



Agricultural Advisory Board Minutes

Remote Meeting

May 13, 2020

4 PM

Legislative Staff Attending: Josselyn DeLeon Estrada, Michael Botelho, Laura Maul, Jennifer Myers

Attending Board members: David Sears, Tony Beattie, Lucy McKain, Sherrill Rosoff, Ken Hartlage

Farmers: Phil Lenker, Matt and Sarah Armin, Emily Piper

Meeting came to order at 4 PM.

A review of local farming challenges in the area due to the coronavirus include;

- a. Kimball Farm: normal flow of customers, covid-19 safety precautions has cut revenue 30%. Carl Hills will be boxing produce (instead of trucking to Boston) as an alternative strategy.
- b. Local dairy farmers are seeing huge cut in milk weight threatening ability to sustain their herds. One alternative is to encourage local buying through home delivery services, farm stands and stores.
- c. Costs of farm labor is continuing to rise
- d. Application assistance for covid-19 farm relief (CFAP) needed to meet deadlines. This relief package promises cash reimbursement for lost revenues. Other assistance from SBA is in form of loans.

The commercial kitchen concept for the Peter Fitz as well as an indoor Farmer's market would be considered value added resources for local farmers. Must continue an outreach to local farm to table restaurants that would be interested in buying local produce directly. Local food pantries might benefit from federal buy-back programs that redirect produce to them. State has the MEFMP program which provides money to local food banks to purchase local foods - currently \$1 - 1.5 million allocated to that program. (Note: contact Susan McCarthy to find out demand for food from Pepperell seniors, PACH).

Michael Botelho (MDAR): MDAR is very aware of the Covid-19 impacts on farming throughout the State. Have been issuing guidance documents for farmers and local Boards of Health, and providing Covid-19 testing services at two locations (Big E in Springfield). Big picture concerns are: supply chain collapse, depressed pricing, (cheap produce arriving into NE from the South); sustaining local farm stands

to encourage buying local produce, lack of distribution infrastructure to support farming statewide (cooler space, storage capacity, extra trucking, for example).

Lucy McKain noted that some grants require pre-approvals before a farmer can apply.

Michael Botelho said that MDAR is in discussion with Governor Baker regarding setting up a task force on food resiliency. Regarding pre-approval, state programs usually have minimal requirements and don't usually require pre-approvals. Finally, in regards to the Ag Board's interest in a commercial kitchen, farmers market, food Hub - the Foods Venture Program is set up as a reimbursement program to help localities establish any and all of the above. The State really wants to fund them.

He also noted that there are efforts at the federal level to push block grants to states but he doesn't know where that's going. Only three farms in the state received money from the first round of federal money through the PPE program.

David Sears talked about the problems with processing meat - there are serious local supply chain problems now due to bottlenecks with slaughtering and processing. Michael Botelho responded by saying that MDAR has not involved itself in this issue - its a federal USDA problem. We should reach out to the Farm Bureau but agreed this is a serious problem - and circles back to earlier comments about the lack of sufficient infrastructure in the state. MDAR is trying to leverage the Covid-19 experience to help farmers.

The meeting ended abruptly due to hackers.

Submitted by:
Sherrill Rosoff