

Notes for the SFPC Quarterly meeting, May 19, 2026

The Southcoast Food Policy Council (SFPC) mission is to convene, connect, and advocate for food system stakeholders to strengthen the regional food system, improve community health, and eliminate food insecurity across the Southcoast.

Working Group Updates

Education & Communication

The working group focuses on engaging the public in understanding the food system.

- **Legislative Issue Briefings ("Lunch & Learns"):** Four sessions were held in February and March to educate and prepare participants for the upcoming budget cycle, including both bill content and related appropriations.
- **Eat Local Challenge:** Expanding from a single weekly email to a daily email format — this year's 21-day challenge will run from July 6 to 26. Goal: encourage participants to eat foods within 200 miles of their homes. Content topics include production, aggregation, distribution, food recovery, and how and where to purchase local food. Register by [clicking here](#). A Google shared [document with flyers and social media](#) content was circulated; members were asked to promote the challenge within their own networks.
- **Annual Food Summit** — September 24, 2026: Theme: Partnerships — highlighting cross-sector collaborations that produced successful food system outcomes. Informed by success stories gathered through the Community and Agricultural Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) process. Registration link forthcoming.
- **FarmCoast Documentary:** In partnership with filmmaker Ethan de Aguiar and Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), the Marion Institute is producing a documentary highlighting our local food producers.

Policy Update:

1. **Farm to School FRESH Grant:** Included in the Senate-passed Massachusetts Farm Bill; not currently in the House Farm Bill version. The House did not pass the \$1 million budget request. Since this meeting, the Senate voted in favor of the \$1 million request. The Budget will be reconciled in the conference committee.
2. **Food Literacy Bill (K–12):** Would require food literacy standards across all Massachusetts schools. Passed out of the Senate committee; the House placed it in the Rules Committee pending review of new graduation standards post-MCAS. Funding was not included on the House side, but included in the Senate budget, which will go to the conference committee to be reconciled.

Food Access

- **Monthly Emergency Food Resource Meetings:** Held on the first Wednesday of each month at 2:00 pm. Targeting food pantries and emergency food relief organizations. Recent focus has included guidance on responding to ICE activity and supporting immigrant community members. Share this meeting with food relief organizations in member networks. Register by [clicking here](#).
- **Southcoast Food Alert:** A listserv connecting over 200 partner organizations. Used to alert the network when surplus food is available, facilitating rapid redistribution. To join, email sfpc@marioninstitute.org.

Policy Update:

1. **Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)** The Budget request of \$29.7 million passed both the House and Senate for FY27; it will proceed to the conference committee.
 - **Massachusetts Farm Bill:** HIP was included in the Senate-passed version; the House version is still pending. Advocacy for the House Farm Bill passage is ongoing. [Click HERE](#) to send a letter to pass the House Farm Bill.

- **Lobby Day:** Food Equity Advisors (people with lived experience of food insecurity) created video testimony, which was presented directly to legislators — described as an effective alternative approach.

2.) **Basic Needs Assistance for MA Immigrant Residents** (AKA State Funded SNAP for MA Immigrants):

Successfully moved out of the Joint Committee and is now consolidated into S.118 Lift Kids Out of Poverty Bill and sits in the Senate Ways and Means.

Capacity Building

- **Aquaculture Policy Coalition:** Steering Committee members are Buzzards Bay Coalition, New Bedford Ocean Cluster, MA Aquaculture Association, Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), and the Marion Institute's SFPC. Join the Aquaculture Policy Coalition by [clicking here](#).
 1. **Coastal Wastewater Infrastructure Financing Commission** addresses aging combined sewer overflows that release nitrogen pollution into Buzzards Bay following storms, triggering aquaculture closures and beach restrictions. The bill has been incorporated into the Environmental Bond Bill, which passed Senate Ways and Means and is now before the House.
 2. **Aquaculture Testing:** Senator Mark Montigny's addition of the Senate budget amendment would fund additional staffing at the Division of Marine Fisheries and its lab, which would help to reduce the post-storm aquaculture closure periods. This passed the Senate Budget and will go to the conference committee for budget reconciliation. Significant relief for aquaculture operators, some of whom have faced up to 200 closure days per year.
- **Community and Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT)** Developed by Indiana University and the North American Food System Network, CARAT is an audit tool that assesses food system resources within a region. Originally piloted in Bristol County, the audit was expanded across all six southeastern Massachusetts counties — Dukes, Nantucket, Barnstable, Norfolk, Bristol, and Plymouth — to ensure consistent data and a shared framework across the region. Community Advisory Boards in each county are currently in the scoring phase, evaluating each indicator to determine whether it represents a regional asset or a gap. Results will be synthesized into the SFPC's 2026 Southeastern Massachusetts Food System Assessment, to be published by the end of the year. The assessment will enable each county to develop its own food action plan while also surfacing common gaps that could inform collective infrastructure decisions or shared state-level policy advocacy.

Policy Update:

- **Donation of Food to Persons in Need** provides a tax credit to farmers, producers, and aquaculture operators who donate food to the emergency food relief system — similar in mechanism to charitable donation deductions for individuals. Full bill calls for a \$25,000 tax credit; the Governor included a \$5,000 credit in the FY26 supplemental budget, which has passed both chambers and is awaiting the Governor's signature. MDAR will develop implementation guidelines once officially enacted. Advocacy will continue to increase the credit amount in FY27.
- **Equity in Agriculture** would create a commission to study and propose legislation to remove barriers for BIPOC farming. This passed the Senate Joint Agriculture Committee and House members, who sent it to the Rules Committee, where it might be incorporated into a moving piece of legislation.

Community Updates

- **Boys & Girls Club of Fall River:** Camp open houses at Camp Welch in Assonet on May 30th and June 6th, 10 am–1 pm. <https://www.fallriverbgc.org/campwelch>
- **Goodwill (Western MA/Berkshires):** Operating a food truck funded through CDBG grants in partnership with Western Massachusetts Food Bank. Currently delivering to 10 sites; expanding to 14 next month and



targeting 18 by summer. Received a \$2,511 roundup donation from Wild Oats Co-op (highest in 14 months). Outreach events are planned for July, August, and October at local farmers' markets to promote SNAP and HIP enrollment.

- **Oakdale Farms/Lane Gardens:** Shared a link to the Massachusetts farmers market directory as markets open for the summer season. <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-grownand-fresher>
- **BAMSI** shared the information about their resource fair: <https://www.bamsi.org/event/dmh-community-resource-fair-2026/>
- **MassHealth** shared a link for the changes from the federal government: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/federal-changes-affecting-masshealth-members>
- Find your local Meat Processor: <http://www.thelivestockinstitute.org/>

Massachusetts Department of Health health equity survey (four questions), particularly relevant for those doing direct community service. Members were encouraged to complete it. <https://forms.gle/dWV7d5egFLf6XoAZ9>