



**Regional Food System Action Plan
Community Advisory Board Meeting
January 28, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., virtually via Zoom**

Attendees

Alfredo Barrera	Jill Slankas
Bill Napolitano	Joanne Zygmunt
Brenna Trollinger	John Lebeaux
Cassandra Thayer	Judi Barrett
Chris Heffernan	Liz Miller
Christine Keller	Meaghan Avery
Dan Shafto	Meg Riley
Emma DeCola	Molly Vollmer
Francis Basler	Rita Higgins
Jean-Charles Zurawicki	Theresa Vernazzaro

Summary

- The meeting focused on Theme 5 of the Plymouth County Regional Food Action Plan, which addresses supporting fishers, farmers, and food producers/processors/distributors
- There's a notable gap in emergency planning that includes fishing industry concerns in coastal communities
- Several agricultural commissions exist in Plymouth County towns, but many became less active after Right to Farm was passed
- Plymouth County Extension provides technical assistance to farmers but has limited resources
- There's a lack of structured mentoring specifically for seafood businesses in the region
- Funding for local food producers has been challenging, with some farmers going out of business after grant programs ended
- BIPOC farmers and food producers face additional barriers to accessing funding and resources
- Several shared kitchens exist in the region , but few provide comprehensive business development support
- The Plymouth Foundation is active in supporting blue economy initiatives

Discussion

Emergency planning for fishing industry

- Francis: Plymouth has invested in redoing a ramp specifically for local fishermen next to the maritime center.
- Meg: Oyster industry in Duxbury Bay is integrated into environmental disaster planning
- Joanne: In Plymouth, Duxbury, and Kingston, food mentioned in hazard mitigation plans relates only to agricultural land, not the fishing industry
- Joanne: Some communities have herring commissions specifically looking at fish runs
- Francis: Harbormasters often serve as liaisons between fishing groups and municipalities
- There's a gap in emergency planning that includes fishing industry concerns in coastal communities
- Water access protection for the fishing industry is not well-addressed in municipal planning

Agricultural advisory boards

- Cassandra: Plymouth has an agricultural commission.
- Bill: Kingston has an active agricultural commission that puts on an annual agricultural fair
- Meg: Marshfield's Agricultural Commission works closely with County farm to organize farmers' markets
- Bill: Carver has an active agricultural commission
- Francis: The sheriff has an Agricultural Board
- Molly: Plymouth County Farm Bureau is connected to Mass Farm Bureau and hosts two annual well-attended events with legislators
- Bill: MDAR has been conducting listening sessions with agricultural commissions as part of the Farm Preservation Plan
- Joanne: Many agricultural commissions were initially set up to pursue Right to Farm legislation, and some became less active after it passed
- Several towns have agricultural commissions with varying levels of activity
- Plymouth County Farm Bureau is an active organization with approximately 100 members
- There are ongoing efforts to review and potentially revive agricultural commissions

Cooperative Extension services

- Molly: Plymouth County Extension staff provide information about local food production and distribution
- Molly: Extension staff connect farmers with UMass specialists for crop-specific issues
- Molly: They provide basic assistance with wetland guidance and farm layout
- Molly: They focus on educating the next generation of farmers
- Molly: The Cranberry Research Station provides specialized support for cranberry growers

- Joanne: Plymouth County Extension is doing more than they have staff capacity for
- Molly: Extension doesn't directly handle marketing for farmers and food makers
- Molly: Barnstable County Extension has more staff and sometimes covers different specialties
- Plymouth County Extension provides technical assistance but has limited resources
- SEMAP handles marketing promotion through programs like Buy Fresh Buy Local
- Extension offices collaborate across county lines when specific expertise is needed

Support for BIPOC farmers and food producers

- Meg: Land for Good is working to connect new farmers to farmland and make it more equitable.
- Meg: Pocasset Pokanoket Land Trust has been helpful for the SNEACTS conference
- Joanne: The Herring Pond tribe in Plymouth had food-growing initiatives as part of tribal education
- Bill: The Herring Pond tribe is developing a master plan that could address food issues
- Rita: New England Farmers of Color may be active in the region
- Meg: National Young Farmers Coalition did a workshop series with SEMAP
- Few programs specifically target BIPOC farmers in Plymouth County
- Some tribal initiatives exist, but their current status needs verification
- Regional organizations like Land for Good are working on equitable land access

Mentorship for seafood businesses

- Joanne: Plymouth Foundation does networking and outreach for the seafood, aquaculture, and blue economy sector.
- Joanne: SCORE program exists across the region, but isn't specific to seafood businesses
- Joanne: NeighborWorks Housing Solutions provides small business support to startups
- There's a lack of structured mentoring specifically for seafood businesses
- General business support exists but isn't tailored to seafood industry needs

Food business development resources

- Meg: There's a shared kitchen in Kingston.
- Meg: People travel to Commonwealth Kitchen in Dorchester, Hope and Main in Rhode Island
- Meg: There are shared kitchens in Kingston, Dartmouth Grange, and Cohasset
- Dan: Hope and Main has a program to help small makers develop businesses
- Theresa: Mass Farm to School works with these kitchens
- Theresa: There's a shared kitchen in New Bedford
- Several shared kitchens exist in the region
- Few provide comprehensive business development support
- Some producers travel outside the county to access more robust services

Local food distribution to food-insecure populations

- Meg: Coastal Foodshed was purchasing seafood for food-insecure families.

- Christine: Catholic Charities receives seafood from Greater Boston Food Bank
- Meg: Greater Boston Food Bank purchases some local fish
- Theresa: Schools participate in farm-to-school programs
- Christine: Greater Boston Food Bank does local produce purchasing
- Liz: Lovin' Spoonfuls recovers excess food from farms but doesn't purchase it
- Liz: There's a federal tax incentive for farmers donating food (?)
- Meg: Small-scale farmers prefer paid relationships rather than donations
- Meg: Some farmers took a financial hit when the local food producers grant ended
- Cassandra: Holly Hill Farm donates to local food pantry and creates prepared foods
- Joanne: Elder affairs centers and senior centers are major distributors
- Christine: Metro South Boys and Girls Club operates a freight farm and shares produce
- Several organizations distribute local food to food-insecure populations
- The end of government funding programs has negatively impacted some farmers
- Farmers generally prefer paid relationships over donation requests

Funding for food producers

- Meg: Several Plymouth County farmers have received Food Security Infrastructure Grants from MDAR.
- Meg: Hornstra Farm, Elliott Farm, and Langwater Farm have received FSIG grants
- Meg: MDAR offers various grant programs, including value-added and APR improvement funds
- Meg: NRCS grants can be game-changing but are difficult to access due to staffing cuts
- Meg: Farm Credit East offers creative financing to new farmers
- Meg: SARE (?) grants focus on sustainability
- Meg: The Kendall Foundation funds innovative food operations, especially around schools
- Joanne: Land trusts like Wildlands Trust raise money to purchase farmlands that remain in production
- Francis: Plymouth County Commissioners provide an annual stipend to SSCAC for children's backpack programs
- Various funding sources exist, but can be difficult to access
- Farm Credit East is an important financial resource for local farmers
- Land conservation organizations play a role in preserving farmland

Institutional purchasing of local food

- Theresa: Schools participate in farm-to-school programs.
- Theresa: There are new blanket contracts through the state for produce and fresh seafood
- Theresa: Schools can join these contracts without individual procurement processes
- Rita: Massachusetts Farm to School helps schools and small producers navigate regulations
- State-level initiatives are making institutional purchasing of local food easier
- Procurement rules remain a challenge for connecting local producers with institutions