

Minutes: Sixth Massachusetts Food Policy Council Meeting

Friday, June 1, 2012 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) Union Hall at the Worcester Union Station, 2 Washington Square, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Worcester, 01604

In attendance:

John Auerbach, Commissioner, MA Depart of Public Health

Cheryl Bartlett, MA Depart of Public Health

Valerie Bassett, Community based nutrition and public health expert

Kerry Bowie, designee for Deputy Commissioner Gary Moran, MA Depart of Environ Protection

Frank Carlson, Carlson Orchards

Jeff Cole, MA Farmers Markets

Daniel Curley, Commissioner, MA Depart of MA Transitional Assistance

Michael Hunter, Undersecretary MA Dept of Housing and Economic Development

Representative Steve Kulik

Frank Martinez Nocito, MA Depart of Transitional Assistance

Katie Millet, MA Depart of Education

Gregory Watson, Commissioner, MA Dept of Agricultural Resources

**Introductions and Welcome:** The meeting was called to order at 9:40 am by Vice Chairman, Representative Steve Kulik, who notes the contributions of former FPC chair, Commissioner Soares, prior to leaving his position.

## **1. Minutes:**

FPC secretary Cole presented minutes in print form, revised from the web-posted draft and his notes.

**Motion to accept the minutes as presented; by Commissioner Curley, and seconded by Frank Carlson. Passed on unanimous voice vote.**

## **2. Reports of Officers**

a. Chair

b. Vice Chair

Vice Chair, Representative Kulik noted the need to elect a chair for the council and that Commission Watson has agreed to serve if elected.

**Commissioner Curley moved to elect Commissioner Watson as the new Chairperson.**

Seconded by Valerie Basset. After hearing no additional nominations,

**Frank Carlson moved that nominations be closed and Commissioner Watson installed.**

Seconded by Cheryl Bartlett.

**Passed on unanimous voice vote.**

It was agreed by consensus that Representative Kulik will conclude a few items of note before handing the meeting over to Commissioner Watson. He noted that Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Amherst, has been appointed to the FPC in the food safety expert position. She had been a member of the Advisory Committee, so that position is open. **The nominating committee was tasked to present candidates to fill the position.**

Ronak Dave' was introduced, an intern from Tuft's Friedman School of Nutrition who will be located in Representative Kulik's office for the summer to assist the FPC Advisory Committee.

Representative Kulik turned the meeting over to Commissioner Watson, who shared his enthusiasm for being a part of the Food Policy Council.

#### c. Secretary Report

Secretary Cole noted the timing of final draft minutes and committed to quicker performance and electronic posting. He solicited comments on the revised format, which were positive.

### **3. Reports of Standing Committees**

#### a. Advisory Committee:

Members including Brad Mitchell, MA Farm Bureau; Cris Coffin, American Farmland Trust; Winton Pitcoff, NOFA; Ellen Parker, Project Bread and Phil Korman, CISA reported on the Massachusetts Grocery Access Task Force Summary Recommendations.

Brad Mitchell reported that the Advisory Committee supports previous MDAR edits to the MA Grocery Force Task Recommendations. The recommendations are important, but the issue of access to food is a part of a much larger issue related to the MA food system. The Advisory Committee suggested a comprehensive strategic plan for the MA food system of which supermarket access will be one element. The committee recommended using the 1974 Governor's Commission on Food Policy report as a foundation and notes MA is one of the few states without a food system plan. They reported that short, medium and long term goals - to 20 years out- are needed as well as a model that is flexible and responds to changing conditions and concluded that an encompassing, integrated, and holistic planning process which includes current initiatives is needed.

Mr. Mitchell noted that Mass Farm Bureau focuses on farm sustainability and through this initiative will work closely with hunger, environmental planning and regulatory issues.

Cris Coffin also encouraged utilizing the 1974 document and noted how many of the issues in 1974 are relevant today. She noted Chapter 61A and the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program were discrete outcomes of the report and that one major recommendation in 1974 was the creation of an office of food policy. And, while American Farmland Trust reports that MA is gaining farmers, we are still losing our very best cropland and need new tools for farmland retention and protection. She also noted there are currently regional initiatives which present collaborative opportunities and opportunity to harmonize state regulations and strategic investments for food, farm and nutrition.

Phil Korman described the dramatic increase in the number of farmers markets and farm shares. He noted the importance of working with MA groups such as the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission with

a focus on food security and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments with a focus on sustainability. CISA is scaling up to identify challenges and economics to growing the local food system and a calculator project to show the importance of supporting local agriculture and the economic impact.

Ellen Parker noted Project Bread's recently completed 9 month strategic plan talking to 500 people across the state about food and security, which found a lot of people talking about local agriculture and the desire to be a part of the system instead of getting a hand out. She noted hunger is a community food security issue.

Winton Pitcoff noted that work in western MA has been good at getting many people engaged with their food. The next step has to focus on those who don't want to be as involved or don't have the time. We need to rethink how local products will be consumed by communities without having to change the way they think. Institutional efforts such as farm to school will be good areas where we can be competitive.

Brad Mitchell proposed that the Advisory Committee develop the framework for the strategic plan for the MA food system.

Discussion:

Undersecretary Michael Hunter noted a focus of the MA Grocery Task Force on money that the state would provide for supermarket development. While there are some communities that need supermarkets, it is not universal, and he feels that focus may be unfortunate in regard to overall food policy. He believes there needs to be some push back to the food industry about processed food product, for example many products have too much sodium. Strategies to get the attention of the companies that control the food chain so they take some responsibility for the nutritional aspects of their products, in an economical way, are needed.

Commissioner John Auerbach appreciated how often public health is mentioned, which is a positive change in approach. Formerly DPH focused on the regulatory side when dealing with food and agriculture. They understand that chronic disease issues are related to diet and a frequent disconnect between how people eat and access fresh produce and other healthy food. He noted there are many efforts in this realm currently underway, so it's important to know what's happening already.

He stated it would be helpful to be able to vote and agree to a set of action steps and asks if the recommendation to develop an outline from the FPC Advisory Committee can be spelled out in writing.

Frank Carlson: We can support an outline off how to move forward, including looking at funding opportunities, within something that's part of a formal proposal.

Katie Millet: It would be helpful to have a brief concept document and a draft timeline to give the charge to move forward with more details for the September meeting.

Valerie Bassett: The Massachusetts Grocery Task force is a piece of the whole plan. Developing criteria with key priorities will be helpful, with a critical starting place.

Commissioner Curley asked how FPC organizations could support the efforts and perhaps provide staff.

Commissioner Watson: The recommendations from 1974 were used in 1976 by Commissioner Winthrop to stop the hemorrhaging of agricultural land. We forget how dire things were back then. Direct marketing and the APR programs were direct recommendations.

Jeff Cole: Food safety is also part of the definition for food security. Mass Farmers Markets is concerned about a not having a general understanding what healthy and safe food is. We feel a consensus is needed. As the FM industry has expanded there has been more tension created by local boards of health and a sentiment by health agents that the industrial food system is inherently safer than local food. We think the evidence points to the opposite conclusion.

Brad Mitchell: Current regulations favor larger more centralized system. There is need for the regulatory system to be more responsive to smaller food systems.

Winton Pitcoff: There is need to think more broadly, compared to what has happened before. Thought provoking information and education is the kind of work that has a huge potential to effect how people shop.

Undersecretary Hunter: The education has to occur at multiple levels throughout the systems.

Commissioner Watson: There needs to be a focus on a dynamic food system. We can identify the influences on the system so that it is a living tool that can grow and react. An urban component is also important. Former MA Governor Mel King said he was interested in agriculture because "I eat".

Brad Mitchell: Need attention to how we integrate local with regional, national and international food systems.

Representative Kulik commended the Advisory Committee on their first meeting and initial recommendations.

Cris Coffin submitted the proposal for the Advisory Committee in writing and is included in the following.

**Motion made by Commissioner Auerbach: FPC tasks the Advisory Committee with development of a concept document that would provide a potential framework for a statewide comprehensive strategic food system plan. The FPC envisions this concept document will lay out a potential process for stakeholder and agency involvement, an estimated timeline, the need for and potential availability of financial resources and a general framework for goals and objectives related to improving Massachusetts food and farm resiliency, and nutritional health. Second by Valerie Bassett.**

**Passed on unanimous voice vote.**

Cris Coffin commended the Food Policy Alliance and their contributions to get to this point.

b. Bylaws Committee  
No report

#### c. Nominating Committee

Representative Kulik asked that suggestions for the UMass Position on the Advisory Council be sent to the FPC Nominating Committee, since Amanda Kinchla has been accepted by the Governor's Office for the FPC Food Safety Position on the Council.

Representative Kulik also asked for a position to be added to the Advisory Committee to represent the Food Policy Alliance. As chair of the nominating committee, Representative Kulik will check with the Alliance for nominations. **The position was added and Representative Kulik empowered to fill it from names provided by the Food Policy Alliance, by consensus.**

#### 4. Reports of Special Committees

None

#### 5. Special Orders

None

#### 6. Unfinished Business and General Orders

HIP Program Update: Frank Martinez Nocito, Director, Healthy Incentives Pilot, MA Department of Transitional Assistance. We are at an exciting and tiring part of the project, the benefit period is at 7 months with 7 months ahead. Data is now being generated. We have 7,500 households in Hamden County with 88 retailers participating and 7 smaller stores that process transactions using scanning technology. We are also in the process of completing our engagement with Big Y who would be the fourth largest redeemer in the county in terms of SNAP. There is collaboration with 13 farmers markets, 3 farmstands and 2 mobile markets to be able increase points of access across the county. The focus groups with 30 HIP clients advised things to be as simple and as straightforward as possible. Producing retailer collateral to help clients at the point of sale as well as other ways to engage clients, such as a customized mailing, will also be helpful with their understanding spending choices.

Challenge of the pilot is that there is a very small period of time and it is changing the food environment, but such doesn't happen quickly. We are also challenged by our own systems. We continue to see an uptake in the benefit from clients and want them to be able to take full advantage of it. Community partners want to help and recommend one page talking points.

Valerie Bassett: Noted a number of different strategies are in place, and understands the need to make it as easy as possible for retailer participation. Systems upgrades may be required and Big Y has had other competing commitments.

#### Mass in Motion:

Cheryl Bartlett reported this is the 4th year of Mass in Motion, with public and private funders. Partners Health Care recently added and hopes that other hospitals will join. The Community Transformation Grant allows expansion so that community and clinical work is linked. They are working on a multi-sector, coordinated, chronic disease program in MA, and new partnership will include 37 partners including state agencies.

Commissioner Auerbach stated: MA in Motion guarantees that senior municipal leaders sign on to take advantage of the funding and develops support from mayors and city councils. The strategy engenders both central and grass root support. At this time we need to think outside of the box and need smaller farms involved in order to enhance of our food system.

School Nutrition Regulations: Go into effect for competitive foods on August 1. There has been attention in the past month to the bake sale portion of the regulations but the regulations are mainly, and most importantly, focused on transforming competitive foods on the cafeteria line and vending machines toward more fresh and low-fat products. All indicators are that the schools are doing a terrific job and going beyond the regulations, such as developing plans to have school minifarms and seeking to engage parents to engage the larger community. On August 1 we will see a transformation worth noting. Rather than going school by school, we will see, overnight, every single food system using the program. And that should have an impact that should be reflected in obesity and health levels of students.

Cheryl Bartlett reported that DPH is completing a second year of BMI screening and is finalizing approval of a report that will compare communities get a sense of the impact of the various initiatives.

Valerie Bassett noted: Regarding regulations and their implications, it's important to work with local boards of health, schools and partners.

Katie Millet stated: The reaction from a lot of schools had very much eliminated many issues from federal guidelines. The challenge is the financial piece since the programs need to be sustainable and she predicts we're not going back as schools have moved past it and are looking to provide healthy environments.

Commissioner Auerbach thanked Representative Kulik and all the legislators for their work, and noted we all should be expressing our support of this effort to the legislature.

## 7. New Business

Katie Millet, MA Department of Education, asked if a **letter of support from the MA FPC for a USDA grant application related to Farm to School** could be generated. And if so what would be protocols for support letters would the FPC generate? What procedures make sense? A recommendation, a reference, other? What would be the criteria for the FPC providing support?

Discussion: It's complicated but worth considering. If there are competitive grants where a FPC letter would help get funding, that would be positive. The pitfalls are multiple groups are applying for the same funding. Often the timelines are tight and we don't have staff to review and respond to a request.

Noted that grant applications sometimes have a question to see how something fits into a wider plan, so our support can be helpful.

Recommended that the bylaws committee generate a policy because it may be complicated, due to the fact that the council is partially composed of agencies that give grants.

Suggestions:

Reference Farm to School work as part of the FPC effort.

Relevant agencies offer letters of support individually in the interim since the June 15th deadline is very tight. Noted that MDAR probably can't meet the June 15th deadline.

**Recent initiatives in the Berkshires re: the advancement of public health and agriculture, collaboration on food safety education and outreach** was presented by Vivian Orłowski, Berkshire County Boards of Health Association. Bringing a farmers and health agents together generated a good response. It was an eye opener for both growers and regulators to hear from each other. The Association encourages more outreach on the local level like what happened in Great Barrington where town meeting endorsed a process of public hearings around agricultural regulation.

Discussion:

Stated: When regulations are being considered, there should be an open process.

Farm Bureau sees a lot of conflict relating to animals and food safety.

Commissioner Watson: We should use what is going on in the Berkshires as a model, but would start at an agency level. This is a best practice to get beyond the silos and go to problem solving.

Suggested: Form a working group of the FPC.

Jeff Cole volunteered to be part of the group. He noted current collaboration with Brad Mitchell (Farm Bureau), Maddie Ribble (MA Public Health Association), Mike Moore (DPH), Charlie Kaniecki (DPH), and Cheryl Sbarra (Massachusetts Association of Health Boards). Phil Korman stated CISA is also doing relevant work and wants to be involved. Suggested that Amanda Kinchla be included because of her food science background.

**Research on Cultural Receptivity of Healthy Food in Massachusetts** as it relates to FPC objectives, was presented by FPC intern Ronak Dave' with a focus on cultural sensitivity in relation to food programs.

Discussion:

Noted:

Nuestras Raices and the Boston Public Health Commission have done some work around this area. These experiences should be part of the literature.

Environmental justice overlaps with food justice and Nuestra Raices offers a good example such as mercury in waterways in an area where fishing is important.

We should think about what expertise is needed for the FCP and Advisory Committee in this regard.

Holyoke Food and Fitness project has a photo voice project relating to produce from Nuestra raices. High school kids and youth want to have a voice. It lead to a policy environment and several of us from UMASS are working with a core group from this project and will be writing an article for publication.

What are ways that the FPC can leverage existing research as well as researchers and research networks?

Suggested: Create Best Practices for engaging minority groups through civic engagement.

Noted:

Take advantage of existing resources to get the word out including postings and press release about the council. But we don't want to reinvent.

The Food Policy Alliance is accumulating relevant research and researchers.

Commissioner Watson states he would like to be a part of a meeting re: cultural sensitivity.

**HIP:** The supermarket industry is very competitive. If one gets on board in a good way, others will often follow suite.

#### **Agricultural Labor:**

With local foods, the demand in some cases exceeds our supply. A good position to be in but also very frustrating. In commercial agriculture there is concern that farms will and are closing because of inadequate labor. A re-haul of off shore worker program and immigration, to allow farm workers to come in is needed. There is still a lot of hand harvest labor required. We can grow more, but we can't get product harvested, resulting in some cases that we won't have enough local food.

Noted: That has to be a part of the food system review.

## **8. Program**

Worcester Train Station welcome and brief overview from Vera Koliass and Trish Settles, Principal Planners with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)

They noted that the FPC work intersects with CMRPC, one of 13 across the state. Mapping, a GIS and transportation departments, as well as community development and planning department all intersect.

CMRPC believes planning is critical and is intersecting with food in many ways. CMRPC serves Worcester and 39 surrounding communities, helping with master plans, open space and recreation plans (including APR and open space) and sustainable food as part of the town plan. We are doing more regional planning now. The prioritization of projects is also important. Aligning all relevant groups and agencies to identify priorities helps greatly. It's a planning process that starts at the local level. Blackstone Valley has a unique area and identity that brings it together. The western part of the region is more rural and is largely agricultural. Worcester County is the 4th county nationally in direct market sales.

## 9. Good of the Order

### a. Member Announcements

- Upcoming meeting schedule

September 7, Brookwood Farm, DCR Property, Canton

December 7, FPC Annual meeting: Trustees of the Reservation Property Doyle Reservation, Leominster

### b. Member Observations or points of discussion relevant to the work of the Council

Question: To what extent are Food Policy Councils collaborating in the region?

Commissioner Watson: At the upcoming NEASDA meeting we'll talk about regional cooperation. Infrastructure for meat processing is an example that is addressed on a regional level.

Representative Kulik is active on the Council of State Governments which has a subgroup related to agriculture and discusses regional issues. Last summer he presented on the MA FPC. There will be more discussions next month.

Commissioner Curley: USDA is hosting a Commissioner discussion in the region for SNAP. Council related issues are discussed; however there is not a specific initiative in place.

Jeff Cole: Farmers are seeing a significant barrier with the cutting/processing of local meat products. This creates as much if not more bottle neck than the low number of slaughter facilities in the state.

Question: If HIP is extended, could processed food products from the WMFPC be included?

Frank Carlson: As long as foods fall within the guidelines in terms of what is eligible, we would open to explore points of access and what we can work with in a very tight time frame.

Jeff Cole: Products from the Western MA Food Processing center would need to meet USDA requirements for the program.

### c. Public Access

Cris Coffin is involved with a policy mapping project including FPC's across the region. There are many regional ag issues including a good food vision being led by Brandeis University.

Betsy Johnson: The form of FPC's is very varied. At the national level the community food security coalition has best practices and the Alliance is working on how to bring together MA regional FPCs. The Northeast Sustainable Working Group has sessions on Food policy councils working together and sharing practices.

**Move to adjourn made at 12:22 by Representative Kulik. Seconded by Frank Carlson.**

**Passed on voice vote.**