



Notes from 2020 listening sessions conducted in developing *Massachusetts' Local Food System: Perspectives on Resilience and Recovery*

10/27/2020

The following is a compilation of comments made during the listening sessions, as well as those submitted by respondents upon review of the initial list of notes. Items that received broad support were integrated into the report. In many cases the items on this list provide detail and operational suggestions to the broader recommendations in the report. In some cases they represent oppositional perspectives expressed by participants in the process.

Where appropriate, substantially similar items were combined. This list is offered as a record of the breadth of perspectives that informed this process, and to stimulate further discussion about how to best move toward collective goals. Inclusion on this list does not represent endorsement by the Collaborative or any other participating organization or individual.

The final report is available at: <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/2020perspectives/>

Eliminating Food Insecurity

Climate change will worsen food insecurity in Massachusetts and worldwide.

- The state should pass comprehensive climate legislation like the Green New Deal for MA that will help build an equitable, resilient and sustainable local food system.

Wealth inequality is an overarching, systemic issue that shapes what food insecurity looks like and will continue to in the future. Policy change takes a long time.

- The state should adopt a more progressive tax policy and use the revenue generated to address historic inequities and invest in communities, such as Raise Up MA's recovery campaign proposal.
- Focus on the root causes of hunger, not food pantries and food banks.
- Food rescue and donation are trying to fill an existing gap. Even if hunger is eliminated, food rescue serves an important role to create a sustainable food system, as excess food should be put towards their highest value: feeding people.

Structural racism has created and exacerbated food insecurity, resulting in a higher rate of chronic illness in communities of color while healthcare coverage remains lower.

- The state should enact comprehensive healthcare reform for a more racially equitable system, such as single payer.

- BIPOC communities have been systemically pushed out of/away from farm land ownership and many BIPOC people are unable to farm now due to the price of land and lack of land access. Reparations, or providing land to BIPOC farmers at reduced or little cost, could be one method for the state to address structural racism and increase community food sovereignty and security.

The cost of food at the point of sale does not reflect the real costs to produce food and leads to inequities in who can afford food, particularly local food.

- State and federal governments should realign their priorities so the food system is focused on sustainability, equity, and resilience, rather than economic efficiency.
- Bring dignity back to food systems work through a living wage.

There is a lack of good data about who is hungry and where they live. Information rapidly changes on available food security programs that makes printed resources quickly lose value.

- The state should begin to track hunger data by aggregating data from benefit programs, Food is Medicine programs, schools, pantries, food banks, emergency room visits and measuring long term impacts of food insecurity to set a baseline that can be improved on so benefit programs are having the intended impact. The state should also coordinate a centralized information repository that will be monitored and updated as needed.
- Use data to see the increases of SNAP applications, UI applications, and pantry participation by zip code to see disparities that should be addressed.

Anti-hunger programs like SNAP do not provide adequate resources to allow recipients to eat a healthy diet. Recipients struggle to understand and keep up with the required paperwork for programs, leading to some dropping off of programs. Food security programs should be designed with multiple goals in mind (e.g. reducing food insecurity and supporting local food systems) without losing their primary purpose - feeding people.

- Resources should be given directly to low income households to spend as they need.
- The goals of the emergency food system should be to move away from parallel infrastructures for feeding poor people to making sure people have the funds they need to buy food where everyone else does.
- The government should increase benefit levels and poverty level cut-offs, and widen eligibility to include all residents.
- The state government should create a simplified universal application in easy to understand, translated languages for all benefits, with adequate staff to provide application assistance at all levels of benefits.. The state should create a central database that a client can submit all financial data needed for each program to, with a standard release form that public and nonprofit organizations can use to access the data required for applicants.
- The federal government should pass the Heroes Act and immigration reform, and mandate hazard pay for food chain workers (grocery store workers, processing facility workers, restaurant workers, farmworkers etc.).

Municipalities have had to set up or are considering setting up their own, parallel food security programs to address the need in their community because means testing and limited eligibility excluded many residents from accessing needed resources.

- Anti-hunger stakeholders should educate municipal decision makers about the economic importance of full SNAP enrollment and usage, and engage them in federal advocacy to improve SNAP.

Food security initiatives sometimes confuse sustainability with self reliance, ignoring the importance of regional and larger systems.

- Local food system stakeholders should take other bordering state's local food system plans into account when planning new infrastructure, supply chains, etc.

Food system workers, especially BIPOC workers who work in restaurants and on farms, are not as well protected during the COVID-19 crisis as other workers.

- The government (state and federal) should coordinate to provide adequate personal protective equipment to all.
- The state should pass rent/mortgage forgiveness to avoid a wave of evictions and foreclosures.
- The government should reinstate the \$600 per week pandemic unemployment assistance program, and make *Pandemic Unemployment Assistance* available to more workers.
- The state government should consider a jobs program to jumpstart COVID-19 recovery.
- All workers should be paid a living wage, have paid sick leave, and easy access to quality, affordable child care.
- Health insurance shouldn't be tied to employment, nor should the cost burden be put on farm owners.

Those with lived food insecurity and low paying food system work experience are not involved in food systems advocacy work and NGO program development.

- Funders should pay for appropriate stipends for clients' oral storytelling and other work that draws on their expertise.

The healthcare system, including the oral health system, needs to be better connected with community partners and the local food system.

- The state should fund community health centers to hire additional staff to coordinate health care and food systems partnerships.
- The state should enhance the education of hospital workers, primary care providers, dietitians, oral health professionals, and more actors in the health care system around issues such as food insecurity and nutrition, and their roles in providing screening, referrals, and interventions.
- Community health centers should carry up-to-date information on available food access resources for community members who may need them, including on Food is Medicine

programs that can assist in preventing, managing and treating diet-related chronic conditions.

- New laws and regulations should be inclusive of medically necessary diets.
- The state should work to protect and expand the Flexible Services Program to ensure reliable funding streams to sustain health care and nutrition services partnership.
- The state should direct resources to Food is Medicine research that evaluates the impact of that programming on health outcomes and health care costs.
- The state should create new funding streams that support community-based organizations in providing nutrition services in partnership with health care.

Transportation is a barrier to accessing food for low income residents who may not have their own vehicle and so rely on inconsistent or minimal public transit services. Transportation to bring food to consumers and to get product to market is a barrier for many farm and food access organizations and businesses.

- The state should fully fund regional transit authorities and increase frequency and number of routes.
- The state should make public transit free at the point of service.
- Farmers markets should be located at central locations that can be easily accessed by multiple bus lines in urban and suburban communities. In rural communities other strategies may be more applicable.

Food supply chains face major disruptions that affect many low income consumers. There was a scarcity of food in one chain and oversupply in another leading to economic loss and wasted food.

- The state should incentivize initiatives to localize supply chains and build regional resiliency.

The state was one of the few approved for P-EBT and did a valiant job standing this program up as quickly as possible. However, there was a lot of confusion around P-EBT eligibility, pinning process, hotline information, and receiving the card.

- Funders and anti-hunger stakeholders play an important role, but need to be accountable to the public through real oversight and evaluation mechanisms. Overall the process needs to be well-coordinated and responsive to impacted communities, not funders or elected officials.

Grassroots efforts have helped to ramp up food production in school, community, and backyard gardens, but do not have sustainable funding.

- Municipalities should pass urban agriculture ordinances and funding to support household and community food production, especially to support immigrant and BIPOC communities, while recognizing that these programs will not solve hunger and that other resources need support as well.
- School districts should institutionalize school gardens in wellness plans required by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

School food should be culturally relevant, healthy, and local, but schools don't have the budgets and capacity to purchase from local producers.

- The state should change its reimbursement model to properly compensate and make it easy for schools to prioritize local purchasing.
- School food distribution systems should be included as a resource in economic planning processes to potentially receive additional resources.
- The state should implement universal free school meals.

Farm to school programs do important work but face an uncertain future due to budget constraints. Home economics and nutrition are not widely included as part of the state's curriculum.

- The state should fund nutrition, cooking and food education in schools.
- Stakeholders should work with teachers' unions and district curriculum directors to begin implementing these topics in classrooms and advocate to add these topics back to the curriculum. These lessons should be grounded in the local food system.

Many neighborhoods lack full service grocery stores and healthy retail options.

- The state should fully fund the MA Food Trust program and release the authorized bond money quickly to build more affordable retail food options statewide.

Addressing Hunger

Engaging and funding communities to do outreach is needed to address the lack of awareness about public and nonprofit assistance programs, especially among those individuals without access to a computer or reliable internet service. Broader outreach is needed beyond online and print resources.

- The state should undertake broader outreach, in partnership with community groups, to let people know about community resources effectively.
- Stakeholders should coordinate resource fairs and resources to hire community outreach workers to continue to share messages about available resources.
- Communities should use school meal distributions to distribute information and resources available.

Community kitchens stepped up to assist during the crisis, but lack sustainable funding.

- The state should provide support for community kitchens, which are shared-use kitchens that can be used either for commercial purpose or by community members for cooking non-commercial or exempt foods or for cooking classes and other related activities. Better support would mean items could be purchased from local producers in bulk, thus further stimulating the local food economy.
- Stakeholders should create an inventory of churches and other commercial kitchens available for community use for classes and bulk production.

Food Is Medicine

Food is Medicine programs have precarious funding streams.

- Community assessments and other evaluations done by stakeholders and state government should include a healthy food system as part of social determinants of health.
- The state should protect and enhance flex services for food is medicine interventions in the next Medicaid waiver and should develop strategies to enhance participation of smaller Community Benefit Organizations (CBOs) across the state, and should develop strategies to better include participation of smaller CBOs with less resources in the flexible services program.
- The state should implement a hub model for referrals and distribution of funds as well as additional technical assistance around legal issues such as protecting patient data

Food is Medicine programs do not always provide services using an equity perspective.

- Food is Medicine programs should include a racial equity lens, informed by tracking health inequities.
- Food is Medicine programs should include diverse communities as food providers, and should serve diverse communities as well.
- MassHealth should reimburse transportation costs related to food access in order to better address social determinants of health.

Information on Food is Medicine services is hard to come by.

- Stakeholders should create a centralized list of resources for Food is Medicine that is supported by the state.

Community health workers serve an important connecting role, but lack sustainable and adequate funding.

- Healthcare institutions should hire community health workers as full-time staff.
- The state should require health plans to employ community health workers at a living wage and ensure an adequate number of workers for each community, especially workers fluent in the languages spoken by residents of the community.

The dietitian community is not diverse.

- Career pathways to increase diversity and trainings on diversity, equity and inclusion should be offered by FIM stakeholders to make the dietitian community more diverse.

There are no safety guidelines for delivered meals and food, potentially leading to wasted food and possible negative health outcomes.

- The state should create guidance for safety protocols for food/meal deliveries.

Transportation

City shuttles have low ridership numbers.

- The state should increase funding so public shuttles can change to allow for routes, hours, and frequency of service.

Emergency food system

The emergency food system had trouble meeting increased demand during the COVID-19 crisis.

- The state should increase funding for Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program, including the local purchasing requirement level, and money for senior meals.
- USDA should waive The Emergency Food Assistance Program requirements during the crisis.
- The state should value non-food bank actors in the emergency food system. Decision makers need to be educated about other infrastructure and necessary solutions.

Distribution of food to homebound consumers can be time consuming and inefficient, and should have additional goals beyond efficiency.

- Emergency food system stakeholders should collaborate to coordinate distribution.
- Emergency food system providers should partner with delivery services that pay workers a living wage.

The USDA's Farmers to Families box program attempted to fill an increased need, but was often inefficient nationally. The program prioritized commodity food; it did not adequately screen applicants for experience and qualifications; it was expensive; it purported to support local farmers but was not structured or managed to support truly local farms, local/regional supply chains, or local emergency food infrastructure; and it created unacceptable bottlenecks (long waits, failure to include last mile distribution despite clear language requiring that) in distribution.

- USDA funding should continue to prioritize local food efforts, but not at the expense of fully funding SNAP.
- Prioritize food access programs that give people in need agency over the foods they receive, rather than predetermined allotments of commodity items.
- Focus on local and regional distribution models for emergency food, rather than federalized systems with higher distribution costs.
- Provide subsidies for farmers to sell local products at affordable prices at farmers markets, farm stands or CSA delivery sites (including online pick up locations and door to door delivery sites) in low-income Gateway City Communities to serve those who do not qualify for federal benefits and are food insecure.

Senior service, medically tailored meal, and emergency food agencies have difficulty supporting seniors who have specific dietary needs.

- Agencies should coordinate between organizations that can provide Food is Medicine services and agencies that serve senior populations.

There is a lack of emergency capacity at food banks, especially in the southeastern part of the state. Items that require refrigeration, such as eggs, meat, and dairy, are harder to supply.

- Cold chain storage capacity and infrastructure in the emergency food system should be increased.
- Pantries should add cold storage capacity.
- The state should prioritize funding for a distribution hub between Cape Cod and Providence to serve that region.
- Increase availability of nutrient-dense, high quality food, especially for food banks.

Food pantries face multiple challenges: reducing stigma and shame among clients, large increases in need, and social distancing requirements.

- Pantries should be located in places where people generally feel welcome by engaging their clients about where those spots are, and by providing multiple locations.
- Pantries should continue to utilize drive through, digital pantry, curbside pickup, and mobile market models to better reach consumers with mobility issues, parents, people with multiple jobs, and others for whom time and physical access are limiting factors to participation. Case work should be carefully coordinated to work with the reduced time spent at pantry locations.
- The state should fund pantries to acquire the appropriate inventory or related management technology and provide culturally sensitive food.
- Pantries should increase healthy eating nudge programs.

Pantries rely on volunteers for operations - many are solely staffed by seniors.

- Municipalities should set up a community volunteer database to pair volunteers with organizational needs.

College students are food insecure and have a hard time accessing benefits like SNAP.

- The state should pass the community college campus *hunger pilot program* and strengthen the provisions included within.
- Universities and colleges should join local food policy councils to increase coordination with community based organizations and share resources.

International students stuck on campus don't have transportation or money to go grocery shopping.

- Colleges and universities should feed and house the students that need to stay on campus even during emergency situations.

Hotlines to connect residents with resources were regularly over capacity during the COVID-19 crisis.

- The state should increase funding for Project Bread's Foodsource hotline and 211.

SNAP

The on and off cycle of SNAP eligibility (commonly known as churn) makes it hard for low income consumers to manage their diets and monthly budgets.

- Improve health care provider knowledge of SNAP and WIC, and enhance application assistance through healthcare.

- The state should provide more transparency and offer check-ins to help SNAP users navigate the various financial and educational resources available to them.

SNAP clients face shame and stigma in using their benefits.

- USDA should strengthen requirements for non-discrimination and local stakeholders should coordinate to provide additional training.
- Launch a Public Service Announcement or similar initiative for SNAP to reframe it in a way that is not the traditional “food stamps” narrative.
- Expand SNAP online purchasing and delivery options to a wider number of retailers, including HIP retailers, to better serve SNAP clients with mobility issues, health concerns, or who may have several jobs that makes access difficult.
- Food insecurity impacts the middle class (or temporarily low-income as evidenced by COVID impacts) as well as those who are low-income. Resources like SNAP/HIP (while not a replacement for robust wage reform) help provide the resources to ensure people gain access to local, healthy food and participate in the local food system.

Restrictions on what SNAP can be used for makes accessing food difficult for those without access to a kitchen and without tools.

- Congress should pass the SNAP Carry Act, which would ease restrictions on SNAP receipts’ ability to purchase prepared foods by enabling recipients to purchase prepared meals from a qualified participating restaurant, deli counter, or store.

All unemployment insurance, including Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and *Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation*, are counted as income when applying for public benefits, making many ineligible for SNAP.

- DTA should not count *Pandemic Unemployment Assistance* or *Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation* as income if it is reinstated.

Only Amazon and Walmart were approved for the SNAP online pilot in Massachusetts.

- USDA should increase the number of retailers in the SNAP online pilot by reducing restrictions, and making it easy for farmers and farmers’ markets to participate as retailers.
- SNAP online ordering, curbside pickup, and delivery should be easier for retailers of all sizes to access.
- The state could mandate curbside pickup so it is easier for vulnerable SNAP recipients to access groceries.

Working remotely has been efficient for WIC, since families do not need to visit state offices to be approved for the benefit.

- The state should continue this practice after the crisis is over to make applying for WIC as easy as possible for recipient families.

HIP

There are continued low HIP participation numbers from clients.

- More effective outreach is needed.

Communication around HIP is difficult and there is not enough deep understanding of the program among clients.

- The state should coordinate with community based organizations to get the message out in culturally relevant ways, and fund stakeholders to do this outreach work.

Suspensions are difficult for customers and farmers to plan around.

- The state should fully fund the program for year-round operation.
- If a suspension needs to happen due to lack of funds, DTA should communicate this at least two months in advance to the legislature, then the public. Not knowing whether HIP will be available at winter farmers markets makes it impossible to make good planting plans months in advance when planting must be done. This is an important customer base that farmers cannot plan around.

There are a limited number of HIP points of sale.

- The state should add more HIP vendors to serve areas that are currently underserved.
- The state should consider ways to keep HIP open to new farmers as current vendors retire and new farmers start businesses.
- The state could consider removing underperforming HIP vendors that are not reaching an appropriate amount of SNAP recipients given their total sales dollars, leaving space for other HIP authorized vendors to reach underserved communities.
- The state should consider ways to make HIP authorization available to farmers that lack reliable internet access.

Consumers are worried about lack of transparency in pricing structure.

- Local food system stakeholders should educate consumers on the real costs of local production and the true cost of unhealthy foods without subsidies.

Many farmers do not train their market staff on welcoming consumers with SNAP benefits in a culturally sensitive way, potentially losing SNAP and HIP dollars and not treating consumers well.

- Food system stakeholders should offer programs on antiracism and providing a welcoming, culturally sensitive environment for all consumers.

Online preordering is inaccessible for many HIP clients.

- HIP vendors should consider adding delivery and curbside pickup to their business models.

Culturally relevant foods are not always available through programs like HIP.

- Farmers should respond to cultural needs of the community and work, potentially in partnership with BIPOC growers, to provide culturally relevant foods.

Not all consumers have access to a farmers' market, farm stand, CSA, or mobile market.

- The state could bring HIP into grocery stores and require those authorized stores to purchase produce from local producers and food hubs that represent smaller growers. Produce that is eligible for the incentive should be easily recognizable to consumers, potentially by including the HIP logo on the display.

HIP is only available for fruits and vegetables.

- The state should extend HIP eligibility to other local foods.

As a result of COVID-19 local farmers had contracts cancelled from major buyers and planted less than usual which may impact market supply and robustness of offerings for consumers with HIP benefits.

- Contracts should be honored and markets and diversion streams such as the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program local food purchasing money should be created and enhanced so no food is wasted and farmers can still earn a profit.

School food

School food service programs face many challenges: having to serve food outside; sourcing food with supply chain interruptions; adhering to packaging requirements; providing adequate refrigeration; delivering food to unhoused families; and low participation numbers at meal sites.

- The state should fully fund school food service programs to meet the needs of all children in each district.
- School districts should partner with organizations that serve housing insecure families to provide wraparound services and deliver meals.

District school food service revenue is down and labor costs are up. Districts are unsure what revenue will look like this year, and how to prepare budgets.

- The federal government should increase funding for school district food service.
- Stakeholders should raise reimbursement rates as an issue to the state's Congressional delegation during the next Farm Bill negotiations.

School food service programs are suffering from a labor shortage.

- The state and funders should support additional funding for school meals and additional reimbursements.

The temporary waiver from USDA to continue free summer meals during the school year will expire at the end of December.

- USDA should extend the waiver for the entire school year.

Significant quantities of food is wasted at school lunch times.

- Districts should extend lunchtime to reduce wasted food once school is back in person.

- USDA should end the milk requirement for summer meals as it is not culturally appropriate for many students.
- Do not end this requirement. Not everyone is going to choose to drink milk but eliminating the requirement would seem to take milk out of the hands of more children who want it. In addition to denying nutritional opportunities to our youth, it would absolutely hurt Massachusetts dairy farmers.

P-EBT

There is still a significant percent of households (10-15% at the time of writing) remaining that have not pinned their P-EBT cards, especially in Gateway cities.

- Earlier, effective outreach was needed from the state and community partners.
- The state should support wraparound services for households with P-EBT to more fully support them.

Nonprofit Sector

Funding for labor is difficult to secure.

- Funders should prioritize supporting operations and labor long-term.

Restrictions and fear funders place on grant recipients around participating in public policy advocacy leads to less powerful and effective advocacy.

- Funders should increase the availability of advocacy training and advocacy grants.

Food security infrastructure grant could only be used for physical capital, not labor and staff needed to build out the projects.

- Future state grant cycles should have clearer language and allow grants to be used for labor costs and used equipment.

Nonprofits are experiencing migration from a sustainable model to providing free services in response to a crisis. Some nonprofits stopped charging for food in order to act as food access points during the COVID-19 crisis. These organizations still have many customers but this model is not sustainable.

- Nonprofits should advocate for systemic changes to address the root causes of hunger.
- Nonprofits should coordinate with emergency food providers to connect customers with resources.

Consumer safety fears and regulations on crowd size have reduced customer base for farmers' markets

- As many already have, markets should set specific senior/immunocompromised hours.
- The state should continue to offer grants for small scale supplies and projects via the food security infrastructure program.
- Farmers market guidance, including winter market guidance, should not be more burdensome than that for indoor groceries.

- Statewide organizations should work on a coordinated marketing push to reassure consumers about the safety of local food points of sale.

Sustaining Food Producers

Not enough land is available for farming, especially for young and beginning farmers, due in part to development pressures.

- Regulations and policies for farmland protection, land sales, leases of public land, and support programs for farmland succession should create mechanisms that support young farmers in accessing land.
- All Regional Planning Agencies should be funded to map available land acceptable for growing food, do soil assessments, and to identify land that young farmers can afford to own or lease.
- Agricultural Conservation Restrictions that lack aspects of the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, like an affirmative guarantee of active production, should be changed.
- Land preservation and Chapter 61A classifications should be allowed on smaller parcels. Current revenue requirements on protected land should be changed to production requirements in order to facilitate food production on small parcels as well as community gardens and other forms of food production that focus on community benefits in lieu of profit.
- Multiple tenure types for farms should be allowed in programs that support farming, not exclusively typical ownership models or picturesque farmsteads.
- Federal regulations and policy should be expanded to support more diverse ownership and tenure options.
- Underwriting standards and policies should support more diverse ownership and tenure options.
- More open land should be made usable for food production through soil remediation, particularly in urban areas.
- State and municipally owned open land and water resources should be made available for agriculture and fishing/aquaculture.
- Support using vacant warehouses for farming.
- More support should be provided for farm succession.

Strategies for land preservation and deed restrictions do not dovetail with access to capital and technical resources for farmers.

- Ensure land protection programs and other supports also provide access to capital and technical assistance for farmers, especially beginning and BIPOC farmers.

Farming systems that use less land are not provided enough operational and educational support to become more sustainable and widespread.

- There should be more research and support for the types of agriculture that can be channeled into intensive use such as container, hydroponic, vertical and rooftop growing systems.

- The MA Department of Environmental Resources considers a greenhouse heated at the level needed for production to be a conditioned area, which is then treated like an inhabited area, which then requires certain costly infrastructure. To meet the code standards of a conditioned building creates barriers to large scale greenhouses being built for production in MA.

There is not enough affordable land for agriculture.

- Funding for Agricultural Preservation Restriction and other land protection programs should be significantly increased.
- The state should implement open space development bylaws with cluster zoning and limits on the percentage of wet and other undevelopable land that can be placed in the preservation portion.
- An alternative should be created to the Community Preservation Act. It is a tough sell in places where the community doesn't have a tradition of popular voting for tax increases.
- The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) should allow the option to purchase at agricultural value as part of EEA restrictions.

Federal funding restricts flexibility and lowers community participation in Agricultural Preservation Restrictions.

- Use significantly more state funds for state/private Agricultural Preservation Restrictions independent of federal funds.
- Enhance the capacity of land trusts to "pre acquire" Agricultural Preservation Restrictions until state funds can be used.
- Federal funding does not support including housing and other critical building infrastructure in APRs.

Agriculture gets less priority than other state grant programs for land, such as the parks grant program.

- State grant and purchase programs for agricultural land should at least be equal in value to the parks program.
- As well as preserving land for agriculture, it is essential that forests are preserved too and this will go some way to ameliorate the ravages of climate change.

Black people have had their property and investments stolen repeatedly via predatory lending and mortgage discrimination and USDA discrimination. Indigenous peoples had their land stolen. Addressing land access inequities is core to addressing racial inequality.

- Have serious conversations about reparations, land access for BIPOC people.
- Intentionally support BIPOC farmers with set asides in all farm support programs.
- Support joint/cooperative ownership models for land and infrastructure purchases and ownership transfers.
- Establish pathways to BIPOC ownership or alternatives to traditional ownership that puts land in BIPOC management.

- Find land trusts that have and/or incent land trusts to have BIPOC focus and incentivize transfer of land to these land trusts.
- Provide financial incentives to white farmers to transfer land to BIPOC farmers.
- Create preferences or percentage requirements for BIPOC purchases within the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program (APR) when APR land is sold.
- Create better access to land for community agriculture in communities of color.
- Create more relationship building opportunities between white and BIPOC farmers as a tool to increase access to farmland for BIPOC farmers.
- Ensure that it is understood that land reparations are not land leases.

People, even the BIPOC community, do not fully understand systemic racism in many cases, as well as how it plays out in individual experience.

- Sponsor diversity, equity, and inclusion and antiracism training for white and BIPOC food producers.

Municipal planning and zoning do not take food into account.

- Agriculture should be allowed in all zoning districts along with “right to farm” provisions.
- Municipalities should not create agriculture-only zoning districts.
- Housing planning should include food considerations, such as yards for gardens and full kitchens for cooking.
- Schools should be built with kitchens that allow scratch cooking to incorporate more local and healthier foods for the kids they serve.
- Public housing regulations that prevent or restrict small farmers living in them from selling their products on site should be changed.
- A statewide land use plan should be created that uses incentives for local participation/compliance in land use plans and zoning best practices.
- Gaps in the local processing and distribution systems, should be addressed in community planning and in development planning and regulation.
- Look at existing economic development plans around the state and figure out what's good, what's working, and what's missing.
- Climate Change and Municipal Vulnerability Program planning should include food production, access, and equity as core elements of the planning.
- Ensure the food system is a core component of every state, regional and local economic development plan. The Berkshire Blueprint, launched in February 2019, is a good example.
- Bring back conservation districts to provide greater capacity and support for cooperative planning, especially for food systems and food related systems planning such flood control and other climate change adaptations.

Laws and policies for lease terms of public land (state and municipal) prevent the long term investment/control required for successfully farming/producing food. “Careful changes to law are needed given the overall legitimacy of not ascribing private benefit from use of public land.”

- Extend the maximum lease terms permitted.
- Identify key properties and designate them for agriculture.
- Identify properties particularly suited for community agriculture.
- Develop a ranking system to prioritize lease assignments that address systemic racism.
- Require an annual report of leased agricultural publicly-owned land.
- Allow for infrastructure improvements on leased land.
- Allow for subdivision of leases of state land.
- Allow for direct sales on site.

Infrastructure

COVID exposed the challenge of enormous amounts of people that do not have access to local food because they don't have a car and/or are at a risk by going out in public.

- Invest in food transportation and delivery infrastructure.

COVID exposed the weaknesses in current transportation systems that do not provide or prioritize access to healthy food.

- Ensure community master planning and programs support transportation infrastructure and systems that provide safe and convenient transportation to locations that provide healthy local food.

Farmers and fishermen cannot produce more food and food hubs can not operate efficiently without cost effective food processing, storage, and transportation capacity.

- Provide public-private investment in food system infrastructure as much as infrastructure that has been supported for other industries.
- Develop more large scale food storage, preservation and processing infrastructure
- Create mobile canning and preservation units that can move from farm to farm.
- Establish state inspected food processing facilities.
- Create more local food hubs to facilitate distribution of healthy, local foods, particularly in areas with high population densities and poor access to healthy foods.
- Invest in upgraded transportation infrastructure and systems/logistics to increase efficiency in the food system.
- Support using existing larger farm facilities to address infrastructure needs of smaller farms in addition to large regional facilities.

Parts of the Commonwealth have no capacity to divert and effectively use food waste.

- Ensure that the infrastructure exists to reduce food waste in all areas of the Commonwealth, and not just related to diverting food waste from landfills.

The demand for local meat is greater than supply because we do not have enough local processing, storage and distribution facilities that can be economically sustainable while satisfying the federal, state and town regulations required to sell product safely and legally to consumers.

- Investment is needed in infrastructure and employee training to provide the necessary resources to enable expansion within Massachusetts.
- Increase capacity for slaughter and meat processing.
- Establish state inspected slaughter and processing facilities.

There is inadequate education/understanding around our food system. People do not know where their food comes from, what it takes to produce it, and do not show enough respect for those who grow and deliver food.

- Ensure more farmers come from the community being served.
- Ensure more food production is embedded in the community it is sold in.
- Develop training and education for neighborhood gardens and farming.
- Ensure local producers are of all backgrounds, especially have more BIPOC producers.

There is not enough education for food system businesses on business development.

- The State should support more business education for the food system.
- The State should increase support provided to local food system businesses through UMass Cooperative Extension Programs by significantly increasing its budget and importance in the University's mandate and culture.

There is not enough training for food system workers.

- The state should invest in food system employment and skills training.
- Partner with agricultural/vocational-tech schools to expand training and provide mentorship programs with job placement.
- Develop education focused on food system careers in secondary and higher education.
- The state should implement policies that support students, veterans, incarcerated individuals, and refugees that want to farm/learn about food production.
- Larger organizations and state agencies should include small business curriculum in training they offer.

Critical life skills for health and well-being are not provided in elementary and secondary education.

- Re-establish nutrition education curriculum in elementary and secondary education.

Current laws, regulations, and policies are often outdated and inadequate for supporting the local food system.

Agriculture and fishing is not given enough importance.

- Enhance article 97 of the state constitution to provide better protection of good agricultural land.
- Increase attention to and compliance with executive order 193, or otherwise codify the order in law and regulation which would preserve more farmland.

- Enact the Healthy Soils bill, which would benefit soil health and productivity, mitigate greenhouse gas production, and effectively respond to climate change.
- Laws about public institutions buying local food should be enhanced and enforced.
- Slotting fees in grocery stores should be outlawed for local foods.
- MDAR should return to being a Dept. of Agriculture as we knew it in the past not the regulatory agency it now is.

Agriculture Commissions have not provided the scope of support for agriculture envisioned in the legislation and desired by many members of the community.

- Create funding streams for Agriculture Commissions.
- Provide Agriculture Commissions with more authority and ensure they are representative of the communities they serve.
- Pass the legislation that provides agriculture commissions' input into local Boards of Health regulations that impact agriculture.

State rules for grant payments/reimbursements and the timing of these grants is highly problematic for local food producers.

- Laws, regulations and policies should be changed to allow more flexibility and to work with the seasonal nature of local agriculture and fishing.

The influence of MDAR is overshadowed by the other departments in the EEA secretariat.

- Ensure MDAR is more relevant, important, and has more advocacy and clout behind it.

The office of rural policy is planned but not created and doesn't have staff.

- Enact plans and provide funding for The Office of Rural Policy.

The lack of a common definition for 'local' creates abuse and predatory marketing practices that harm local producers, and the lack of enforcement of labeling laws has created extreme abuse and opportunism, harming local/organic producers.

- Create a state definition to be used for all policies and programs and enforce its use with existing truth in advertising laws and labeling requirements.
- Set and implement regulations appropriate to the size of the producer operation to ensure both safety and economic viability.

There is a lack of quality and motivated employees for farming and processing work.

- Consider earmarking summer youth job funding to support local food systems.

The integrity of 61A lands is under pressure by competing municipal interests for that land.

- Ensure that good agricultural land remains in farming when transferred for governmental/public use.

Regulations prevent local food businesses from operating or operating sustainably.

- Local producers should be able to easily sell their food to people in their communities.

Seafood producers trying to sell retail are significantly hampered with archaic laws and regulation.

- Revise state and local regulations to lower the burden for retail sales.

Health regulations do not fully reflect new understandings, current science and epidemiological evidence, and the increased ability to trace foodborne illness. As a result Massachusetts regulation is significantly more burdensome than other states in New England but no increase in public health is derived from the added burdens.

- The public desire for and public health benefits of greater access to foods should be considered when creating health regulations.
- The goals of the Commonwealth's Local Food Action Plan should be considered when creating health regulations.
- Slaughter regulations should be updated and should be supportive of local slaughter and processing.
- All local and state health agents should receive adequate training on food production and processing systems and methods.

COVID opening standards for farmers' markets, roadside stands, and CSAs required by the Department of Public Health are substantially different than other retailers regarding touching of produce, which is an unfair and unnecessary regulation.

- Create equal regulations unless clear, verified epidemiological evidence proves unequal regulation is required for public health.

Local Boards of Health closed farmers' markets or implemented requirements that were inconsistent with State requirements and/or more burdensome than requirements set for grocery stores and other food retailers.

- Create equal regulations unless clear, verified epidemiological evidence proves unequal regulation is required for public health.

Building codes, especially around food production, are antiquated and harmful to economic growth.

- Incorporate modern materials and construction methods into the state code in a manner that supports efficient and cost effective food system infrastructure growth.

Laws and regulations around food donations are inadequate/outdated.

- Laws and regulation should be created to better meet current understanding of food safety and need for access to food.

Grant Program terms do not incorporate equity.

- Include equity considerations in all grant programs.
- Applications should be released in different languages.

Reimbursable grants, lack of rolling admissions, and insufficient funds are a challenge for most local food system businesses.

- State grant programs should allow rolling applications and provide working capital for projects.
- The state should use forgivable loans as a mechanism of support for food system businesses.
- Distribution of funds for grants and subsidies should be allocated to industries based on release dates that work well for each sector.
- Different pools of funds should be created for different industries.
- The state should evaluate the effectiveness of financial incentives provided by public funds by creating a system of tracking and audits.
- Increase the effectiveness of financial support provided by public funds with enforcement if needed.

Support for the food system is not commensurate with its importance to the Commonwealth and the fact that it impacts every resident of the Commonwealth.

- Ensure the understanding that agriculture is an important part of economic development.
- Increase attention to and importance of the food system at state, regional and local levels.
- The state should create a public bank to support food system businesses.
- Increase access to capital for BIPOC businesses by creating an underwriting system that is based in equity by enacting different standards for BIPOC.

There is a lack of a systemic approach to risk management (not just crop risk).

- The State should support a system of risk insurance that includes market risk and other risk management products for food system businesses.

The current economics of food does not create sustainability.

Cheap food doesn't work unless we subsidize it.

- Short-term grants are not a sustainable way to keep farms in production and local food prices competitive - consistent funding is needed to support production.
- Government funding is a poor fix for the societal ailments they are intended to address.
- Smart farmers know not to rely on government funding be it subsidies, grants or otherwise. They are simply not sustainable.
- Any subsidy should be to consumers not farmers or processors.
- Housing requirements for farmworkers need to be fair and consistently enforced.
- We must pay the people who provide us with our food living wages.
- The value of local food should be supported by the state Department of Health and Human Services and the health care and insurance system with incentive funding, because food is a critical part of public health.
- Create better wages for farmers, fishermen, local food producers, their workers, restaurant and food retail workers, food access workers, and all food system workers in for-profit and nonprofit enterprises.

- Consider a worker training program for domestic workers that provides similar consistency and competency as the H2A program does for workers from other countries.
- Food prices should be higher while ensuring wages of low income workers and public benefit programs are increased.
- Enact regulations to provide greater worker protections, living wages, healthcare, and paid time off.
- Farmers and fishermen should be compensated for the environmental services they provide.

Sales/money going only to Walmart and Amazon for online SNAP.

- Ensure online SNAP sales can be made with local grocery stores and small food producers, farmers, and fishermen.
- DTA should file the waiver with the USDA for entry into the pilot program and take all necessary steps for acceptance into this program.
- All farmers should be able to process HIP. Rollout priority should go to producers who are also engaged in racial equity work.

The state should do a better job of promoting local food.

- More communication to the public about where and how to buy from local producers and local food retailers using up to date information is critical.
- Communication about the ways in which local farmers are working to keep local food safe in the case of pandemics, food borne illnesses, and other disruptions is essential.

Where food waste is generated is mostly separated from where it is used after-recycling, creating greater expenses.

- Incentivize more small farms that are embedded in urban areas that can be more integrated in community and nutrient cycling.
- Increase support for anaerobic digesters in order to benefit farms with less expensive and more readily available soil organic matter inputs while meeting renewable energy goals with anaerobic digesters instead of solar installations on agricultural land. From a renewable energy perspective, solar is much less expensive and more productive. There is already surplus AD capacity in MA and to be cost-effective, and to produce usable volume of biogas (for heat, and especially electricity), systems are quite large.
- Provide tax credits for compost facilities and ensure compost goes to local agriculture at affordable rates.
- Enact lower thresholds for food waste bans and mandate residential, municipal, school composting programs. The MassDEP's Solid Waste Master Plan 2020-2030 includes reducing the commercial food waste disposal ban from 1 ton/week to 0.5 ton/week. This may happen as soon as 2021 and will mean that more schools are covered (once cafeterias are back to normal operations).
- Ensure food waste creates compost and other forms of organic matter for agriculture.

No connection between breweries, municipal composting programs, and local farms, means waste is not going to local agriculture.

- The state and municipalities should create connections that direct more organic matter to food production, as is already happening in certain locations. Many breweries and farmers have worked out these connections on their own, and the MassDEP's RecyclingWorks in MA program has connected MA breweries with farmers.
- There are significant and adequate connections with local breweries.

There is a lack of data/information about food waste.

- Amplify existing campaigns and information regarding food waste.

High quality, affordable, and accessible child care is a critical need for all low wage workers, including food system workers.

- The state should provide child care support for all low wage workers.

Lack of control of land and water resources creates uncertainty that prevents business investment and economic growth.

- Land and water resources must be owned or controlled by those working the land and water.

Federal support requires focus on land owned by individuals and excludes cooperatives.

- State resources that provide greater flexibility should be increased.

Sustainability and resilience in the local food system is often interpreted as self-reliance or a lack of importing food from outside the local area, which is not realistic.

- Ensure resiliency considers regional and wider supply systems.

Coordinating the Local Food System

Public sector

Governmental interventions in and supports for the food system usually do not take into account existing racial inequities, and often exacerbate them.

- Analyze how government institutions, as well as private institutions that receive public benefits, perpetuate racial inequities and develop and implement plans to reverse those outcomes.
- Require cultural competency and bias training for state staff, and ensure that steps to address racial equity and structural racism are a part of any state food system programs.
- Ensure that public programs offering food resources to consumers, and funding and technical support to food system businesses, target outreach to communities of color, seniors, immigrants, and other traditionally underserved communities.

Many state agencies have programs and regulations that relate to each other, but are not coordinated with each other.

- The administration should re-commit to the goals of the Food Plan and action items toward those goals.
- The administration should consider a cabinet-level position to coordinate food system efforts, connecting the work of multiple agencies and ensuring that interventions are effective and efficient.
- All agencies should take a systemic approach to food, considering the economic, environmental, and cultural impacts of their decisions related to food system programs, regulations, and funding.
- Inventory and map all state programs that relate to food and analyze potential opportunities for better collaboration.

Opportunities for stakeholder engagement in state food system policy and programs often put significant burden on small organizations and exacerbate racial inequity.

- State agencies should work to build relationships with non-governmental stakeholders to inform and support their work. These efforts should be coordinated, and compensate the time commitment required of the stakeholders.

The state does not emphasize enough the importance of agriculture, local food, and nutrition.

- The state should invest in a sustained public campaign to educate institutions and the public about how food choices that consumers make have a broad impact on the health of individuals and, more broadly, the economy and the environment.
- The state should consider incentivizing institutional purchases of food from Massachusetts producers through tax credits.
- Examine the roles of nonprofit stakeholders to identify tasks that they undertake but would be better managed by the state to help ensure long-term sustainability.

Many municipalities do not affirmatively support the local food system through programs, investments, and regulations.

- Elected officials and other municipal leaders should have greater understanding of the food system and the need for systemic consideration at the local level.
- Local boards of health need more education about food system issues and need to be supported in passing consistent, science-based regulations that protect public health and encourage good nutrition, while supporting local food producers.
- Local planning boards should be encouraged to consider both immediate and long-term impacts on the food system in all development projects.
- Food system-related projects should be encouraged in Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program and the Community Compact Best Practices Program.

- A coordinated effort should be made to capture and disseminate municipal food system best practices.
- Municipalities should develop better communications systems to reach residents about available services, as local newspapers and other media continue to decline in readership.
- Require cities and towns to not add sewer fees to water used for irrigation of food crops.

Public grant and loan programs are not always responsive to the constituencies they are intended to serve, do not consider racial equity, and often favor larger, established applicants.

- Set and enforce goals in grant and loan programs to further racial equity in the food system.
- Reform application processes to remove obstacles for smaller businesses.
- Allow grant funding to be paid in advance, rather than retroactively.
- Allow grant funding to be spent on labor needs and other soft costs.
- Allow for flexibility in spending, so that funds are not required to be spent within the state's fiscal year.
- Ensure that application deadlines do not coincide with the busiest season for the targeted applicant pool.

The state has not set clear goals or ways to measure progress in the food system.

- Programs that fund food businesses and programs should be regularly evaluated to determine whether they are serving the most current and urgent needs.
- Program impact analysis should consider immediate benefit – economic impact, job creation – but should also measure longer-term benefits, such as increased equity, community building, long-term public-health outcomes, and environmental impact.
- The state should set benchmarks and goals for all elements of the food system - demographic, economic, etc. - and create a public dashboard to track progress in each.

The legislative and regulatory policy processes do not adequately engage stakeholders, and even bills with significant legislative support often do not get enacted.

- Provide greater opportunity for public input on bills and legislation prior to drafting.
- Reform leadership roles in the legislature to allow rank and file legislators to bring legislation to the floor for votes.

Schools are under-utilized as an opportunity to support public health and the local food system.

- Mandate nutrition education in schools. Schools are under-utilized as a place to foster strong wasted food management practices among young people - prevention, donation, and diversion. The cafeteria should be thought of as a classroom; this is how we can help mainstream the adoption of these practices. A lot of schools are unaware of the laws that exist to allow them to participate in food donation (and share tables) without risk of liability or losing federal meal reimbursements.
- Support school gardens.
- Support scratch cooking in school cafeterias.

- Support local food purchasing by school meal programs.

Non-governmental stakeholders

Leadership of community-based organizations that support the food system does not reflect the communities that are most impacted by the racial and economic inequities in the food system.

- Develop and support programs and career pathways that foster people of color and other traditionally disenfranchised individuals in gaining leadership roles and building power in the organizations that serve their communities and work toward systemic change.
- Funders should consider the diversity of organizations' leadership and staff when making grant decisions.
- Funders should support cultural competency and bias training for their grantees.

There are many important stakeholders not at the table when non-governmental stakeholders develop campaigns and set priorities.

- Community-based organizations and coalitions working on food system change should better engage people of color.
- Community-based organizations and coalitions working on food system change should engage farmworkers and other food system frontline workers.
- Community-based organizations and coalitions working on food system change should engage undocumented immigrants.
- Local food system stakeholders should better engage larger institutions – grocery store chains, institutional buyers, hospitals, etc.
- Community-based organizations and coalitions working on food system change should engage stakeholders from non-food system related fields (i.e.: housing, social services, etc.).

Medical professionals have insufficient knowledge of food is medicine interventions.

- Require/incentivize education for issues related to food insecurity and nutrition for dietitians, nutritionists, oral health professionals, and physicians and empower providers to intervene.

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a dramatic increase in emphasis on immediate needs, as well as some duplication of efforts. At the same time, some existing resources, particularly infrastructure, are underutilized.

- Funders of nonprofit stakeholders should focus on organizations seeking to create long-term, systemic change of underlying conditions, rather than merely behavior of impacted communities.
- Funders should support organizing and advocacy, as well as programs.
- More mapping and indexing of community-based and statewide efforts should be done, and funders and stakeholders should coordinate to avoid duplicative efforts.
- More mapping and cataloging of institutional kitchens, storage, and other infrastructure should be conducted and kept current, to refer to in times of crisis and to assist startups and small enterprises.

Non-governmental food system stakeholder groups often work in isolation, unaware of similar efforts or organizations that could be allies. Limited funding pools often result in competition or turf issues between organizations.

- Nonprofit funders should support network building and network participation as a critical component of all funding.
- Develop and maintain a directory of food system organizations.
- Facilitate communities of practice to give organizations opportunities to collaborate and share ideas and resources.

General public

Consumers are generally unaware of the food system and the impact their eating choices have not just on themselves but on their communities, the economy, and the environment. While public interest in learning more about the food system is growing, the information available is often driven by corporate food system stakeholders.

- Ensure that food system education is framed by the structural racial inequities that shape access to food, jobs, land, and power.
- Build the capacity of local food system stakeholders to work better with the media to tell their stories.
- Coordinate an effort to capture and share food system best practices of businesses, communities, nonprofits, and other institutions.
- Engage communications professionals to help develop infographics and messages that educate about the importance of the local food system.
- Ensure that any communications efforts engage the impacted communities to develop messages and tell stories.
- Capture and track local food system data to inform the public about trends and needs.
- Develop learning opportunities for individuals who want to more fully understand the Massachusetts food system – adult education, lecture series, podcasts, tours, etc.

Connections between small producers and commercial processors or retailers are often simply transactional or merely an effort on the part of buyers to capitalize on a “local” connection.

- Build better relationships between local food producers and larger stakeholders.
- Better educate consumers about the business relationships within the food system.

Conglomerates and other large corporations in the food system focus on self-interest and efficiency, rather than on public health or local economies.

- Organize campaigns to pressure food and health care businesses to change their practices to reflect public interest in supporting local agriculture, small businesses, and nutritious eating.