

Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

*Final Report of Working Group on Farming and Public Health

*Strategies to Address Food Waste and Encourage Food Sharing

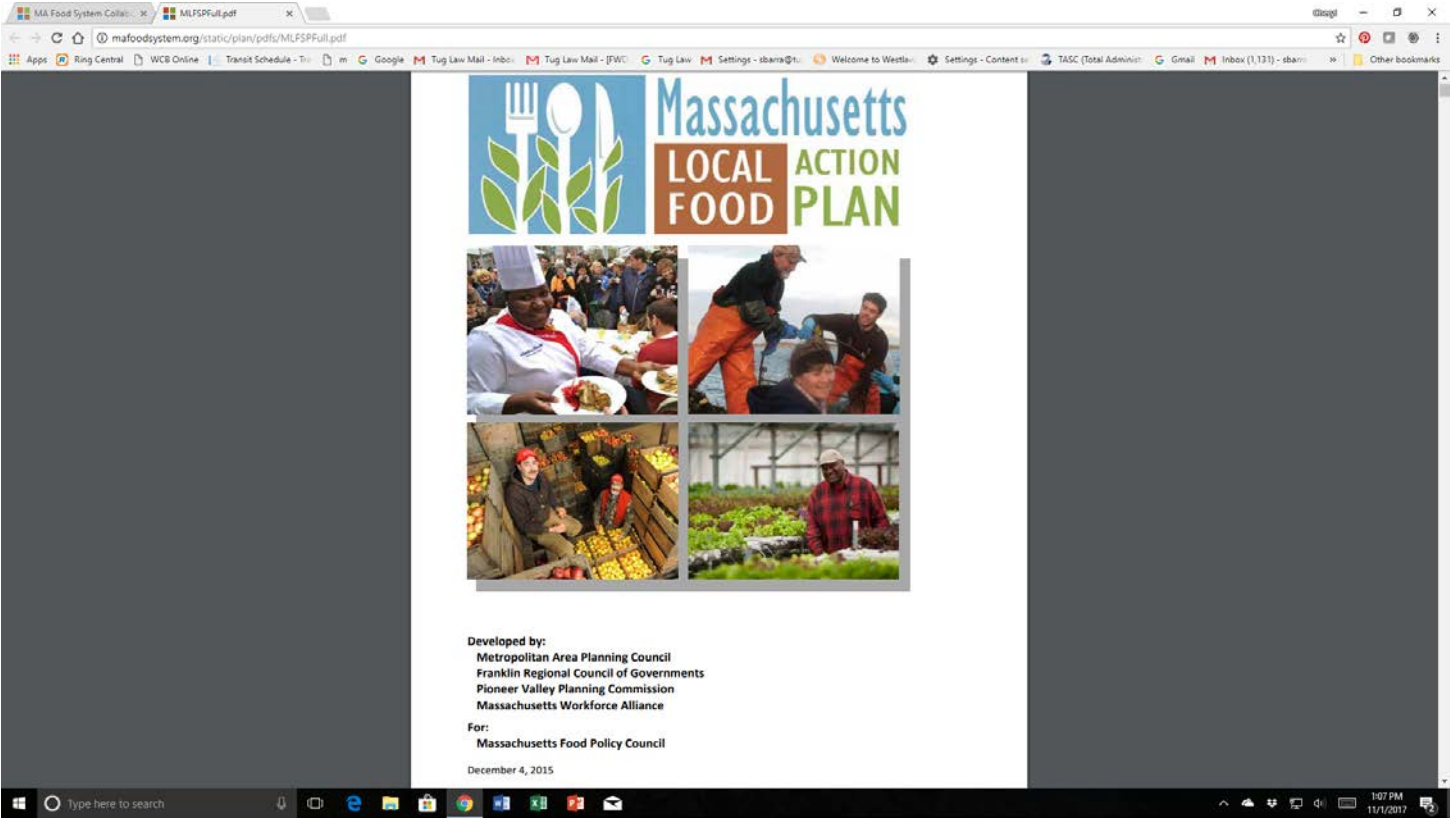


Cheryl Sbarra, Director of Policy and Law, MAHB

Winton Pitcoff, Director, Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

MAHB Certificate Program, November 2017

Massachusetts Food Policy Council's 2-year statewide planning process produced:



Goals of the Plan



- ▶ Increase production, sales and consumption of Massachusetts-grown food.
- ▶ Create jobs and economic opportunity in food, farming and fishing.
- ▶ Protect land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing.
- ▶ Ensure food safety.
- ▶ Reduce hunger, food insecurity, and increase availability of healthy foods.

Initial draft recommendation on farming

July '15

- ▶ Recommendation 2.3: Minimize municipal (boh) regulations that hinder farm viability.
 - ▶ Develop a system of checks and balances to oversee municipal boards of health and conservation commissions as their work relates to agriculture.
 - ▶ Develop incentives to encourage municipalities to create Agricultural Commissions.
 - ▶ Work towards consistency of municipal health agricultural regulations . . . If greater consistency cannot be achieved, pre-emption should be considered.
- ▶ MAHB contacted by MPHA at this point.
 - ▶ Member of Coalition of Local Public Health (CLPH).
- ▶ MAHB contacted Winton at Mass Food System
 - ▶ Coordinator of the Plan at that time.



Concerns expressed by MAHB

- ▶ Support food plan.
- ▶ Need reform in how regulations are developed and enforced.
- ▶ Should engage stakeholders at beginning of the process.
- ▶ Enforcement should be about compliance with reasonable health, not punishment.
- ▶ Tone of much of the farming chapter is collaborative, encouraging education and technical assistance.
- ▶ MAHB working with Farm Bureau to encourage regulations in keeping with generally acceptable farming procedures.
- ▶ Singling out boards of health by emphasizing the need for “checks and balances” on them and only them is troubling.

Concerns (continued)

- ▶ MAHB not at the table.
 - ▶ Nor was MHOA, MEHA .
 - ▶ We represent local public health.
- ▶ Dialogue ensued.
 - ▶ Farmers were frustrated.
 - ▶ Lots of confusion and misinformation about what generally acceptable farming procedures are.



Final Plan Goal 2: Action 2.3.7

- ▶ Create a professionally-facilitated working group that includes representatives from the fields of public health and food systems, as well as regulatory agencies, to develop a proposal to improve regulatory oversight of the local food system with respect to public health.
- ▶ Steering Committee Members:
 - ▶ Cheryl Sbarra, Mass. Assoc. of Public Health
 - ▶ Jeff Cole, MA Assoc. of Farmer's Markets
 - ▶ Winton Pitcoff, MA Food System Collaborator
 - ▶ Patrick Field, Consensus Building Institute - facilitator





Working Group on Farming and Public Health

- ▶ Mass. Food Systems Collaborative - Winton Pitcoff
- ▶ Mass. Farmers' Markets - Jeff Cole
- ▶ Mass. Assoc. of Health Boards - Cheryl Sbarra
- ▶ Mass. Public Health Assoc. - Maddie Ribble
- ▶ Mass. Health Officers Assoc. - Sam Wong
- ▶ Mass. Farm Bureau Federation - Brad Mitchell
- ▶ Local Board of Health - Tom Carbone
- ▶ Goat farmer - Ann Kiessling
- ▶ MDPH - Jana Ferguson
- ▶ MDAR - John Lebeaux, Commissioner



Process

- ▶ Interviewed 15 stakeholders during the summer of 2016, including members of the working group.
- ▶ Gathered press clippings with examples of challenges.
- ▶ Assessment identified need for small, balanced working group of key organizations in farming and public health.
- ▶ Working Group met 3 times.
- ▶ Focus group of farmers and public health directors and board members met.
 - ▶ Natural tension.

Initial Issues Identified

- ▶ Farmers markets and health regulations relative to application of food code, samples, prepared foods, seafood, etc.
 - ▶ Raw v. processed food
 - ▶ Co-mingling produce
 - ▶ Fermented products
- ▶ Farm stands and public health regulations
- ▶ Keeping of animals, including bees
- ▶ School gardens
- ▶ Community kitchens
- ▶ Slaughtering and animal processing



Assessment interviewees

- ▶ Inadequate resources in health departments
- ▶ Insufficient education for farmers and public health
- ▶ Limited communication
- ▶ Structural barriers with 351 boards of health
- ▶ Extensive authority of boards of health - long history, has many benefits, but can create issues.
- ▶ Inconsistently applied regulations, including different interpretations of food code.
- ▶ No requirement of a public hearing
- ▶ Risk perception



Common Objectives

- ▶ Protect public health
- ▶ Enhance local agricultural business development
 - ▶ Good for everybody
- ▶ Increase consistency among like municipalities
- ▶ Provide transparency and input
- ▶ Increase efficiencies of local government
- ▶ Provide meaningful access to expertise and learning





Possible Solutions Identified in Assessment

- ▶ Education for farmers, farmers market managers and public health officials
 - ▶ Can't be required
- ▶ Certification of market managers and public health officials in food safety relative to agriculture
- ▶ Statewide guidance
 - ▶ Model templates, guidance
- ▶ Statewide technical support
- ▶ Statewide regulatory review and updating
- ▶ Structural reform at state level
- ▶ Incentives to encourage regionalization
- ▶ Improved administrative processes locally

Recommendations of Working Group

- ▶ 1. Align procedures for enacting local public health regulations related to farming with procedural requirements required for Title 5 regulations.
 - ▶ Hold hearings before enacting regulations.
 - ▶ Involve Agricultural Commissions where they exist.
 - ▶ Legislation filed to do this.
- ▶ 2. Develop model regulations, variances and guidance for farming activities and disseminate them widely across the Commonwealth.
 - ▶ Keeping of animal regulation done.
 - ▶ On to farmers markets.
 - ▶ MAHB, Farm Bureau, Farmers Market Assoc., DPH, MDAR



Recommendations (continue



- ▶ 3. The *Guidebook for Massachusetts Boards of Health* will be updated to include a specific and separate chapter on agriculture.
- ▶ 4. Partners will create, maintain and assist municipalities and farmers to utilize a “resource pool” of expertise in farming, farmers markets and food safety to informally assist all parties in addressing issues, proposed regulations and implementation of regulations and programs.

Recommendations (continued)

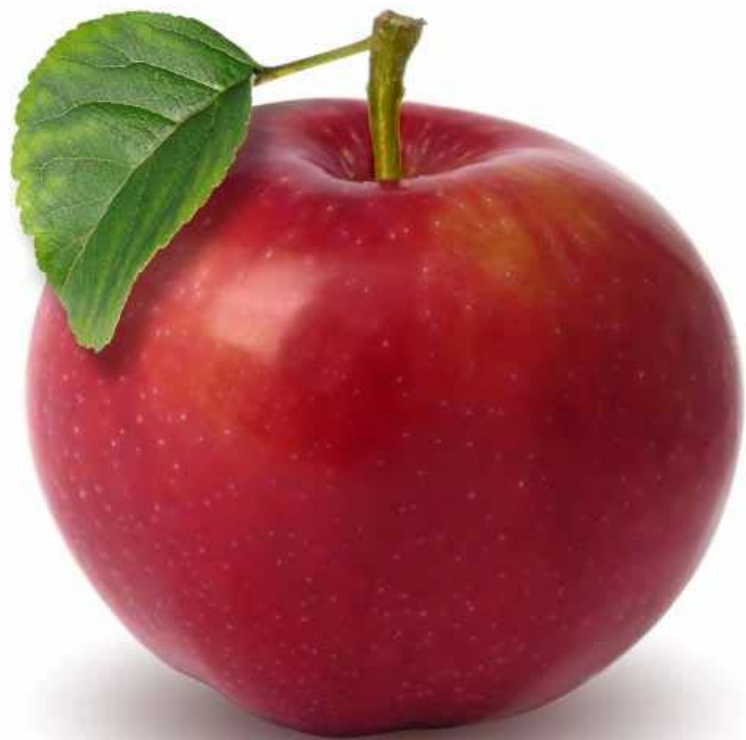
- ▶ 5. The Commonwealth should fund “circuit rider” positions to assist municipalities in addressing farming and public health issues.
- ▶ 6. Partners will explore the possibility of a third-party certification program for farmers markets (and mobile markets).
- ▶ 7. DPH, DEP and MDAR should provide, with assistance from Partners, quality, affordable, available and widely available training in food safety, farming practices, composting, and direct sales for boards of health, health agents, farmers, farmers market managers, vendors and others.

Final Recommendation



- ▶ Partners should engage annually to monitor implementation and address new issues as they arise.





Questions?

