

Southcoast Food Policy Council Quarterly Meeting NOTES

January 11, 2023 at 11 am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82750987466>

Hi! I am Christine Smith, program manager for the Southcoast Food Policy Council, a program of The Marion Institute. The Marion Institute engages individuals and communities in an integrative approach to whole-body health. We do this through our programmatic work that focuses on promoting health equity, advocating for food justice, and building resilient communities.

The Southcoast Food Policy Council's mission is to connect, convene, and advocate for local food producers, consumers, and community leaders who seek policies and systems that strengthen our regional food system, improve community health, and eliminate food insecurity.

40 people attended.

Agenda:

- Overview of the Community Advisory Board
- Goals and Activities of four S.F.P.C. Working Groups
- Food Equity Advisors
- Successes of S.F.P.C.
- What YOU can do
- Questions

1.) Overview of the Community Advisory Board

- This is a quick reminder. 27 Community Advisory Board members have been meeting since September 2021 to put together the strategic plan and the Working Groups.
- Each fall, we have a C.A.B. and Working Group review, and we had 5 members step down and recruited 7 new members to the C.A.B. from across Bristol, Plymouth, and Norfolk counties.
- We have Four Working Groups: Education and Communication, Food Access Working Group, Capacity Building Working Group, and Policy Working Group.

2.) Goals and Activities of the Four Working Groups

Education and Communication Working Group

- We have 13 people in this working group.
- The overarching goal for the Education and Communication Working is that the public will learn how vital a resilient food system is to withstanding future crises such as climate change and pandemics that disrupt supply chains, how to access healthier foods produced locally, and the environment and health benefits of buying local.
- The S.F.P.C. Education and Communication Working Group will focus on long-term goals to expand food system education through educational campaigns and food forums over the next few years.
- Short-term goals include:
 - a.) Develop an educational campaign on building and supporting a local food ecosystem that will include education on the true cost of food, the importance of buying local, healthy eating, supporting farmers and the local economy, and climate justice.
 - b.) Create a summer Eat Local Challenge Month as part of an education campaign.

- c.) Expand education around September's Hunger Awareness Month with more opportunities to volunteer, donate, and take action.
- d.) Organize the annual October Food Summit to educate the public on the priorities further and issues impacting our food system.

Action Taken:

- ✓ We have already taken action to get funding for the Education Campaign by submitting a grant application to the newly passed M.D.A.R. Food Policy Council grant program.
- ✓ We are in teams working on the first goal of developing an education campaign on the food system.
- ✓ The MI website can translate materials on the site into other languages to make Food System Education more accessible.

Food Access Working Group

- We have 11 people in the food access working group
- The overarching goal is for environmental justice and low-income communities to access local, healthy, nutritious food that is culturally relevant.
- The Food Access Working Group's long-term goals over the next few years are to develop a regional gleaning program, increase the amount of local food in the emergency food relief system, and reduce waste.
- Goals include:
 - I. Create a Gleaning program (Farm to Pantry)
 - a.) Identify best practices and develop a gleaning program in Southeastern MA, including Plymouth, Bristol, and Norfolk Counties.
 - b.) Recruit and train volunteers for the gleaning program.
 - c.) Develop a streamlined method of communication among farmers, volunteers, and food pantries to support these initiatives.
 - d.) Identify groups willing to receive gleaned and rescued food.

Action Taken:

- ✓ The Boston Area Gleaners and Hope Harvest in Rhode Island presented their gleaning programs to our work group so we could have some initial key learnings from their respective gleaning programs.
- ✓ We are in teams now working on the plans for a gleaning program- a project plan and plans for what that would look like for volunteers and farmers. We will work with Coastal Foodshed and S.E.M.A.P. with farmers and also the two other gleaning programs previously mentioned.
- ✓ We submitted a letter of interest for a big grant to help establish a gleaning program.

II. Increase Food Recovery to Food Pantries

Action Taken:

- ✓ We invited Rescuing Leftover Cuisine to present how they work and how the S.F.P.C. might be able to support their efforts. We are working on figuring out how best to help.
- ✓ We invited the Greater New Bedford Regional Refuse Management District to present the landfill challenges and we are looking to see how we can defer edible food to food pantries through the New Bedford Hunger Commission and Rescuing Leftover Cuisine.
- ✓ We are seeing where our partners that make edible food (hospitals, restaurants, schools) put their edible and non-edible organic waste to ensure it goes to food recovery and if not, goes to composting.

Capacity Building Working Group

- We have 8 people in this Working Group.
- The Southcoast Food Policy Council Capacity Building Working Group is focused on building the physical infrastructure and networking capacity to create a regional Food System in Southeastern MA.
- Short-term goals include:
 - a.) Identify and convene stakeholders to identify and cultivate food-related assets and value-chain intermediaries.
 - b.) Identify and support pilot projects that establish the infrastructure for a food-focused ecosystem.
 - c.) Convene and work with commercial enterprises to help divert organic waste to food relief programs and/or composting.

Action Taken:

- ✓ We took action by inviting Coastal Foodshed to share some of the barriers to setting up mobile food markets in our area, and we are discussing how to address those barriers to food businesses.
- ✓ We invited Black Earth Compost to give a presentation to us, and we asked what they needed. Black Earth Compost said they would like to establish composting routes and a potential compost site in Southeastern MA. We are working on connecting and convening businesses that might want to set up trucking routes.
- ✓ We also hired Holly Fowler, who created the 2021 Southcoast Food System Assessment, to create a paper to help us think about what we need to do to create a business plan for the Food Innovation District.
- ✓ Regarding the priority of identifying dry and frozen storage space in our area to hold food, we worked with the M.A. Department of Agriculture, which is currently researching this across MA. Once they finish the research, we will use that to figure out a plan for our area.

Policy Working Group

- We have 8 people in this Working Group
- The food system impacts and is influenced by a variety of other factors and systems, including the environment, public health, and the economy. These, in turn, are reflective of varying levels of policy, which is often the expression of a society's culture and values. While complex, food policy councils must consider these multi-faceted, interdependent relationships as they consider food and agriculture-related policies and programs. To create a food system that works for everyone, we need to address policy and decision-making at all levels.
- Long-Term Goal:
 - The Southcoast will have a group of citizens and lawmakers who understand the food system barriers and act on those potential solutions by fostering good food system policies.
- Short-term goals:
 - a.) Advocate for the permanent funding of the Healthy Incentives Program (H.I.P.) in the budget.
 - b.) Advocate for Equity in Agriculture and other equitable food policies.
 - c.) Advocate for the permanent funding of the Farm to School program in the budget.
 - d.) Advocate for medically tailored food programs and pre-made food to be covered by SNAP.
 - e.) Advocate for the Food System Budget funding priorities.
 - f.) Advocate for the Farm Bill at the Congressional level. The Farm Bill sunsets in September and needs to be renewed. It is now the time to urge Congress to make changes.
 - g.) Write Opinion-editorials to educate the public and legislators.

- h.) Create Food Policy Education for the Education and Communication Working Group.
- i.) Set up meetings with legislative staff and legislators to develop relationships.
- j.) Write and provide testimony and send out action alerts through the email list servs.

Action Taken:

- ✓ There has been a series of Policy briefings for the Working Group on the issues we cover, including inviting the M.A. Food System Collaborative to give a briefing.
- ✓ We have now created small teams to work on Ops Eds, set up meetings with legislators, and create the Policy Food System education for the Education and Communication Working Group.

3.) Food Equity Advisors

- Food Equity Advisors are people in the community with lived experience of hunger.
- We have three Food Equity Advisors from Wareham, Fairhaven and Fall River towns.
- They are all on Working Groups, sharing their opinions and ideas, and shaping the work as we go. They are also doing legislative advocacy via talking to the media about H.I.P., sending in letters to legislators, and we hope to write opinion editorials soon.
- To recruit more Food Equity Advisors, we have been doing Focus groups work in Fall River, Wareham, and New Bedford. In New Bedford, the focus group was entirely in Spanish. We ask for people's ideas on our plans and use their input to change what we are doing to reflect the community's needs. We also want to get people excited about what we do, and we hope to recruit people from the focus groups to join us in our work.
- We are actively seeking people, so if you know any group or individual that is interested, email me at sfpc@marioninstitute.org

4.) SFPC SUCCESSES:

FOOD SUMMIT

- We host a yearly Food Summit with Senator Montigny's office and the UMass Dartmouth Leduc Center for Civic Engagement. Food is the common language we use and is also true in our work worlds. You cannot talk about food barriers unless you also talk about housing, healthcare, and transportation. This past Food Summit was to break down those barriers and start a conversation.
- Our keynote speaker was Brandy Brooks, C.E.O. of Radical Solutions L.L.C., who also worked at Community Design Resource Center of Boston, The Food Project, the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness who shared, "We are nomads, and follow the food and build towns around how we get our food and water. We derive medicine from food and create spiritual practices and cultural norms around food in every aspect of our life. We forget that food is how we embody our relationships and what we believe in the world. When we talk about housing and transportation, we see the ways we have been segregated, and it is reflected in who has food access and the quality of the food. So you have to think about food inter-sectionally."
- Following our keynote speaker, we had a panel of subject-matter experts representing the sectors of advocacy (Alexis Walls, Assistance Campaign Director from Massachusetts Public Health Association), healthcare (Damon Chaplin, Director of the New Bedford Department of Health), housing (Josh Amaral, Assistant Director of P.A.C.E. in New Bedford) and transportation (Erik Rousseau, Administrator of the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority).
- If you have ideas for the future Food Summit, please share them at sfpc@marioninstitute.org.

SUCSESSES IN POLICY

We asked S.F.P.C. members to write to their legislators four times:

- We asked members to write letters to their legislators to support M.A. Food System Budget items. We provided an opportunity for organizations to sign a group letter from the S.F.P.C. for Healthy Incentive Program, Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program, UMass Extension, Local Food Policy Council Grants, Department of Agricultural Resource staffing, Buy Local Agriculture Organizations, Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline, Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program, Massachusetts Food Trust, Mass Farm to School, MA Emergency Food Assistance Program, Senior Farmshare Program, School Meals Extension, Mass in Motion. We were successful in funding these programs.
- We asked members to write letters to their legislators to support a particular piece of the budget that would provide grant money for Food Policy Councils to continue their work. We successfully got the first-ever Food Policy Council Grant into the budget.
- We asked members to write letters to their legislators to support the Common Application on the Mass Health online form to receive SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and other benefits. This was a huge success; the one application on Mass Health now covers SNAP and W.I.C., fuel, and housing assistance benefits.
- We asked members to write to legislators to support making H.I.P. (Healthy Incentive Program) funding permanent in the M.A. Economic Development Plan.

More Policy Success

1.) Provided written testimony:

- Securing \$30 Million from the American Rescue Plan for the M.A. Food Infrastructure Grant. The S.F.P.C. provided written testimony specific to support securing \$30 Million from the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) for the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (F.S.I.G.) to include more than funding for food pantries, restaurants, farmers, and processors. This passed, and the additional ARPA was secured for F.S.I.G.
- Securing COVID funds for the Farm to School grant program. The S.F.P.C. provided written testimony in support of An Act to secure federal COVID funds towards the Farm to School grant program as part of the M.A. Farm to School Coalition, which was a success, securing \$1 Million from COVID relief money to go to this program to fund it at \$1, 250,000 for F.Y. 2022.

2.) Letters asking legislators to co-sponsor:

- One Common Application for MassHealth. We asked legislators to support the FY23 Outside Section Budget language from Act to streamline access to critical public health and safety-net programs through common applications, so there is only one online Mass Health application to complete to automatically be enrolled in SNAP, fuel assistance, childcare, and W.I.C.
- M.A. Food system programs: Healthy Incentive Program, Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program, UMass Extension, Local Food Policy Council Grants, Mass in Motion, Buy Local Agriculture Organizations, Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline, Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program, Massachusetts Food Trust, and many other programs. We successfully advocated for these programs.

SUCCESS in the CANDIDATE FORUM:

- We held our first Candidate Forum to educate candidates on food system issues and in turn educate the public on how those candidates view the food system issues.
- We will hold more Candidate Forums each election cycle.
- We created 7 questions that covered the entire Food System in one way or another. One of the questions we asked was: "Climate change is impacting our ability to produce enough food to feed people. We have fires and droughts in the west and flooding caused by storms in the Southeast. Currently, we are just emerging from the worst drought in recent memory. All these conditions result in a breakdown in food production and supply chains. How would you combat climate change, so local farming, fishing, and aquaculture industries are supported in building a more resilient food system?"

5.) WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Be Engaged!

- Take action when we send legislative alerts to take action
- Participate in our events – Eat Local Month Challenge, Food Summit, Candidate Forum
- Donate and support our work
- Contact sfpc@marioninstitute.org

6.) Questions:

1.) For the Food Access Working Group: For the food recovery work, have you all looked at Market Basket as a place to talk with about their excess food going to food pantries or composting?

- No, thank you, great idea! We will add that to our list. If anyone has a contact with Market Basket, please email me at sfpc@marioninstitute.org.

2.) For the Policy Working Group: The last payment for the Federal Extra COVID SNAP is ending March 2. This is a Congressional decision, not D.T.A.'s decision to stop this payment. When people go to the grocery stores, it might fall to the clerks and cashiers to explain that they do not have that money on your SNAP card.

- Comment: As a farmer, we are really worried about the Farm Bill. I want to be informed and share information when I have it.
- Christine: We will share information as we develop our positions on the Farm Bill. We invite you to share information with us too. 😊
- Yes, the M.A. Food System Collaborative is aware of the Farm Bill and we will work with other coalitions and experts of their field to figure out our positions in the Farm Bill.
- Coastal Foodshed brought up the idea of increasing the Farmers Market Coupons so it is year around, and yes, this is part of the Farm Bill. The 2015 MA FOOD PLAN of ACTION clearly states we should advocate for year-round Farmers Market coupons. We will have this in our advocacy too.

3.) Food Equity Advisors: Comment: We need to recruit bi-lingual folks into this group and more people with disabilities to represent the community.

- We are looking to recruit people from a diverse array of backgrounds. If you know of someone, please contact me so we can begin that discussion. When we onboard a Food Equity Advisor there is a lot of relationship work and trust to build so it takes time. Then we invite them to choose where they want to enter the S.F.P.C.- as a Working Group member, as a Community Advisory Board member or just as a consultant. The choice is entirely up to the individual on how they would like to engage in the S.F.P.C.

4.) Liz: Thrilled with the turnout and can't get this work done without you. I am grateful to work with you, to do more and do better.

5.) Bill Napolitano: Is Holly Fowler's work on that report done on the Food Innovation District? That report would be a nice piece to have for the Regional Resiliency Plan for the Regional Plan and give it more strength and help create some of those contacts you are looking for and create a space for a Food Hub.

Liz in response: Bill, it is similar to what we talked about before and is a work in progress and a huge undertaking. I would love to have more conversations offline on how we can make this work and collaborate.