



A Brief Description of the...

Massachusetts Food System Plan

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is engaged in an exciting effort to develop its first comprehensive food system plan since 1974. In August, 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) on behalf of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council (MFPC), seeking consultants to facilitate the development of this plan. The MFPC is a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature and Governor in November, 2010 (MLG Chapter 20 Section 6C).

The RFP indicated that the planning process would involve “a process for stakeholder and agency involvement, an estimated timeline, a draft budget, and a general framework for goals and objectives that will improve Massachusetts’ agricultural economy, enhance the resiliency of the Commonwealth’s food system, and improve the nutritional health of the state’s population.” Consistent with the MFPC’s legislative mandate, the plan will have a heavy, but not exclusive emphasis, on food production in the Commonwealth and the economic viability of the agricultural sector.

After a selection process, MFPC chose the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and three partnering organizations (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, and Massachusetts Workforce Alliance) to facilitate the planning process and help to draft the plan.

The plan will develop goals and strategies to:

- 1) Increase production, sales and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods;
- 2) Create jobs and economic opportunity in food and farming, and improve the wages and skills of food system workers;
- 3) Protect the land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing, and ensure food safety; and
- 4) Reduce hunger and food insecurity, increase the availability of healthy food to all residents, and reduce food waste.

These strategies will include legislative, regulatory, and budgetary recommendations, especially but not exclusively on the state level, as well as actions that can be taken by the federal and local governments, the business community, community-based or non-profit institutions, and others to advance the goals of the plan. The plan will include indicators for measuring progress and create a web-based tool to share information and promote collaboration among stakeholders.

As the planning process proceeds, participants are asked to consider the issues they bring to the table through the lens of three over-arching questions:

- What steps can we take to grow the economic impact of Massachusetts' farm and food enterprises?
- How can we increase access to fresh, healthful and affordable food, in ways that achieve greater equity along lines of race, class, and income?
- How can Massachusetts increase the ability of the food system to withstand stresses related to climate change?

To advise the planning team and to guide the development of the Food System Plan, the MFPC endorsed a group of Project Advisors comprising approximately 30 members representing a wide array of interests and expertise. The MFPC further appointed a smaller Executive Committee to meet more frequently and to provide the planning team with more timely oversight. Most members of the Executive Committee serve as the “lead” of one of the project’s Working Groups and subgroups, which have primary responsibility for developing the key findings and recommendations in the planning process.

The following is a list of Working Groups:

Food Access, Security, and Health
 Inputs, Waste Management, and Nutrient Recovery
 Processing
 Production (including four subgroups: Farming, Fisheries, Land, and Urban Agriculture)
 Wholesale and Retail Distribution

The planning process involves significant public engagement, including regional meetings, an academic conference, and interviews with key stakeholders. MAPC has subcontracted with two additional organizations (Fertile Ground and the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness) to assist with outreach and engagement for often under-represented groups.

The planning process also has a significant research component. Much of the research is focused on gathering and synthesizing existing data and analysis on food production, distribution, and needs in Massachusetts. Planning team members, with the assistance of several renowned research institutions in the Commonwealth, are supplementing existing analyses with additional research in several key topic areas.

The Massachusetts Food System planning process is generously funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Kendall Foundation, the Merck Family Fund, the John Merck Fund, the Island Foundation, the Boston Foundation and the EOS Foundation.

Anyone interested in learning more about the planning process, contributing to the plan, or participating in this effort is encouraged to seek further information or to contact the planning team at www.mafoodplan.org.