



**Regional Food System Action Plan  
Community Advisory Board Meeting  
October 29, 2025, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., virtually via Zoom**

**Attendees**

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|---------------------|-----------------|
| Cassandra Thayer    | Liz Shea        |
| Daniela Andrade     | Liz Wiley       |
| Frank Basler        | Mary Waldron    |
| Howard Randall      | Michael Jackman |
| Jen Wiernicki       | Rita Higgins    |
| Joanne Zygmunt      | Seani Silva     |
| Julianne Stelmaszyk | Vanessa Olson   |
| Kevin Cogan         |                 |

**Summary**

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- The Community Advisory Board meeting focused on Theme 3: Community Self-Reliance in Food for Plymouth County
- Land protection mechanisms in Plymouth County include Right to Farm communities, Agricultural Protection programs, 61A tax breaks, Community Preservation Act, and land trusts
- Several organizations support food education, including 4H Club, UMass Extension, Boys and Girls Club, and local schools
- Water access and quality (including PFAS concerns) were identified as significant barriers to food production
- Local zoning and Board of Health regulations vary by town and can create barriers for small-scale food processing and cottage industries
- Community gardens and raised beds are becoming more common in Plymouth County towns
- Farmers' markets in Hingham, Braintree, and Plymouth offer diverse local products, including produce, meats, and processed foods

**Discussion**

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**Protecting Farmland in Plymouth County**

- Howard: Most communities are Right to Farm communities with agricultural exemptions in zoning that provide opportunities for agriculture in most zones.

- **Land Protection Mechanisms**

- Howard: Land trusts work with communities to use Agricultural Protection (APR) program resources to preserve farmland
- Frank: Community Preservation Act provides funding to protect farmland
- Frank: Transfer development rights have been used in several communities
- Howard: Wildlands Trust participated in protecting farmland in Plymouth through transfer development rights
- Joanne: Some communities have local land trusts that own actively farmed land (Easton Natural Resources Trust, Bridgewater)
- Howard: Native American land trust based in Mashpee has acquired land including 35 acres at Sacred Heart School in Kingston

- **Public Land for Agriculture**

- Frank: Plymouth County Sheriff's Farm includes land leased to the sheriff with 15 acres maintained by the county for programs
- Howard: Bridgewater Prison has fields that were actively farmed in the past
- Joanne: Stonehill College has a farm that previously grew food for pantries
- Howard: Town of Dighton leases land around Council Oak to a local farmer
- Joanne: Municipal conservation land is often leased to farmers in communities like Easton

## **Education for Food Production**

Rita: Who in Plymouth County is teaching and supporting people to safely hunt, fish, and gather wild food?

- **Hunting and Fishing Education**

- Howard: Mass Fish and Game and DCR hold land and run educational programs
- Liz Shea: Abington has land that was 61A for hunting and hosts a fishing derby for kids as part of Abington Celebrates
- Howard: State stocks trout in Winnatuxet River in Plympton and other sites
- Joanne: Rod and gun clubs provide education throughout the communities
- Howard: Wildlands Trust has selectively opened lands to hunting including the Preserve in Halifax and Great River Preserve in Bridgewater
- Joanne: Coastal communities require permits for shellfish harvesting

- **Gardening and Farming Education**

- Michael: Plymouth County 4H Club affiliated with Farm Bureau provides agricultural training
- Frank: Meg Riley runs agricultural training programs and teaches about careers in agriculture
- Cassandra: Meg Riley taught a class at Plymouth Public Library about seedlings
- Liz: Jacqueline Pina and Terra Curis provide educational programming in Plymouth school system
- Liz: UMass Extension Service offers educational programs about growing food
- Jen: Boys and Girls Club has three hydroponics farms where kids learn to grow food through STEM work

- Jen: Boys and Girls Club partners with Manomet to lead a gardening club for preteens
- **Aquaculture Education**
- Jen: Duxbury Maritime offers educational programs where kids learn about catch and release and fishing regulations
- Frank: State provides education and pamphlets about catch sizes and regulations
- Liz: Stellwagon Bank National Marine Sanctuary in Scituate may offer fisheries education

### **Barriers to Starting Food Businesses**

Rita: How hard is it to start a new food business in Plymouth County?

- **Land Access**
- Howard: Availability of land is one of the biggest setbacks
- Liz: Land access is a significant barrier
- Howard: Wildlands Trust has helped find farmers with APR land in Middleboro
- **Regulatory Barriers**
- Jen: Local zoning, permitting, health, and food safety regulations create many hurdles for food businesses
- Howard: Board of Health requirements for CSA farmers include hand washing and other health regulations
- Joanne: Home-based business restrictions limit employees, parking, hours, and noise
- Liz: Cottage food laws vary by town, with Board of Health interpretations differing across communities
- Liz: There was legislation proposed at the state level, but little momentum, as it defers to local boards of health
- **Financial Barriers**
- Liz: New farms aren't eligible for federal funding until they've been farming for 3 years, including NRCS and USDA support

### **Local Food Production Policies**

Rita: What local laws prevent or support people growing food within communities?

- **Community Gardens and Public Land**
- Liz Shea: Abington bought an old dairy that now has a community garden, walking trail, and land for corn growing and hay
- Liz Shea: Abington's MVP 2.0 grant is funding raised garden beds in areas where people may not be able to access the main community garden
- Cassandra: Cohasset recently added raised beds to their elder affairs building as part of MVP 2.0 process
- Cassandra: Cohasset's Open Space and Recreation Committee is looking into plots for a community garden
- Frank: Council on Aging has put in raised beds, and the county farm has raised beds encouraged by 4-H programs

- Cassandra: Plymouth has raised beds at most schools, the library, and a small orchard of fruit trees
- Frank: Carver schools grow their own hydroponic lettuce for school lunch programs using federal grants
- **Restrictions**
- Joanne: Many restrictions relate to animals, with noise and smell ordinances
- Howard: Water availability is a potential restriction with water bans throughout Southeastern Massachusetts
- Joanne: Water bans often apply to gardens, preventing watering during drought periods

### **Small-Scale Food Processing**

Rita: What policies allow for local food to be processed by small-scale cottage or other processors?

- **Commercial Kitchen Access**
- Jen: Boys and Girls Club opened Blue Spoon Community Kitchen in Taunton, which allows small businesses to use the space, providing sanitation, permitting, and commercial kitchen licensing
- **Farmers Markets**
- Liz Shea: Hingham Farmers Market has fish, dumplings, bakers, and garden farmers
- Liz Shea: Braintree Farmers Market had meat (pork, beef, chicken), salsa, honey, bakers, jams, and preserves
- Liz Shea: Hingham Farmers Market operates year-round, moving indoors to Wampatuck in winter
- Frank: Plymouth Farmers Market has meats, honey, vegetables, and baked goods
- Howard: Local hog and beef producers sell at Plymouth Farmers Market
- Joanne: Langwater Farm in Easton hosts a farmers' market with occasional poultry producers

### **Resources for Growing Food**

Rita: Are there affordable resources for growing food, such as water, mulch, compost, and seeds?

- **Seed Access**
- Cassandra: Cohasset and Plymouth libraries have seed libraries in the springtime
- Joanne: Several communities have seed libraries
- Joanne: Garden clubs in the region offer seed and sapling exchanges
- **Compost and Soil Amendments**
- Cassandra: Black Earth Compost services many communities, including Cohasset, and offers compost in exchange for scraps
- Howard: Access to bulk fertilizers and soil amendments like calcium have disappeared
- Howard: Bridgewater Farm Supply used to provide these resources, but they're now coming from Rhode Island or far distances

- Rita: Municipal compost is available in some areas, but quality can be an issue (e.g., glass contamination)
- **Water Concerns**
- Joanne: Growing concern about water quality with PFAS contamination
- Liz Shea: Abington is running out of water as part of joint water works with Rockland, nearing DEP threshold
- Joanne: Farms with wells that dry up during drought face expensive city water fees if they need to switch