



Food System Planning in Plymouth County

Community Advisory Board Meeting, September 24, 2025

Attendees

Molly Vollmer, Plymouth County Extension

Bill Napolitano, OCPC

Brian Wick, MA Cranberries

Charlie Brandon, Boys and Girls Club

Tim O'Neil, Wellness Croft

Alyssa Papantonakis, OCPC

Meaghan Avery, Old Colony Y

Howard Randall, CPCWD and Old Colony Y

Marisol Torres, BAMSI

Joanne Zygmunt, OCPC

Rita Higgins, Marion Institute

Rob May, City of Brockton

Frank Basler, Plymouth County

Meghan Riley, County Ag Extension

John Fay, City of Brockton

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Liz Wiley, Marion Institute

Summary

Community Health and Food Action

The meeting began with introductions from participants. Rita emphasized the importance of community health and well-being, the focus of Theme 2 in their CARAT project. The meeting served as an opportunity for familiar and new faces to connect, with discussions centered around the ongoing Food Action Plan Initiative and related projects.

Climate-Resilient Food System Updates

The meeting focused on introducing changes to the meeting format and note-taking methods. The group discussed the progress of the CARAT, which is part of a larger initiative to build a resilient food system in Plymouth County, and moved on to Theme 2, focusing on community health and well-being. The conversation ended with a discussion on how to continue working on the Carrot tool outside of monthly meetings and an invitation for suggestions on improving the tool.

Plymouth County Social Initiatives Review

The group discussed opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and connections with socially disadvantaged groups in Plymouth County, highlighting programs like Plymouth County 4-H, Community Action Committee, BAMSICommunity Health and Food Action

The meeting began with introductions from various participants, including Joanne Zygmunt, Frank Basler, Rita Higgins, and others representing organizations such as Old Colony Planning Council, Marion Institute, and BAMS Helpline. Rita emphasized the importance of community health and well-being, the focus of Theme 2 in their CART project. Participants were encouraged to change their Zoom names to reflect their organization for better identification. The meeting served as an opportunity for familiar and new faces to connect, with discussions centered around the ongoing Food Action Plan Initiative and related projects.

Climate-Resilient Food System Updates

The meeting focused on introducing changes to the meeting format and note-taking methods, with Rita and Joanne explaining the shift to using a Google Doc for better engagement. The group discussed the progress of the CART project, which is part of a larger initiative to build a climate-resilient food system in Plymouth County, and moved on to Theme 2, focusing on community health and well-being. Tim raised a question about validating his segment in the food system pie chart, which Rita addressed by mentioning future validation efforts. The conversation ended with a discussion on how to continue working on the Carrot tool outside of monthly meetings and an invitation for suggestions on improving the tool.

Plymouth County Social Initiatives Review

The group discussed opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and connections with socially disadvantaged groups in Plymouth County, highlighting programs like Plymouth County 4-H, Community Action Committee, BAMSI's, and Old Colony Y. They explored farming opportunities, mentioning a regional conference, Land for Good, and MDAR's program for new farmers, while noting challenges like land availability and cost. Sheriff McDonald's aquaponics program at the County Farm was praised for providing fresh produce to pantries and hydroponics training to inmates.

Food Access and Leadership Initiatives

The group discussed ways to improve access to healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful food and explored opportunities for leadership development within the food system. The conversation also touched on the need to monitor public health indicators related to the food system, with Tim mentioning recent regulatory changes in Massachusetts and potential resources like the Massachusetts Public Health Department and veterans' organizations. Additionally, they discussed programs like Town of Plymouth's health assessment, which may provide valuable information on food system-related health issues.

Massachusetts Farm-to-Institution Grant Initiatives

The group discussed farm-to-institution programs, focusing on initiatives in Massachusetts schools, daycare facilities, hospitals, and correctional facilities. Tim explained their application for a MassCEC grant to support a farm-to-institution project. They discussed various grant programs, including MDAR and USDA initiatives, as well as the use of Fork Farms and Freight Farms technology in schools. The conversation highlighted the challenges faced by institutions in increasing their local produce and the role of grant funding in supporting these efforts.

Local Food Distribution Initiatives

The group discussed various organizations and initiatives related to local food distribution and promotion in Plymouth County. They explored how different entities, such as Farm Fresh Rhode Island, the County farm, and Sodexo, engage with local farms and institutions. The conversation highlighted challenges in managing food surpluses, with examples of creative solutions like turning cucumbers into soup. They also discussed the role of food hubs, distributors like Sid Wainer, and organizations promoting local foods through retail and nutrition programs. The group identified several areas for follow-up, including investigating distribution to institutions and exploring grants for promoting healthy local foods.

Food Access Programs and Impact

The group discussed various food access programs and their impact on communities, including UMass Extension's food safety training and a Mass General study on pantry attendees' food choices. They explored the demise of Digger Foods and the transition of Just Roots to a cash-based system for fresh food deliveries, highlighting the importance of MassHealth coverage for low-income individuals. The conversation also touched on Fair Foods' food rescue operations in Stoughton and Brockton, as well as the potential for partnerships with organizations like Meals on Wheels to increase fresh food access for limited-resource and limited-mobility residents.

Local Food Access Programs Overview

The group discussed various local food access programs, focusing on HIP (Healthy Incentive Program) and CSA subscriptions. Meghan shared information about HIP delivery boxes and noted that not all farmers accept HIP benefits. The group explored sliding-scale CSA options, with Joanne mentioning quantity-based pricing tiers. Regarding community-based nutrition education, Meghan described 4-H cooking clubs and summer camp food access programs, while Joanne highlighted Council on Aging programs and Frank mentioned Teresa Vernazaro's work in Carver schools incorporating cooking and hydroponics education.

Food Sourcing and Emergency Planning

The group discussed food sourcing and emergency management in Plymouth County. Meghan explained that the Greater Boston Food Bank provides about 45,000 pounds of food monthly to their pantry, including produce from local farms like Ward's Berry Farm. However, the loss of the LFP grant has affected local farmers who can no longer sell food at reduced costs to food pantries. The discussion then shifted to emergency food accessibility, with Joanne noting that while municipalities have emergency response teams and hazard mitigation plans, food is rarely mentioned in these plans.

Emergency Planning

The group discussed how drought and flooding impact food systems and emergency preparedness, with Howard sharing his experience managing a shallow well in Plympton. Joanne mentioned that new consultants will be hired to assess weather-related impacts on the system, while Meghan and Bill explained that Plymouth County has a coordinated response team called TERPS (Technical Emergency Response Programs) focused on livestock management during emergencies. Rita highlighted examples from other towns, including Eastham's climate resilience hubs and Bristol County's siloed emergency plans for elderly services, suggesting the need for better integration of emergency response systems.

Actions

- Joanne and Rita: Clean up meeting notes and produce an inventory of programs, policies, and projects discussed for Theme 2.
- Joanne and Rita: Continue developing ways to work on the CARAT tool outside of monthly meetings, such as creating a shared spreadsheet or website.

AI Disclaimer

These meeting minutes were generated with the assistance of an AI tool. While efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, the content may contain errors, inaccuracies, or omissions. For an accurate account of the meeting, please review the video recording available at <https://oldcolonyplanning.org/foodresiliency/>.