



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Commissioner



Bryan P. Hurlburt
Commissioner

860-713-2507
www.CTGrown.gov

Connecticut Food Policy Council

MEETING Minutes

November 12, 2020

1:00 PM- 3:00 PM

Members Present: Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt (DoAg) Bill Seedman (DSS), Monica Pacheco (State Department of Education), Flavia Pereira (DOT), Marcia Pessolano (DPH), Robin LaMott Sparks (End Hunger CT!), Patrick Doyle (KNOX), Molly Devanney (Highland Park Market), Jiff Martin (UConn), Lynn Peccerillo- Hills (DAS), Susan Pronovost (Brass City Harvest),

Members Absent: None

DoAg Staff: Erin Windham, Cyrena Thibodeau, Haley Rowland

Guests in attendance: Peggy Zamore (Danbury Farmers' Market), Jennie Hirsch (Foodshare), Latha Swamy (New Haven Food Policy Council), Martha Page (Hartford Food Systems), Chelsea Gazillo, (Working Lands Alliance), Stephanie Marino (Agency on Aging), Shannon Yearwood (CSDE), Pam Levasseur (OEC), Lucy Potter (GHLA), Mike Corey (CT VOAD), Mike Puglisi (UConn), Michelle DeLuca, Robert Kenny, Kim Ploszaj(DPH), Julie Bisi (OEC), Martha Page (Hartford Food Systems)

The meeting was called to order at 12:59 by Commissioner Hurlburt

Introductions were not done out of respect for limited time and a full agenda.

Review of regular and special meeting minutes: September minutes were reviewed and a motion to accept the minutes as presented was made by Bill Seedman. The motion was seconded by Molly Devanney. All in favor, so moved.

Special meeting minutes from October were reviewed and Bill Seedman motioned to accept. The motion was seconded by Jiff Martin. All in favor, so moved.

Old Business- none

New Business

- a) **Meeting organization-** Erin Windham went over the meeting format based on feedback from members. The new format will alternate presentations, facilitated discussion, and regular updates and discussion.
- b) **Website update-** Erin Windham shared that the domains CTFoodPolicy.com and CTFoodPolicy.org had been purchased as well as hosting for a period of one year. A request for members and interested individuals to join a working group for development of the website was made with a request to follow up with Erin.



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c) **Available CIA Funds:** A funding proposal was made to encumber funds in the Food Policy Council account for the purposes and amounts below.

- Fellows \$25,000
- Mini grants \$20,000 for market access
- Study \$25,000: Gaps Risks and Opportunities within CT Food System
- Publication \$5,000

Jiff asked about the amount of funds in the account which Commissioner Hurlburt reported were over \$100,000. Jiff noted that \$5000 for publication makes her nervous, suggesting it be reframed to make policy recommendations. Commissioner Hurlburt shared that he would like to make legislators aware of the Food Policy Council so they can address their ideas to FPC instead of creating a new group. Jiff asked if other means could be used. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that this is a short document to raise awareness of the Food Policy Council.

Shannon Yearwood asked if there was money set aside for maintenance of the website and asked if the study could be viewed through a disaster response lens. `

Sue Pronovost- Agreed with Commissioner Hurlburt that we should inform our legislators so that as things move forward we have a voice. She pointed out that there will be lots of requests moving forward so the Food Policy Council should be thought of in response. Jiff asked Sue if she is thinking that there will be needs and instead of creating a new group that FPC will be thought of as a place to address the needs. Sue- Yes. During the pandemic, DoAg rose to the needs and FPC should be involved. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that between FPC & ESF we have established a good forum. We should continue to include people across the state and share information. Peggy Zamore noted that there is good representation of the food system in those 2 groups and a good platform for discussion. JM asked if will ESF and FPC would eventually come together and Commissioner said that would not be the case.

Bill Seedman asked if the grants might be available to FM for incentive programs, asking what the execution of the grants would be. ? Are other sources of funding available? The suggestion of a pilot program that could be grown was put out. Erin Windham shared that we are open to ideas that address the issues and any suggestions should be sent to DoAg. More information will be shared for a future vote.

Farm Labor: Luis Yu-Mon Chang, *State Monitor Advocate*

State monitor Advocate System- EPA website has more information. The program is structured throughout the country and there is one state monitor in each state including VI and PR. Their role is to monitor and ensure that services are being provided in an equal and proportionate manner to non-seasonal workers and to advocate for workers and. This leads him to develop relationships with other stakeholders such as the NE River Valley Health Workers Program, Migrant Health Workers, CHC Inc., and Generations family health systems in the Eastern part of CT.



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There is an Ag Outreach Plan and within those reports, based on NASS they estimate there are about 5500 farm operations in Connecticut with 380, 000 acres involved in crop production, forestry, and logging.

Demographics- Shortage of farmworker labor has been around since WWII. We are bringing in labor from other countries and this has increased. 50-80% of labor is undocumented, by Luis' numbers. Regardless of legal status, they are farmworkers and he is making sure they are well informed of their rights. He is developing relationships with the workers so that they are comfortable coming forward with complaints and problems. Much of the documented labor is H2A – Ag Visa program. This number is also increasing and within H2A we had an increase from 46-51 employers taking part in the program. 97 job orders for workers requested but with COVID, bringing in workers has been difficult. There is not a lot of discussion regarding solutions to the shortage of labor.

The major crops: In the past it was tobacco for high quality cigar wrappers. That industry has been affected by attempts to duplicate product in South America. Tobacco buyers are willing to take lower quality in favor of cost. Now major crops are GH and nursery.

The DOL collaborates with other stakeholders. NE FW Council- Nat'l Farm workers program is a grantee of DOL to provide training and services, but also helps in other areas that DOL does not. For instance, family members, training programs, gift cards for food, and bus passes for transportation. We work closely to minimize duplication of services.

CT RV Health worker program. Goes out with these groups to the farms to make sure that people have access to resources. If there are complaints or violations they are helpful in getting us in contact with the workers. We collaborate w/ Dr. Gould and UCONN Health FW clinics, but were not able to get out this year due to COVID. Manny Rivera is in charge of the outreach program. This season has been challenging so we are looking at alt methods of contacting workers.

Cyrena Thibodeau asked if there is any role for the FPC to play, or ways that we can be involved or helpful. Yu-Mon will share the resources that he has spoken about. If you would like to get an idea of why I do the work I do, watch Harvest of Shame. Remember, the demographics have changed, but the issues have not. There has not been dramatic change in 50 years.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/1960-harvest-of-shame/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/harvest-of-shame-50-years-later/>

<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/considerationsforagriculturalemployersandworkersrelatedtocovid19.htm>



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US DOL Wage and Hour can fine and penalize. CT DOL can stop providing services to farms if they are in violation. For example, they need to test the local market before they can apply for H2A, and we can make that unavailable.

Commissioner Hurlburt asked Yu-Mon if he could talk about how the outbreak in CT was identified. When the first test came back the DPH was notified, and for the 1st week the response came from DOL, UCONN, CT River Valley, and Community health services in coordination with CHC Inc. They were notified by the employer because of their close working relationships and then responded. An assessment was done and the decision was made to divide the camp to separate positive from negative workers.

Commissioner Hurlburt- You mentioned relationships, and how those are important for continuing the work you do. Yu-Mon: Yes, a lot of the farms I go to are the ones participating in the program. It is hard to get access to the farms that are not in the program. They see a government representative coming in and that can be difficult. It is very hard to get the conversation growing.

Jiff- Is there any organizing of migrant labor i.e. Migrantjustice.net? Yu-Mon: Not that I am aware of. There are some regional groups, but nothing that I know of here in CT.

Jiff- How often do you exercise the right to suspend services? Yu-Mon: I have not had to use those options. I have resolved the complaints through informal resolution.

Patrick Doyle- - What type of governors' mandate would help the situation? Yu-Mon: Executive Orders. Look at Wisconsin and Massachusetts.

BPH- We did host webinars with OTG to share information on testing protocols and resources available. Information is also available in the Ag Report for farm workers. We do not regulate but we are a resource for our farmers. We have developed best practices with DPH- DoAg, OTG, and DPH.

Public Comment- None

Next steps/ Actions- Erin Windham will write up the funding proposal to share with attendees.

Meeting was adjourned by Commissioner Hurlburt at 2:52

Respectfully submitted by Erin Windham, AMIR I, November 13, 2020