

2024 A Year in Review: Celebrate Successes!

Our 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.

Legislative Activities:

1.) Advocated and engaged the community in legislative advocacy to pass SFPC Community Advisory Board legislative priorities.

- Created six Action Network Advocacy alerts and engaged the 1,000+ SFPC Members-at-Large to take action. To date, 424 letters have been sent to legislators, and with the [newest action alert](#), nearly 300 letters have been sent to date to legislators on preventing HIP cuts.
- Coordinated two Lobby Days (March and November) for The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), for SFPC's Community Advisory Board (CAB) members and a Food Equity Advisor to talk directly with legislators and their staff at the Statehouse.

2.) Provided opportunities for Food Equity Advisors to directly engage with decision-makers.

- Each of the four Food Equity Advisors sent in written testimony to support fully funding the Healthy Incentive Program.
- One Food Equity Advisor wrote an op-ed about the Cliff Effect-- when one benefit increases and another decreases as a result.
- In October, the SFPC and three Food Equity Advisors provided in-person testimony about the cliff effect and food insecurity at the Poverty Commission Hearing at UMass Dartmouth.
- One Food Equity Advisor joined the HIP Lobby Day at the Statehouse and spoke directly to legislators about her experience on SNAP and HIP.

3.) Create and maintain relationships with legislators.

- In January 2024, coordinated a Legislative Breakfast with The Greater New Bedford Youth Alliance and the Women's Alliance of Southeastern MA to provide an opportunity for the community to meet and develop relationships with legislators and their staff. Over 130 individuals participated in the Legislative Breakfast.
- In March, initiated monthly updates with the 13 legislators in our region.
- Met with three additional legislators to establish new relationships.
- Coordinated two Lobby Days (March and November) at the Statehouse for HIP, engaging six individuals, including one Food Equity Advisor to speak with legislators and their staff at the Statehouse.

4.) Promote democratic activity and civic engagement in food system issues.

- The SFPC organized a virtual Candidate Forum for District 10 Bristol County for the office of State Representative to educate future State Representatives on food system issues, providing a safe space for the public to hear candidates' thoughts on food system issues, and create goodwill with future legislators. Eighty people registered, and 42 attended. [Video here](#).

Engage the Community in Food System Education

- 1.) In the summer, we launched our 2nd Annual [Eat Local Southcoast Challenge](#). Over 400 Southcoast residents participated in this year's challenge, doubling the participation from 2023. Collectively, we have reached over 750 individuals who received food system education through MDAR's local food policy grant.
- 2.) The SFPC organized the annual 2024 virtual Food Summit: *Shifting Perspectives from Food Security to Food Sovereignty*. We had the highest registration number for this event: 163 people registered, and 67 people attended. You can see the notes and PowerPoints [here](#).
- 3.) The SFPC initiated the [Community and Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool](#) (CARAT) with each working group to measure the baseline food system resiliency of the Bristol County food system. CARAT uses seven core themes and 101 key indicators (i.e., natural resource management and distributed democracy) critical to a robust local food system. The CARAT will help us understand the needs and gaps in our region, increase our knowledge of the local food system, and understand what climate measures we need in place.
- 4.) The SFPC created a five-module legislative advocacy training, and trained the SFPC CAB on how to do legislative advocacy, and shared the tools needed to do the advocacy.

Engaging the Community to Eliminate Food Insecurity

In the summer of 2023, food pantries in our area said they were getting less food and seeing an increase in individuals served in food pantries. After discussing this with the Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB), the SFPC convened GBFB agencies to enroll in the USDA commodities program. In 5 months, the SFPC facilitated meetings to help partner organizations (PACE in New Bedford, United Way of Greater New Bedford's Hunger Commission, Citizens for Citizens in Fall River, St. Martin Food Pantry in New Bedford, Catholic Social Services Solanus Food Pantry in New Bedford, MOLIFE Food Pantry in New Bedford) to bring in 942 cases or roughly 17,000 pounds of USDA Commodities food from GBFB to their pantries, increasing the amount of food they had to offer the community. In July, PACE took over leading this effort from the SFPC. To date, this program has brought roughly 1,800 cases or 33,500 pounds of food into the Southcoast food relief efforts.

SFPC Policy Priorities and Status of Bills:

1. **The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).** Each year, we advocate for making HIP a permanent part of the budget. Since 2017, it has not been fully funded resulting in the need for supplemental budgets throughout the year. We advocated for funding at \$25 Million for FY 2025, but the final approved budget was for \$15 Million. We wrote letters to legislators, provided testimony at hearings, engaged the Food Equity Advisors in writing testimony, organized a HIP Lobby Day with other state advocates, and continued to engage the SFPC Members-at-Large to contact their legislators.

2. **The Equity in Agriculture Bill.** The SFPC advocated for the bill, writing legislators asking for support, and providing written testimony at the hearing. It was enfolded into the Economic Development Bill, but it is not clear if it passed this month or was signed by the Governor.

3. **Farm-to-School FRESH Grant Bill.** The SFPC provided written testimony to support this bill in 2023, we contacted our legislators in 2024 and sent two action alerts to support funding this bill in 2024. We also sent a letter to the House and Senate Ways and Means committees asking them to fund this bill. The Fiscal Year 2025 conference committee budget proposal included \$1 million for food literacy. This will be split into \$750,000 for the FRESH Grant and \$250,000 for the school wellness coaching program.

4. **Protecting our Soil and Farms from PFAS Contamination.** The SFPC advocated with local legislators, submitted written testimony during a hearing, and sent an action alert to SFPC Members-at-Large to support the bill. The Joint Committee on Agriculture supported the bill but the bill did not move out of the House Ways and Means.

5. **Encouraging Donations to People in Need:** We wrote our legislators asking for support, submitted written testimony during the hearing, and sent an action alert asking SFPC Members-at-Large to contact their legislators to support the bill. This was included into an Omnibus Bill in which the SFPC wrote the Senate Ways and Means and the Senate President asking for support. Due to the conservative fiscal climate, it was not moved forward.

6. **State-Funded SNAP for MA Immigrants:** In 2023, we wrote to legislators asking for support and submitted written testimony in a hearing. In 2024, we sent letters to the House and Senate Ways and Means asking for funding. We sent an action alert to the SFPC Members-at-Large asking for funding. This bill did not get funded.

7. **Food System Budget programs:** We advocated for the following with legislators and asked SFPC Members-at-Large to take action: Food Policy Council grants (asked for \$250,000 but did not get funded), Buy Locals (asked for \$1 Million but got funded at \$750,000), MEFAP (asked for \$47M got \$37M), Mass in Motion (got \$1M), FSIG (asked \$25 M and got \$25,300,000).