**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**



**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**Office of the Commissioner**

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| Bryan P. HurlburtCommissioner | 860-713-2501www.CTGrown.gov |

**Connecticut Food Policy Council**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

January 14, 2021

1:00 PM- 3:00 PM

Via Microsoft Teams

**Members present:**  Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, Patrick Doyle, Robin Lamott Sparks, Jiff

 Martin, Molly Devanney, Susan Pronovost, Monica Pacheco, Flavia Pereira,

 Willard Seedman

**Members absent:** Lynn Peccerillo-Hills, Marcia Pessolano

**DoAg staff:** ErinWindham, Cyrena Thibodeau

1. Commissioner Hurlburt called the meeting to order at 1:06 PM

2. Council members introduced themselves to attendees.

3. Review and approval of Regular Meeting minutes for November 12, 2020, and December 11, 2020- Robin Lamott Sparks noted an error in spelling. Motion to accept with correction made by Bill Seedman. Seconded by Molly Devanney. All in favor. Motion passed.

4. Public Comment – No comments

5. Old Business

 a. RFP for research study- Erin Windham gave a brief background on the RFP and it’s purpose, noting that she will be reaching out to council members for input on the RFP.

 6. New Business

 a. **New England State Food Plan Presentation**- Cyrena gave background on the purpose of the presentation, sharing that the intent was to give the council a background on regional food plans and the planning process behind them. Cyrena and Erin presented. The presentation will be shared after the meeting.

Comments-

Jiff- Thank you. I’m grateful to you for bringing the conversation to the council and excited to see where the conversation goes. Based on the discussion I hope we can decide on 1-2 guests to invite in the future.

Cyrena- Erin and I met with Meg to decide how we can integrate our work going forward.

Commissioner Hurlburt noted that we don’t need to duplicate work, but we need to join forces.

Bill- Thank you. It was good to see each plan and I’m happy to see that each plan incorporated food insecurity.

Chelsea Shared that she would also like to see racial equity at the foreground of any Connecticut plan

 b. **Website presentation and discussion**

**Erin Windham** presented the [www.CTFoodPolicy.com](http://www.CTFoodPolicy.com) website, going over the current content of each page. Discussion ensued and it was agreed that the page would be published and continually updated.

**Cyrena Thibodeau** noted that the DoAg website will continue to hold administrative information such as minutes and agendas.

**Monica Pacheco**- Sees lots of opportunities for resources. Will gather those and send ideas

**Patrick-** Glad to see this move forward and happy to have the website as a resource as well as an opportunity to share their information. This will also be helpful as we move the research forward.

**Latha-** Asked if content be approved by the council beforehand or if DoAg wil put it together and there will be comments. Most content will be compiled and published through DoAg, but comments and input are welcome.

7. Board Member Updates

**Robin Lamott Sparks, End Hunger CT!** Patrick is on board and collective purchasing in pantries is moving forward. BPH- Can you give background as to what Patrick is doing? Began working in May based on pantries asking for help to combine resources to buy food more economically. Most pantries are buying 30% of food, so we looked at data to make a proposal. We got a grant to move this forward, so this is a complementary program to food programs. Includes soup kitchens and others who are not generally included. Has been well received and is not taking the place of the food banks. No official name, but we’re close.

**Patrick Doyle, KNOX Hartford-** This is great work by End Hunger. Good things are coming up. We are turning over fields for a new program starting in March. We are able to double the number of farmers. Thank you to Jiff who helped with networking and information sharing. We are just starting to go into intake and recruitment, so if you know of people who might be interested, connect them with us. Also, we are looking to get people into our 20 community gardens for the spring. We are small, and our work is focused in Hartford, but we appreciate help from the Department of Ag and other people doing the work.

**Jiff Martin, UCONN Extension-** The FTS Collaborative is really active with 3 action teams- policy, procurement barriers, and educational opportunities. Please reach out if you are interested. Hoping to present a bill related to FTS grant. Will have an update at the next meeting. My colleague, Christina Conelly is here. She is an AG Resource Economist and speaks food language, so if you have research ideas please reach out.

**Susan Pronovost, Brass City Harvest-** This is our down time, but we are still distributing food. Hope the wholesale picture will brighten as we get past COVID. Our priority will be food security and farmers.

**Monica Pacheco, CSDE-** We are as busy as ever with school meals and feeding. P- EBT is in round and is almost ready to go. We are working closely with DSS and working to collect data. 159 districts are doing seamless summer or summer feeding programs. This means districts can be feeding all children right now, not just their children. These programs serve all 18 and under. About 22 districts are doing NSLP. Traditional summer folks are already gearing up for regular summer programs. It’s a crazy time but we are looking forward to next year and the end of the pandemic.

**Flavia Pereira, CT DOT**- buses have not changed, but train schedules have been changed. Travel patterns have changed and there are increased fatalities. We are seeing increased speeds and less enforcement which contributes to the fatalities. Spread the word- drive safely. This is a nationwide problem.

Bill- We are proud of our partnership with CSDE. This month there were $70m in benefits issued for one month. Staff has been busy, and we are doing anything we can to increase access to SNAP to help combat hunger. We are continuing with monthly supplemental benefits. And have been bringing everyone up to the maximum supplemental benefit. Most recent stimulus act included a 15% increase across the board. Ie. 204 goes up to 234. This will happen on the 20th. On 23rd we will issue emergency supplemental benefits. SNAP increase is more than just benefits on an EBT card. IT also includes free education through SNAP Employment and Training / CT Pathways. We partner with community colleges and a few others so that participants can go to school for free. Note: there are some exceptions.

**Commissioner Hurlburt, CT DoAg-** We have been working on distributing food boxes at testing sites. Currently health care worker ask a qualifying question to determine need for food. Participants can then get a box of food to get them through the initial phase. We will be speaking with 5 FQHC’s to get boxes at their testing sites. We are partnering with Salvation Army, United Way, and DoorDash to deliver boxes to COVID + or isolating individuals, including seniors in congregate housing. We are making boxes available through CRC’s who are working as case managers for those affected. They then take care of needs in all 5 regions who are using their staff or volunteers who are in need. FFFB program will continue. On January 19th the USDA will announce vendors for phase 5. We will share information as it becomes available. We have delivered almost 400,000 food boxes over the last 4 phases. Foodshare announced additional mass distributions in Norwich, Norwalk, and New London.

**Molly Devanney, Highland Park Market** noted the differences in how local health districts handle things. Asked all to have patience when they go into your stores sharing that they haven’t stopped serving customers since the beginning of the pandemic, so be patient. We have challenges everywhere from town to town. Supply chain issues- had a meeting yesterday with manufacturers who report that there are no challenges at this point. They have been able to push through production with the increase in cases. Curbside has picked up and we are happy to provide the service, and are also happy that we are included in 1b for vaccines to continue for those serve our customers.

Open for comment and questions from the general public.

**Ian Harrington, ACCESS Willimantic-** CRC in Region 4- Happy to hear that they are distributing boxes at testing centers. That is a big gap, so I’m happy to hear that is happening. Glad that the conversations are going on.

**Chelsea Gazillo, Working Lands Alliance-** When FFFB program rolled out we had CT contracts. When program changed and shifted, that went away. Is there any talk of how to work with the federal government in the Biden administration to try to get contracts to CT producers. BPH- gave background on CT farm contracts and noted that he has had conversations with USDA AMS to discuss the need to include local resources- farmers, truckers, etc. and that this could be an opportunity. Signed letter w/ NEASDA Commissioners, and Secretaries offering assistance to USDA to offer suggestions on improvements to include local goods. Have not received a response, but it’s another avenue we are using. Have been in communication with delegates re: FFFB. In phases 1 and 2 immediacy was the concern. As there is a shift in leadership, he hopes there is an opportunity for revision of the program. Chelsea offered that If he needed help from AFT, they were available.

**Kaitlin Binnington-** Do you think that after COVID there will be a continuation of the FFFB program? It has been really beneficial and we would like to see it continue. BPH- Good question, not sure. I think there will be a number of changes, but I don’t know what that looks like.

**Meg Hourigan- CFSA/ HFS-** Policy Committee is getting ready to release the policy report and recommendations. This is a broader approach than in previous years and they are hoping to release in next couple of weeks. Regarding partnership – we would like to include this group. Our targets are local food production and we are including climate response planning work as well as general supply chain. CFSA is doing legislative tracking to report on what bills are moving through the legislature. Will drop link in chat. BPH- Can we include you on the next agenda to talk about what is happening in the region? Meg agreed.

8. Next Steps- Continue to update the website, If you have content or comments, please let us know. Distribute the presentation on state plans. Commissioner Hurlburt noted his

 appreciation to the group for their time and attendance, as well as the work taking place.

 Let’s continue to communicate so we can work together to make sure our efforts are

 successful.

9. Motion to adjourn was made by Molly Devanney and seconded by Bill Seedman. All in favor. Adjourned at 2:34

Respectfully submitted by Erin Windham, AMIR I on January 20, 2021.

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*Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity Employer*

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