about an upcoming RFR which will provide \$250,000 for local food policy councils. She requested feedback to help shape this upcoming competitive RFR process, with funds to be spent by June 30, 2023. Q: Is this a one-time allocation? A: With an earmark, assume that it is a one-time allocation. Comments: Given the short time frame, keep the application easy and include examples of expenses. Consider small capital expenses that would be eligible. If possible, funding targeted towards building capacity throughout this year, assessment work, and adding staff to scale operations should be eligible expenses. Each council has different priorities, so flexibility is critical. Staffing support for coordination and regional work is important. If possible, incentives (stipends) for community members to participate would be helpful. Establishing a limit for the value of the awards would be helpful. New groups wanting to start a local food policy council should be eligible to apply. A connection to the MA Local Food Action Plan should be a requirement, perhaps with bullet points from the Plan to indicate where the application intersects with the Plan. The definition of a food policy council should be as inclusive as possible. Comment: MDAR aims to have applications that are not a barrier to participation, however the agency has to adhere to procurement laws and has an obligation to move the funds as directed by the legislature and also protect the interest of the state's taxpayers. Comment: Being a part of this discussion that will lead to the development of the RFR should not affect the eligibility of applicants.

Two additional updates:

MDAR received \$7.4 M in June from USDA's [Local Food Purchase Assistance program](#). The application deadline is Sept 16.

MDAR received \$543,000 to develop a mental health program to support the agricultural community. A survey is forthcoming that will lead to a toolkit, with winter trainings for farmers and service providers.

Q: Are you working with the National Centers for Farmworkers Health? A: They are on our stakeholder list.

### **MA Food Policy Council member updates**

Danah Tench. A study to examine the future of solar in Massachusetts is in process. A survey for public feedback including where solar is located includes agricultural land as an option. As soon as the survey is available, it will be shared with Council members for input. The GAP energy program application ended in July. The grant was extended, for the first time in its history to food and ag sectors. There were 24 applications from the extended group, many from food and ag organizations. The total request from the extended group was approximately \$3M. DEP will have an upcoming grant focused on installing or replacing industrial refrigeration systems.

John Waite. The Massachusetts Agriculture Innovation Center's new director, Tricia Wanko, was introduced. She has strong experience in food safety, technical expertise, and working with small producers. USDA recently announced a new grant opportunity for food centers to work collaboratively. John will reach out to other centers to explore working together.

Rob Leshin. The FY 23 state budget included a \$110 M earmark that allows states to support universal free meals through the upcoming school meals. MA is one of five states that are continuing with this program and is providing guidance on implementation. Last year school meals increased by 43%. The process for the \$1M Farm to School grant is just starting. Have issued \$1M reach resiliency program to food bank, to shore up that system. DESE submitted a local food for schools grant totaling \$3.5, similar to MDAR's program, and is waiting to hear back from USDA AMS if it is accepted. DESE is issuing another round of supply chain assistance funds - \$23M allocated last year - \$16.8 remaining to direct to local farming industry. In a few weeks, will host a national gathering of farm to school grantees, with a USDA administrator in attendance, and DESE Commissioner providing the welcome.

Ayn Yeagle shared that last Friday the US HHS Secretary visited North Central MA in preparation for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Tune into the [Conference](#) on September 28, to be sure that agriculture voices/issues are included.

Brittany Mangini. DTA is combatting a fraud situation of EBT benefits being skimmed. Encourage SNAP and DTA recipients to [repin their card frequently](#). Broad outreach is ongoing including to all HIP recipients to deal with this issue. Representative Kane asked if a legislative briefing on this topic could be scheduled. In August, DTA announced the onboarding of 123 new HIP vendors, a 61% increase, including many more access points. The [DTA Finder](#) will be updated as new HIP vendors become live.

Phoebe Walker. The State Action for Public Health Excellence (SAPHE) did not move forward as was hoped. One of the objectives is to streamline a consistent regulatory environment for farmers, food producers and value-added processors. [September is food safety month](#).

**MA Food Policy Council Advisory Committee:** Ayn Yeagle. Without a quorum, the Committee was not able to meet. At the Oct 4 meeting, the agenda will include a legislative update and elections for a leadership structure. She welcomed interest from other Council members to be involved.

### **Announcements**

[The 2022 MA Food System Forum](#), Wednesday, October 12, 8:30am – 4pm

November, Annual Meeting of the MA Food Policy Council (TBA)

### **Public Comment**

John Waite: Though the Council isn't required to action, would it be helpful for the Council to endorse the Farmland Action Plan? This can be an agenda item for the next meeting.

**A motion to adjourn** was made at 10:48 M by Hannah Kane, seconded by John Lee, and passed via voice vote: *Jessica del Rosario, Bill Fredericks, Representative Kane, Commissioner John Lebeaux, John Lee, Rob Leshin, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite, Phoebe Walker, Brittany Mangini.*

*We are meeting remotely in accordance with An Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations ("Act"), which was signed by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022. This Act extends the expiration of certain provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2023, allowing a public body to continue holding meetings remotely without a quorum physically present at a meeting location as long as it provides "adequate, alternative" access to remote meeting.*