



Agricultural Advisory Board

Remote Meeting Minutes

June 3, 2020

4 - 5:30 PM

Attending: Ken Hartlage, Tony Beattie, Lucy McKain, David Sears, Sherrill Rosoff,
Guests: Susan McCarthy, Renee D'Argento

Meeting was called to order at 4 PM.

Susan McCarthy provided an overview of PACH. There are 150 families in Pepperell that come to PACH for produce (first Quarter 2020 statistics); that's about 400 people (on average) using PACH for their food needs every Quarter. Stimulus checks given out due to Covid have helped considerably. PACH also goes to the Greater Boston Food Bank to acquire food (PACH transports food via van). They've also seen an increase in Meals on Wheels at the Senior Center. Susan said she didn't know what Townsend does regarding a local food pantry, but PACH is open to residents from Dunstable. She said SNAP benefits have increased during Covid (Healthy Initiatives Program or HIP is an automatic benefit for SNAP recipients designed to provide recipients with locally grown food). Susan asked whether a Farmer's Market would come back to Pepperell; PACH uses coupons to purchase food at local Farmers Markets (that's probably the HIP program - SR). Susan noted that it's unclear what the need for PACH is in our town; there's a lack of information about PACH in town that may prevent people from using their services. She wondered whether some sort of question on future Town Census or a survey monkey done at Town Meeting, would help the community understand what the demand/need for food security is in our town.

Tony Beattie noted that the Ag Board would love to work with PACH; opening a commercial kitchen and farmer's market at the Peter Fitz is a goal. We should look at funding to bring fresh produce from local farms to PACH - cited the Greater Lowell Community Foundation as an example of serving underserved populations needing food. Susan noted that they have "PACH kids" - about 119 kids - who are served by the food pantry.

Discussion turned to funding for a commercial kitchen at the Peter Fitz. Food Ventures program needs up front money from the town (it's a reimbursement program). We also need to locate a manager for the kitchen.

Lucy McKain asked whether the Peter Fitz kitchen has been inspected by the Board of Health and Building Inspector? Has anyone approached the Board of Health and spoken with them?

Questions arose about the business plan for a commercial kitchen and what the Collaborative's role would be. Would it want to manage the kitchen or just lease space? What would be the costs per square foot to lease?

Lucy McKain mentioned the FoodBank of Western Massachusetts as a possible source of information.

David Sears felt that we were a long way from making this happen for the Peter Fitz. although he's supportive. His more immediate problem is getting his beef processed during Covid times. He's running into slaughterhouse problems; USDA can't keep up; meat processing is highly regulated; 3-4 weeks ago everything stopped processing. Beef is a bigger problem than pork; chicken still okay because there's an exemption in the State right now for chicken. He believes the USDA should allow in-state slaughterhouses to take up the slack - this is a regulatory problem and labor shortage.

Tony Beattie asked: what is a state slaughter house? David responded that it's a state licensed facility that can slaughter and process meat - and more willing to do the processing - but David (and others) can't sell the meat that's processed through these facilities because it is stamped "not for sale" in the wholesale market. To get around that problem, he (and others) can sell small retail cuts directly to consumers who ask for them. David has back orders from customers for his pork but he can't sell them meat because he can't get them processed through USDA approved slaughterhouses.

Beef is the most problematic; 85% of beef nationally is controlled by four companies - and none of the slaughtering and processing is about food safety.

Discussion turned to informing our town about the issues our farmers are facing - should we do a presentation to the Select Board? Review what our farmers are doing, and what protections are in place at the State level that we need to see reflected in our local zoning?

Lucy McKain suggested a local Farmers Day to increase town awareness. Could offer raffle tickets and/or gift certificates from local restaurants, and coordinate with an Autumn Festive around the town. Sherrill and Lucy can work on this project.

Meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Submitted by Sherrill Rosoff