

Notes from The Southcoast Food Policy Council Quarterly meeting July 12, 2023

14 participants

Agenda

- Introductions for CAB, Work Groups, staff
- Land Acknowledgement
- Update on the Four Working Groups
- Results from the "Know Your Food System" survey
- Invitation to the Eat Local Southcoast challenge in August
- Focus Group interest and Food Equity Advisors
- Other issues you would like to raise and questions

Working Group Updates:

Education and Communication Working Group

This working Group is a leverage point for all SFPC Initiatives. If the public better understands the food system, that increases the support and success of all the SFPC initiatives.

- Recently, we received the MA Department of Agriculture Food Policy Council grant to launch the Education Campaign, which will launch publically in August 2023.

This is a multi-media, multi-year effort to:

- a) Understand the baseline of the public's understanding of our local food system,
- b) Identify needed education/communication modifications/improvements and
- c) Measure change in the community's understanding and support of the food system and its role in the food system.

- Campaign themes include The Journey of Food in the Southcoast (the education will be on the website and added yearly), the August Eat Local Southcoast Challenge, September Hunger Awareness Month, and the Annual Food Summit.

Food Policy Working Group

- The goal is to advocate for food system priorities, resulting in a thriving and equitable food system. Advocacy includes letter writing, community engagement, testimony, relationships with elected officials, and an annual candidate forum.
- This year alone, we've advocated for funding in the state budget for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), Farm to School grants, Food Policy Councils, Food Literacy, Universal School Meals, Basic Needs Assistance for MA Immigrants, Protecting Soil from PFAS Contamination and other Food System budget issues.
- We've also provided written testimony during Joint Committee hearings for the following bills: Encouraging Donations to People in Need, Equity in Agriculture, Food Literacy, and the Farm to School Grant bill.
- At the Congressional level, we sent letters and invited the SFPC members to write their Congressional delegation to support creating a Farm Bill that increases SNAP dollar amounts, expands who is eligible for SNAP, and addresses Climate Change.
- Policies we'll support down the pike will continue to be those listed. Hearings on these issues will continue over the next two years. We are looking into technology to make it easier for the SFPC community to contact their legislators and develop relationships with legislators.

Food Access Working Group

- The priorities and activities came out of the SFPC Community Advisory Board strategic planning using the 2021 Southeastern Massachusetts Food System Assessment https://www.marioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MI_FoodAssesmentDIGEST.pdf.

Key Activities

- Establish a Farm-to-Food relief program.
- Establish a Gleaning program, as research showed that Gleaning is nascent in our region. **Gleaning** is when you train volunteers to harvest a crop from farms that would otherwise go to waste in the field.

Farm-to-Food Relief: The Neighborhood Farm at Frogfoot

The collaborative partnership with AD Makepeace Company and the Marion Institute has broken ground, and the official name is "The Neighborhood Farm at Frogfoot." Makepeace will provide the land, soil, and irrigation.

- It is important to note that this parcel of land was not an active bog, never was a bog, nor was it active farmland. It is a sandy piece of land surrounded by bogs that were being vacated.
- The Marion Institute is responsible for all programmatic aspects of Frogfoot Farm - developing a farm plan, purchasing equipment, and fundraising to hire a farmer and gleaning coordinator to get this running next year.
- Although it was incubated in the Southcoast Food Policy Council, Frogfoot Farm will be a program within The Marion Institute.
- Frogfoot Farm will meet SFPC goals in three ways:
- 1. Increase the availability of local food in food relief programs. Frogfoot's distribution will focus predominately on Wareham, Rochester, Carver, and Plymouth.
- 2. Launch the regional Gleaning Program, as there is currently no official gleaning program in Southeastern MA.
- 3. These programs will also allow us to address another gap identified in The Food System Assessment and one which was elevated during the pandemic – a lack of healthy, prepared meals going into the food relief system.
- We recognize the great work done by the YMCA's Sharing the Harvest, which has run a farm-to-food relief program for many years. We will work with Sharing the Harvest to ensure our footprint of food distribution complements their efforts.
- We will help support this program through our policy working group, specifically "An Act to Encourage Donations to People in Need," which provides farmers a tax credit of up to \$5K and increases liability protection for the donor of food, such as a farmer or restaurant, and increase liability protection for the food pantry and food bank to receive the recovered food.

Other regional gleaning programs that train volunteers to glean from other farms for farm-to-food relief:

- Boston Area Gleaners
- Hope's Harvest, Rhode Island
- What is next in Food Access? We still need to find ways to increase food in the area and food access. When we started the SFPC, we were immediately involved in emergency food response. We have been asked by many different working groups and the Community Advisory Board to restart the weekly meetings to coordinate emergency food response in our area. You are welcome to these meetings every Friday at 11 am starting July 21. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84025596278>

Capacity Building Working Group

Priorities developed by the SFPC CAB using the 2021 Southeastern Massachusetts Food System Assessment:

- Build a regional food innovation district- priority action step
- Increase refrigerated and storage spaces
- Build networks that make local food accessible to everyone
 - Identify partners and solutions for food waste in Southeastern MA

Food Innovation Center

- Food Innovation Center puts different food businesses into one building, including distributors, commercial kitchens, markets, retail, shared storage, and organizations. The idea is to increase efficiency through shared resources supporting the food system.
- Sunbeam Building, New Bedford, was the 2nd location under review as a potential site. After careful consideration and extensive due diligence done on all aspects of the project, from the location, the neighborhood impacts, the operating models, and partnerships, we decided that Sunbeam was not the appropriate location at this moment in time. We appreciate the support from the Mayor's office, Mass Development, and others, but we realize that The Marion Institute and our SFPC partners need to move more slowly and address some of the information gaps highlighted during the Sunbeam discovery process. We will re-examine what smaller steps we can take collectively to build capacity for the regional food system.

- Moving forward: We learned a lot about the information gaps that must be addressed. Firstly, we need more specifics on the current needs of our partners and stakeholders to find the right size for any physical infrastructure we commit to building together. We also do not want to replicate existing infrastructure that may be available and simply underutilized. As such, some of the steps we may need to take before pursuing an increase in regional capacity through the development of physical infrastructure is a stakeholder's needs assessment/survey and possibly a regional food asset map, in addition to other steps the workgroup may identify in future meetings.

Focus group interest and how to get involved.

Are you interested in partnering with the SFPC to run focus groups? A focus group can elevate your work, help identify community needs, help groups be educated on an issue, learn about the SFPC, and see how they are also stakeholders in the food system and join the SFPC. We have successfully worked with the Council of Aging in Wareham, Cardinal Medeiros Tower housing in Fall River, and a community organizing Group in New Bedford. We plan to work with E-For All and their students who want to pursue food enterprises.

Questions and other things to share

- Capacity Building Working Group Asset mapping and feasibility study- Jim McKeag offered to help, especially with interview questions.
- Do we need a Local Food Bank in Southcoast, like the Greater Boston Food Bank? The Southcoast is completely reliant on one food bank. How resilient are we in this system with an increasing need?
- WIC- Plymouth office-100% in-person with clients.
- Use Farmers Market Coupons for seniors and WIC families
 - <https://www.massfarmersmarkets.org/2023-farmers-market-coupon-programs-copy>
 - <https://www.mass.gov/farmers-market-nutrition-program>
- Plymouth office Farmers Market coupons are available now, and a distribution event on July 27, 3 – 6 pm. The coupons come in \$5 increments for \$30 in one book of checks.