

**Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
DRAFT**

DATE: May 28th

TIME: 10:00-11:30 AM

LOCATION: Conference Room A, Rhode Island Department of Administration

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Janet Coit, Director, Department of Environmental Management (DEM); Nicole Alexander Scott, MD, Director, Department of Health (HEALTH); Michael DiBiase, Director, Department of Administration (DOA); Aleatha Dickerson, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA); John Rogers, Department of Corrections (DOC); Lissa DiMauro, Associate Director, Department of Human Services (DHS); Becky Bessette, RI Department of Education (RIDE)

ATTENDEES: Joe Masino, DEM; Ken Payne, RI Food Policy Council; David Dadekian, Eat Drink RI; Katie Kleyla, Eat Drink RI; Ann Barrone, HEALTH; Dan Majcher, DOA; Gemma Gorham, Brown University; Sheila Brush, Grow Smart RI; Leo Pollock, RI Food Policy Council; Molly Bledsoe, Farm Fresh RI (FFRI); Thea Upham, FFRI; Paula Gill, FFRI; Kimberly Clark, FFRI; Allison Rogers, DOA; Amy Nunn, RIPHI; Caitlin Towey, RIPHI/Rhody Food; Ken Ayers, DEM; Chris Ausura, HEALTH; Valerie Ethier, HEALTH; Mikayla Anthes, FFRI; Octavia Abell, Office of the Governor; Georgina Sarpong, FFRI; Aleatha Dickerson, DEA; Sher Griffin, FFRI

1. Approval of September 30, 2014 Meeting Minutes

- Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:07 AM.
- Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott called for a motion to approve the September 30, 2014 meeting minutes.
- Aleatha Dickerson motioned to modify the minutes to reflect additional information on the activities of the Division of Elderly Affairs in cooperation with Farm Fresh RI to increase redemption of senior farmers market coupons, and stated that she had provided these edits to Chris Ausura.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott called for any additional modifications to the meeting minutes, and hearing none asked that Chris Ausura modify the minutes to reflect the language requested by DEA.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott called for a motion to approve the minutes with the amendment requested by DEA.
- Director Coit motioned, and Dr. Alexander-Scott seconded the motion.

2. Introductions

- Dr. Alexander Scott requested the Council members introduce themselves and speak to any goals they may have for the Council moving forward.

- Aleatha Dickerson, Designee for Director Fogarty, stated that they are actively working to increase the amount of local food used by their caterers.
- Lissa DiMauro, attending on behalf of Director DePena, was interested in developing more clarity on how DHS fits in, and how they can maximize the impact of their programs, such as SNAP, to impact the local food system and support the community.
- John Rogers, Designee for Director Wall, stated that he was impressed with the work that this Council is doing in conjunction with the RI Food Policy Council and Farm Fresh RI.
- Becky Bessette, Designee of Commissioner Gist, stated that they are dedicated to improving the quality of food in both childcare and school settings, and increasing their utilization of local foods.
- Director Coit, DEM, welcomed Michel Nischan and stated that she would hold her comments until further in the meeting as she was scheduled to present.
- Director DiBiase, DOA, stated that DOA had multiple touchpoints for the food system including purchasing, human resources/health, and that health care costs are a priority for him. He plans to focus efforts on nutrition and health outcomes of state employees.
- Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Director of HEALTH, stated that from her perspective food as a driver for economy is a core element of public health, and falls within one of the department's key priorities to address the social and environmental determinants of health. Additionally addressing food insecurity and access among vulnerable populations within the state is a Department goal which requires a cross cutting approach like the one this Council is taking.

3. Public Comments Received

- Dr. Alexander Scott called for comments from the public.
- Ken Payne, Chair of the RI Food Policy Council, stated that there is no better time to address the issues of food and the food system than now. It is a centerpiece in the Governor's economic development plan, and food is instrumental in human wellbeing. It is a pre-condition for developing an economy, not the outcome of a developed economy; an input, not an output. He stated that he would fully support the IFNPAC as it moves forward with its work.
- Amy Nunn, Executive Director of the RI Public Health Institute, stated that their mission is to promote health equity, and reduce health disparities. They have formal relationships with RI HEALTH and Brown University; and they were recently awarded a grant from USDA to address food insecurity and food swamp. Those efforts will help to increase the impact of SNAP dollars through an incentive program designed to bring food to the consumer.
- Kim Clark, FFRI, stated that she has worked collaboratively with numerous staff and leadership within each of the Council members agencies, and that she was very happy to

have the opportunity to work in Rhode Island where this is such a high level of support within state government for this sort of work.

4. New Council Membership Welcome

- Dr. Alexander-Scott called on Director Coit to provide some background information on the IFNPAC, and it's actions to date.

- Director Coit stated that the Council was formed in 2012. Since formation the Council has expanded, and has done a tremendous amount of work to move the RI Food system forward. This has occurred thanks to the support of the organizations and staff in the room, and that partnership is the key to the success of this group moving forward.

The Council originated by simply having these different state agencies speaks to the impact their organization has on the RI food system. This has changed the approach to policy and has created opportunity to use food to grow the economy. Even with small increases to the percentage of food that comes from local sources we can see significant economic growth, and with only 1% of food consumed coming from local sources, there is only room to grow.

This meeting coincided with the activities of Agriculture Day at the State House, and she encouraged everyone to go after the meeting to see a sampling of the diversity of industry Rhode Island's agriculture sector has to offer

Over the past year the Council has taken many actions towards the goal of increasing local food access. There were local provisions written into the most recent state contract for food, MPA 435; and now we're working with the winning vendors to identify local sources for products, and gather the data necessary to continue to grow the percentage of food that the state buys from local sources.

The Council recently voted to adopt the Food Solutions New England 50% regional by the year 2060; thereby committing to a substantial plan of growth for the local and regional food system over the next 45 years.

The Governor and First Gentleman extremely interested in agriculture, food security, and using food as an economic driver. However, there is a need for the development of a food systems strategic plan, and she requested this Council consider that as a priority for the coming year(s).

Director Coit further stated that the expansion of this Council has been extremely positive, but there was still a need to further address gaps. Specifically, she called on the Council to look at options such as the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act grants, and using that as a model to engage Commerce RI to identify specific loan and funding programs to support the needs of the sector/system.

She closed her comments by thanking Ken Ayars, Chief of the Division of Agriculture, for his dedication to the food system and the agriculture sector in Rhode Island.

- Dr. Alexander-Scott thanked Director Coit for her presentation and called for discussion on her presentation as well as the current workplan outlining the Council's actions and priorities to date. She seconded Director Coit's call to develop a statewide action plan for the growth of the RI food system, and opened the floor for discussion after reading the current workplan aloud for the benefit of the general public in attendance.
- Director DiBiase commented that he felt there was a distinct lack of target or focus on the cafeteria within DOA as there was a considerable impact that food served within that cafeteria has on employee health.
- Lissa DiMauro stated that she wasn't positive, but thought that the vendor for the cafeteria was part of the Office of Rehabilitation Service's Blind Vendor program. She then asked if someone could clarify whether action had been taken in this area in the past.
- Chris Ausura stated that the Council took action in its first year to address the vendors and the cafeteria services, but the approach taken at that time was unsuccessful due to a lack of unanimous participation from all vendors within the Powers Building. The cafeteria vendor and the vendors in concessions and vending were different as the vending and concession vendors were part of the Blind Vendor program, but the cafeteria vendor was not. Internally staff has been working to address this issue, and provide a better platform for the inclusion of cafeteria and vending services in the work of this Council, and that the IFNPAC staff and other state staff from DOA and HEALTH were planning to meet on 5/29/15 to discuss inclusion of nutrition/healthy food criteria in the RFP for the cafeteria contract. Following that meeting the IFNPAC staff could develop a motion for the Council membership to vote on regarding vending and concessions within state buildings if this was the direction the Council members requested of the staff.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott stated that she wanted to highlight the priority of developing infrastructure for the support of the IFNPAC moving forward. She stated that the current staff person within HEALTH, Chris Ausura, has committed to moving this work forward, but as the Council continues on with its work the identification of resources to support the work in an official capacity was necessary.
- Director Coit stated that she felt that the inclusion of Commerce RI moving forward would be a critical next step for the work of this Council, and called for a presentation from Commerce RI at the next meeting to bring them into the fold.
- Director Coit further stated that to make this work sustainable there needs to be staff devoted to coordinating and completing the work of this Council. This should be a high priority as the Council takes steps forward, and identification of startup funding can be leveraged to create a more long term funding source.
- Director Coit spoke about the current workplan, and how this workplan should be harnessed to create a more robust strategic plan. She called on the RI Food Policy Council to update the IFNPAC on the current status of the Local Food Report.

- Ken Payne stated that the RI Food Policy Council is nearing completion of a robust report on a town by town analysis of the number of food systems establishments, retail locations, farms, food processors and more. He stated that this mapping project would be the basis for the development of policy to support growth at a community by community level. He stated that the report would be available to the Council by it's next meeting in September.
- Director Coit stated that the work that Ken and the Food Policy Council has taken on this report, and the work that Tom Sprouls completed mapping agriculture industry in the state, is a solid foundation for the development of actionable items for the Raimondo administration to invest publicly and privately to grow the RI Food Sector.
- Becky Bessette stated that she supports the inclusion of federal food programs in the development of a local food system, but is concerned about the penetration of these programs into the communities who need them the most. She asked if there are better ways to coordinate the programming which occurs to increase or bolster food security; but no answer was provided.
- Director Coit stated that before moving to the next item she would like to recognize Chris Ausura for doing so much of the leg work for the Council, and to introduce Joe Masino who is DEM's new legislative liaison. She stated that Joe will be working as a second staff person from DEM working on IFNPAC related policy development.

5. Presentation from Michel Nischan

- Dr. Alexander-Scott called on Sheri Griffin of Farm Fresh Rhode Island to introduce Michel Nischan.
- Sheri Griffin stated that she was the Co-Executive Director of Farm Fresh RI, and that Chef Michel Nischan of Wholesome Wave and FFRI have been working together since 2009 to promote the SNAP farmers market incentive program. Their partnership came out of the desire to see greater access of healthy local items for SNAP recipients. Michel is a three time James Beard awardee, celebrity chef, and co-founder of Wholesome Wave. Their organization has grown from a small non-profit working to increase food access for SNAP to a national advocate for the food system.
- Michel Nischan thanked the Council for inviting him and spoke about how he started his work in food as the child and grandchild of a farming family, and that his knowledge of food led him into the culinary industry. He started the first farm to table restaurant in Milwaukee; and after his son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes he began to better understand the impact of food on human health. Over the course of his learning about type 1 diabetes he began to learn more about the impact of type 2 diabetes, and how much of an impact access and affordability was on the prevalence of diabetes in low income areas which lead to his involvement in the creation of Wholesome Wave.
- Michel presented on the work of Wholesome Wave, and the impact of local food on the development of a local economy. Copies of his full presentation are available upon request.

- Michel concluded his presentation and asked for any questions from those in attendance.
- Director Coit thanked him for his presentation and work, and stated that her takeaways were how important one relationship can be to the creation of an initiative, and that small actions like calling your representatives in congress, can have immense impacts on the decisions of policy makers when those calling are provided the powerful information about the benefit of this work.
- Director Coit then asked him what direction he would recommend this Council take as considers the coming year. Specifically what opportunities does he feel would provide the State the greatest return on it's investments
- Michel responded that what they have seen in San Diego was that County leadership came together and put approximately \$150,000 per year of County money into incentive programs to support local food incentives. This money is being leveraged to draw down USDA FINI funds to make the SNAP dollar go farther in the local marketplace. These are at their core economic development strategies, and creating line items to support them will keep money in the local economy.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott asked whether there were additional funds available to take steps towards aligning what we are already doing with what he is proposing is possible.
- Michel responded that pursuing line items in the budget to create a sustainable funding stream for these efforts would be a core strategy in the pursuit of federal funds moving forward. He stated that there is a shift to diversify the funds into states, and that states who have the infrastructure in place to move this work forward will have an advantage when it comes to drawing down federal dollars. The philanthropic community played an immense role in this as it was developed, but the actions of organizations like the National Conference of Mayors has accelerated this work. Moving forward, a state like Rhode Island could position itself as the leader in the development of this infrastructure, and position itself in a way that they would be a at the top of the funding list for federal dollars. It requires commitment on behalf of the states, but once that commitment is there it demonstrates to the federal delegation that this work is there to stay.
- Leo Pollock asked how Wholesome Wave manages avoiding the race to the bottom mentality of food access and food costs.
- Michel responded that although there was pressure during the development of the most recent farm bill to diversify this and include all fruits and vegetables, they pressed to keep the local component in the bill to support the economic benefits local food creates. This was due in large part to the efforts of state and county director's of agriculture advocating for the importance of the local food economy. Adam Putnam was a key ally in this effort, and upon hearing about the availability of SNAP double bucks decided that Florida needed to invest to make major strides in the utilization of local foods. Florida received \$4.4 billion dollars in SNAP funds in 2014 and less than 1% of that was spent on locally produced products. His goal is to increase that percentage to 20-25%, which would create approximately \$1 billion

dollars in agriculture economy alone. USDA studied the SNAP population and determined that the SNAP consumer base is a nearly \$160 billion per year retail market; investments in this population to increase their buying power keeps money in the local economy.

- Director Coit asked if there were specific opportunities around seafood, both at the levels of sustainability and affordability.
- Michel stated that Tom Menino made the decision that the Bonus Bucks funding would be available to be used to support the purchasing of fish at all Boston farmers markets. Now most markets that accept SNAP, also have fish available, and has increased sales for “Red’s Best”, the seafood purveyor for Boston farmers markets, by 15-18%. Michel stated that the City money and commitment really opens the door to possibilities, and these incentives open the door for low income clients to purchase fish.
- Director Coit asked how they worked around the refrigeration issue.
- Michel responded that they are freezing the fish, and keeping it frozen at the market.
- Micheal then stated that with products like fish, and other moderate to high cost items the consumer takes a risk that when they spend the money on something that is “healthy” that isn’t familiar to their family. If they buy it and it doesn’t get eaten they have spent a lot of their food budget for something ended up being wasted. This is where the incentive can really help to bridge the gap of food choice, and help families move away from the processed food towards more local products by mitigating that risk. Partner that with things like cooking demonstrations, and the possibilities are immense.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott hearing no other questions thanked Michel for the eye opening presentation, and providing a great direction for this Council to follow.

6. Annual Report

- Dr. Alexander-Scott called for a motion to approve the submission of the draft report to the RI General Assembly as part of the statute which formed the Council. She stated that the report was changed very little from the previous year as an effort to satisfy the requirement of the statute quickly to accommodate for the delay stemming from changes to State leadership under the new Administration. She called for a more robust report to be developed over the coming months to inform the General Assembly of the actions and priorities of the Council moving forward.
- Director DiBiase motioned to accept the draft report.
- Director Coit asked for clarification if this was to approve this report as it currently stands.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott confirmed this was the case.
- Director Coit then requested that a cover letter be added to the report prior to submission stating that this report was submitted during a time of transition; and a more robust report

would be forthcoming which would provide greater detail of the direction of the Council and its actions to date.

- Director Coit then seconded the motion to approve the report.
- Dr. Alexander-Scott agreed that a letter would be drafted by RI HEALTH, and requested Chris Ausura ensure a letter containing Director Coit's comments be drafted and included in submission.
- Director Alexander-Scott called for a vote on the motion, and the motion was unanimously approved.
- Director DiBiase asked that the Council review and consider finding and recommendation 4.a. and the language contained to acknowledge that parts of the language may need to be revised in the future to reflect the legal limitations of the agencies represented in the Council; specifically the call to "substantially increase the State's purchasing of healthy, locally produced food". He stated that he supported the statement, and did not motion for a change, but he wanted to mention that the Council can only do what they are permitted to do under State Law, and there may be legal limitations.
- Dr. Alexander- Scott summarized the outcomes of the meeting, and that the items for the next meeting would be to include Commerce RI for a presentation on the food sector from their perspective, an update on the food report from the FPC, an update on the progress on the cafeteria contract, and an update or agenda item to begin the strategic planning process.

7. Adjournment

- Dr. Alexander-Scott called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.
- Director DiBiase motioned to adjourn.
- Director Coit seconded the motion to adjourn
- Dr. Alexander-Scott adjourned the meeting at 11:34 AM.