

Minutes

MA Food Policy Council meeting will be September 15, 2017
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM – Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston, MA

In attendance:

Denise Courtney, EOESE
Paul Dunphy, Rep. Kulik's Office
Representative Hannah Kane
Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety
John Lee, Farmer
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MA Dept. of Ag Resources Commissioner
Frank Martinez Nocito, Dept. of Transitional Assistance
Lea Susan Ojamaa, Dept. of Public Health
Eric Stocker, Distribution
Danah Tench, Dept. of Environmental Protection
John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center
Samuel Wong, MA Health Officer's Association

Call to Order at 9:47 AM

Acceptance of Minutes: John Lee had editorial change recommendations to incorporate. A motion to accept the minutes was made by John Lee, seconded by John Waite and passed unanimously.

Officers Reports

Chairman Lebeaux introduced Ruth Seward, Tower Hill Botanic Garden Director and director of the Worcester Tree Initiative established to replant after Asian Longhorn beetle devastation who welcomed the group. She described the history of the Garden and the gardens and programs available to the public which includes educational outreach programs for children. Introductions were made of the Council members and attendees.

Farm to Institution White Paper for acceptance discussion: The White Paper shows the wide breath of information on this topic. There may be an opportunity for a press release to highlight the many activities and organizations involved. Commissioner Lebeaux would like to include the White Papers completed this year as part of the Council's annual report with a cover letter summarizing the year's progress. Eric Stocker asked if the White Paper language could be broadened to include purchasing from local distributors that feature local food, in addition to growers (page 9). Various pathways to buy local produce should be highly encouraged. Is there information about the schools that purchase the most? The data from FINE is confidential to name specific schools. EOESE collects data on farm to school that is school specific; however the data needs to be refined. Some large institutions tout local but it's hard to know if the information is accurate. In the past, MA Ag in the Classroom was awarded a USDA Specialty Crop grant for smaller districts to have access to local who don't have access to distributors, to be able to find small providers to streamline the delivery part for central and western MA . Any ranking should be by percentage rather than total volume.

What other data is there to prioritize the importance of this economic activity and rank it compared to other options? Information comes from USDA NEASS when MDAR gets an ag economist, it could be a topic to explore. The five year federal census will commence in early 2018, please encourage your contacts to complete the information. The updated White Paper will be available two weeks before the next meeting and it will be on the agenda for action so Council members were asked to promptly respond with any comments in writing.

2018 MA FPC planning informed by member engagement: This will be an agenda item for November. Commissioner Lebeaux plans to meet individually with Council members to discuss ideas for the direction of programs in 2018. An initial conversation with Rep. Kulik started the process. Reviewing the role of the Council and the relationship with the MA Food System Collaboration is an important part of the discussion. From a legislative perspective, state agencies have a separate process for buy-in, compared to the NGO Council members.

Program

Program focus on education: This broad goal from the MA Local Food Action Plan is to support expanded educational opportunities for farmers and other food system workers. The current focus is to support Massachusetts higher education, UMass Extension, and vocational technical schools by developing and offering appropriate curricula to meet food system needs. There are 69 action items relating to education in the MA Local Food Action Plan – many wider than this broad goal.

Phil Korman, Executive Director, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture - Buy Local role programs for grower education: The MA Collation for Local Food and Farms includes nine buy locals groups interacting with 1,800 farms. CISA has a focus on technical assistance programs for farmers except for the topic of growing, which is provided by UMASS. Buy Locals are networked around several mutual topics of mutual interest.

Jennifer Hashley, Director, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project: overview of beginning farmer training programs – hands-on, classroom, and incubator farm programs, including Beginning Farmer Network of Massachusetts: This organization is 100% self-funded with a goal of developing and supporting a next generation of farmer.

What can be done to engage the next generation in farming? And how can those who want to farm be supported? Currently, less than 1 % of population is farming. Streamlining farmer training programs is a first step. NESFI has a goal to get at least 1,500 new farmers with 250 on the land in the next 5 years and have a corresponding tract including production courses for beginners, first year startup business plans, which is different from MDAR's business planning for more seasoned businesses. The programs offers ½ acre of rental land for up 3 years - enough to be overwhelmed or to thrive. If they do well they get more land. There is interest in investment/access to micro capitol as well as a built in marketing component. Another NESFI program includes a food hub, a CSA, food pantries and other partners to build business skills. NESFI is a partner with Land for Good.

The core program is on farming training, especially incubator farm training. Other focuses include local food distribution, support through national programs, a mobile poultry processing unit and the beginning farmer network network which has fluctuated with funding. Work with the Urban Farming Institute and national organizations have supported over 200 farms across the country with webinars

and technical assistance. NESFI is launching a federally registered national apprentice program. Currently, some internships do not meet the Department of Labor criteria so farmers have been fined. NESFI is also working on a national tool kit and labor workshop, and will connect with Buy Locals to streamline efforts. The New Entry site has a matrix with resources across the state including strong technical assistance partners and support for existing growers, based on a Beginning Farmer Network survey – including resources and referrals. Land for Good sent information on information relating to access to farmland including the non-farming landowners. FPC has a role and to support policy to ensure access to land.

NESFI funding is about \$1.7M which comes from USDA food system grants, Risk Management sources, and other federal programs and partners. Might NESFI expand into western MA? Things are regional in MA, even though the state is small. Moving statewide would require additional funding. It would be helpful to have a line item in the budget for this type of work.

Alex Risley Schroeder, Program Director, Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, Linked Food System Education and Training Creates Jobs and Career Pipelines: The ability to define career pathways can yield a ready workforce. There is an arc of training, education and certification. John Waite provides entry level jobs and hires some staff from manufacturing backgrounds. The WMFPC supports new food business development and then needs to hire workers. Serve Safe training puts them in a position for other jobs. Linking growing with food processing and marketing can lead to full time positions. Amanda Kinchla described a pathway for the student with a culinary degree who crosses over to food science area and has a nexus of relevant experience. Food safety also offers job opportunities.

Early exposure to careers that are not so evident is important. Some groups have elementary programs and others focus on youth including the Food Project and Seeds of Solidarity. Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board connects activities for youth. There are Utube videos of jobs in the food system promoted by the Franklin Hampshire Regional Board, even if the work isn't on the farm. Food Works in Holyoke, the New England Center for Arts and Technology and Community Servings have community-based programming. SNAP training is happening at NECAT. Incubator Kitchens can be a first step forward. It's important to identify the required competencies for entry-level food processing jobs. What's the training and what's the job was described?

David J. Ferreira, Executive Director of the statewide MA Assn of Vocational Administrators (MAVA) past 10 years - Supporting the Commonwealth's Workforce Pipeline at both the Agricultural and Vocational Technical Schools: Membership includes 55 vocational technical schools including the agriculture schools, serving about 50,000 students, representing about 20% of the state's high schools. There is a focus on all clusters with 46 training programs approved by ESE. The agriculture schools tend to be the smallest with 4-500 students. There is a change in the perception of vocational technical schools, resurgence in interest. These are now schools of choice, particular in Gateway Cities and now there is an access situation without enough room, an issue in the workforce pipeline. The students are coming in with a lot of passion with lots of interest in small animal care and science. There are less kids going directly into the workforce pipeline and more going into secondary education. There are 55 schools that offer culinary art programs, a target audience for food science and for those interested in food science. Academically, it's an all-time high. The high school dropout rate is 1.9% in MA. In the regional vocational technical schools, it's .06 percent. The MA statewide graduation is 86.1% (higher than the national average) but in regional vocational technical schools the rate is 95 percent. The Council should have an upcoming meeting at one of the schools.

Public Comment from Liz O’Gilvie, chair Springfield Food Policy Council: She is working to build a system to encourage children’s interest to become farmers or interested in culinary programs, as well as working with foodservice providers to have gardens. An underdeveloped work force could be bolstered by intentional thinking about this pipeline, starting with elementary education. Comment from presenter: The earlier the better, but the curriculum is driven by testing metrics which makes it hard to integrate new things. If it isn’t mandated, it’s very difficult to get it accomplished.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared information from Stockbridge School of Agriculture provided by Wes Autio who was unable to attend. There are 28 programs available. The most popular major is sustainable food and farming which is also available on-line at various levels. Stockbridge is third in the country for agriculture universities. Commissioner graduated from the school in 1948.

UMASS Extension Panel: Title: UMass Extension Today and Tomorrow: **Jody Jellison**, Director, UMass Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment and UMass Extension; **Kathleen Carroll**, Director, UMass Extension Agriculture and Landscape programs; **Lisa Sullivan-Werner**, Director, UMass Extension Nutrition Education Program; **Kathy Cunningham**, SNAP-Ed Multi-Level Specialist, UMass Extension Nutrition Education Program; **Amanda Kinchla**, Extension Assistant Professor, Food Science

Joe Schoenfeld introduced the panel. What is UMass Extension Today? Kathleen Carroll: Equine is one of the largest sectors but has no educators. There is staff working with greenhouse, vegetable and fruit sectors. UMass is not able to work with almost half of the industry which is related to hay and animals but does work with almost half of the food/crop producers in MA. Thirty-three percent of overall funding is based on grants. Most of the inquiries and work come from the green industry including landscapers, arborists and home gardeners. Kathy Cunningham and Lisa Sullivan-Werner talked about the Nutrition Education Program which community based, federally funded and highly driven by accountability. Kathy Cunningham works as multilevel specialists to encourage healthy choices. Amanda Kinchla focuses on the Food Safety Modernization Act and how it affects Massachusetts producers and growers. Within Extension, two of the FSMA rules are priority including the Produce Safety Rule (PSA) and the Preventive Controls for Human Food (PCQH). In the context of regulation, someone in each operation needs to be trained. PSA is a full day and PCQH is 2.5 days, a huge commitment in terms of developing food safety plans. The regulatory compliance is here, depending on business size and the certification trainings are being implemented this year. With the increase in value-added products, a product development training program has been organized, as well as other support. Research interests are related to food safety and FSMA which also crosses over to the produce side with collaboration with Lisa Keag. There is an upcoming PSA training on Sept. 26th at Atlas Farm, South Deerfield.

Moving ahead, comments by Jody Jellison, Director: Support for existing programs is appreciated, however there are many goals identified in the Plan which aren’t being met. UMass has the interest and organizational structure to address opportunities, though there are resource limitations. UMass Extension federal funding is static with allocations based on a formula related to acreage. State support is also static while at the same time, costs and needs are increasing. Overall there has been a 25% decline in state funding. About half of the operational budgets is from grants, contracts, gifts and revenue but is often targeted without flexibility to meet new needs leading to a shrinking workforce and restricted operational funds. A goal is to leverage base support for priorities including IPM, regulatory education, urban food systems, economic analysis and prioritization of food systems. A specific resource request: 1) Three-year funding for four extension professionals. 2) Extension seat on the MA FPC. 3) Undergraduate food policy fellows. This program is in the beginning stages to place

undergraduate students as food policy fellow in state agencies or private organizations interested in the interface between the food community and policy.

Public Comment from Liz O’Gilvie, chair Springfield Food Policy Council: These programs are very significant. Springfield plans to have a minimum of food in schools representing local sources (15%) and from less than 50 miles. Foodservice providers must help support the continued support of school gardens, nutrition education programs. MDAR’s Urban Ag Program was complemented.

Commissioner Lebeaux: Request for attendees to share grower or food worker training programs not previously described.

Betsy Johnson, Springfield Food Policy Council, shared that Community Garden programs are critical for education programs. A representative from Old Sturbridge Village shared that they will have a new charter school and will be acting as the culinary manager. More networking would be of benefit. Joan Squeri shared that the resources discussed are undervalued. Having quantifiable data is an asset for grant writing which could be more robust. Rita Brennan Olsen, MA Partnership for Food Safety Education mentioned that 20 years ago UMASS Extension established the MA Partnership for Food Safety Education which includes representatives of the food system continuum with a wide range of resources on their website hosted by UMASS. Language and literacy barriers are significant in many cases. In addition, education of young people includes agriculture which is very important. MA Ag in the Classroom provides tools and science for this training so their funding is important to train teachers. The Plan included an inventory of training resources which could be helpful to connect educational resources across settings.

Old Business

New Business: Winton Pitcoff, Director, MA Food System Collaborative Update. The Collaborative did an inventory of education providers that focus on agriculture. Many collaborate on offerings but most have their own networks. There is a lot of cross over with Buy Locals as a nexus. A few topic gaps include land access, and also levels of trainings and resources. Beginning farmers has been a target but those that have graduated may need additional programming. There was interest in a common website and speakers list, though some are available from New Entry for example. MDAR has a good calendar. NOFA has a good website even if you’re not organic. Consumer education wasn’t a part of this conversation but 4-H is an amazing way to get youth into the food system. The Collaborative is hiring an outreach and engagement coordinator.

Announcements:

Eastern State Exposition (Big E) open 9.15.17 - please visit the MA Building!

November 1, 2017: 9:30 – 12:30, MA FPC meeting - Focus on the Healthy Incentives Program.
Massachusetts State House, Boston, Room 428

November 17, 2017: Massachusetts Food System Forum, hosted by the MA Food System Collaborative.
Doubletree Hotel, Leominster

December 5 – 7, 2017: Community Food Systems Forum, Boston.

January 12, 2018: 9:30 – 12:30, MA Food Policy Council meeting, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581, Room 103

Sept. 9 – 12, 2018: NASDA National Meeting, Hartford, CT

Public Comment

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn was made by John Lee, seconded by Amanda Kinchla and passed unanimously at 11:45 AM.