



**Regional Food System Action Plan
Community Advisory Board Meeting
February 25, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., virtually via Zoom**

Attendees

Bill Napolitano	Jill Slankas
Brenna Trollinger	Joanne Zygmunt
Cassandra Thayer	Kevin Cogan
Chris Heffernan	Lauren Bartell
Christine Keller	Liz Miller
Courtney Rocha	Liz Wiley
Debra Roberts	Meaghan Avery
Howard Randall	Michelle Badger
Jared Rogers	Rita Higgins
Jean-Charles Zurawicki	Theresa Vernazzaro

Summary

- Theme 6 focuses on Food Sovereignty and Equity, examining who has access to food and who decides what food is available.
- Herring commissions and watershed associations play important roles in local fisheries management, though fish populations have significantly declined due to environmental factors.
- Healthcare organizations are leading efforts to address social determinants of health through community health needs assessments that include food access components.
- There's a lack of representation from historically disadvantaged communities in food system planning and decision-making processes.
- Several organizations provide emergency food services, including a collaborative system in Brockton using a universal intake card for food pantry access.
- Youth programs related to food systems exist through organizations like the Boys and Girls Club (hydroponics), Bristol Aggie, and Duxbury Maritime School.

Discussion

Food Sovereignty and Equity Definition

- Rita: Explained that food sovereignty concerns who decides what food people eat, while food equity addresses who has access to food.
- Rita: Food sovereignty runs along the entire supply chain and affects what we eat daily
- Rita: Local food access is a question of food sovereignty
- Rita: Food equity examines whether access is equitable or limited by factors like affordability and transportation
- Food sovereignty and equity are interconnected concepts that examine power dynamics in the food system
- Both concepts relate to access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainable food

Fisheries Management and Indigenous Access

- Howard: Identified declining fish populations as a major barrier in the local fishing industry.
- Howard: The lack of fish is a significant barrier, particularly for alewife, which serve as food for cod
- Howard: Industrial era dams have impacted fish migration to spawning grounds
- Howard: Towns like Kingston and Plymouth have worked on dam removal to restore fish populations
- Bill: Division of Marine Fisheries works with local herring fisheries commissions to develop river management plans
- Joanne: Herring Pond tribe in Plymouth advocates for access to waterways for fishing and maintaining traditions
- Howard: Environmental degradation affects both fish populations and soil quality (PFAS contamination)
- Herring commissions represent a unique local governance structure for fisheries management
- Environmental factors significantly impact the viability of local fisheries
- Indigenous tribes have traditional connections to local fisheries that need to be considered

Seafood Industry Barriers

- Rita: Asked about systemic barriers for small-scale BIPOC and Indigenous fishers.
- Howard: Quota systems significantly impact seafood workers

- Howard: Historically, Portuguese-speaking and Cape Verdean people have worked in the fishing industry
- Rita: On Cape Cod, aquaculture permits require town residency, creating barriers due to housing affordability
- Jill: Local residency requirements for permits may be designed to keep the industry local rather than allowing outside corporations
- Howard: Most locally harvested seafood is shipped elsewhere rather than consumed locally
- Housing affordability, permitting processes, and quota systems create barriers for small-scale fishers
- Historical patterns of who works in the industry may reflect systemic inequities

Food Access Programs and Coordination

- Jared: Described collaborative efforts to address food insecurity in Brockton.
- Jared: United Way convenes the Brockton Area Hunger Network, bringing together nonprofits weekly
- Christine: The City of Brockton has supported organizations during the SNAP crisis
- Jared: The Brockton Area Cooperative includes Catholic Charities, Boys and Girls Club, and other organizations
- Christine: A universal intake card system allows people to access multiple food pantries without repeating paperwork
- Jared: United Way awarded grants to 16 nonprofit partners throughout the county
- Joanne: Councils on Aging and Meals on Wheels programs serve the elderly and homebound populations
- Christine: Charity Guild does routine deliveries for clients who cannot access food pantries
- There's significant coordination among emergency food providers in the Brockton area
- Multiple organizations address food access for specific populations (elderly, homebound, etc.)
- The universal intake card system represents an innovative approach to streamlining food pantry access

Community Engagement and Representation

- Joanne: Noted challenges in engaging historically disadvantaged communities in planning processes.
- Joanne: Planning projects emphasize public engagement but lack resources to properly engage disadvantaged groups

- Joanne: Engagement requires going to communities, providing translations, interpreters, and flexible meeting times
- Kevin: Surveys at Abington's food pantry revealed distrust in government as a barrier to engagement
- Brenna: Fear for safety sometimes prevents well-meaning people from engaging marginalized groups
- Rita: Format barriers include language, timing, jargon, and representation expectations
- Joanne: Organizations like the Cape Verdean Association of Brockton, Haitian Community Partners, and NAACP provide programs for specific communities
- Resource limitations and trust issues create barriers to meaningful engagement
- Cultural differences in representation expectations need to be considered
- Community-based organizations often serve specific populations but vary in their collaboration with government

Social Determinants of Health

- Rita: Asked about organizations addressing social determinants of health for disadvantaged communities.
- Joanne: Healthcare providers conduct community health assessments that include food access components
- Joanne: The Town of Plymouth is conducting a health and community needs assessment
- Joanne: Municipalities develop housing production plans addressing housing access
- Howard: Economic status affects dietary choices, questioning whether food assistance provides nutritious options
- Bill: Project Bread may have studied root causes of health problems due to food inequity
- Liz Miller: South Shore Health has conducted a community health needs assessment where food access was identified
- Healthcare organizations lead efforts to measure and address social determinants of health
- Multiple factors (housing, transportation, education) affect food access and health outcomes
- Questions remain about whether food assistance programs address nutritional quality

Youth and BIPOC Employment in Food Systems

- Rita: Asked about programs to reduce youth or BIPOC unemployment through food system job matching.
- Joanne: Duxbury Maritime School may have programming around fishing

- Joanne: Bristol Aggie provides agricultural education
- Jared: Atlantic Resiliency Institute in Marshfield focuses on blue economy and climate resiliency
- Jared: Boys and Girls Club has hydroponics program (Freight Farms)
- Jared: Boys and Girls Club distributes produce to food pantries and farmers markets
- Jared: Boys and Girls Club's Taunton kitchen serves as a culinary incubator
- Rita: Farm Fresh Rhode Island has a youth program producing preserved foods
- Several programs provide youth with food system skills and experience
- Hydroponics and culinary training appear to be focus areas for youth programs
- Limited information was available about programs specifically targeting BIPOC employment