

Municipal Food Systems Planning Toolkit for MAPC Communities

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the structures and/or best practices established by existing FPCs, and can coordinate their work with efforts happening at the state and regional levels. (See below for links to local food policy councils in Massachusetts, and see **Chapter 1** for information on state and regional food systems planning.) New AgComs can join the **Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC)** for resources, education, and training. MAAC has published a toolkit for organizing an AgCom in Massachusetts, available at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/agr/agcom/docs/handbook/pdf/handbook-for-agricultural-commissions-full-doc.pdf>.

Timeframe

The work carried out by a food systems group will likely be long-term. The process of getting to know a local food system through assessments and other activities may take a few years, and though specific projects may be fairly easy to implement, the systemic change that many groups seek does not happen quickly. In addition, farmers, farmers' market managers, and other stakeholders involved in agricultural production have limited availability for meetings and activities during the growing and harvest seasons. Food systems group leaders should be aware of these constraints as they plan project timelines and work to recruit many types of stakeholders.

TYPES OF FOOD SYSTEMS GROUPS

The following sections describe the structure, membership, and activities of two common food systems group types: Food Policy Councils and Agricultural Commissions. They also include common steps for starting those groups and resources for more information. Though there are differences between the group types, the form and name of the organization is likely less important than the fact that a food systems group exists in a

community and is managed in such a way that members and engaged citizens can create and carry out projects related to food systems development (Sharp et al 2011).

Food Policy Councils

What Are Food Policy Councils?

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are one type of group established to develop the food system within a particular municipality, county, region, or state.⁴ They are intended to address “the actions and in-actions by government that influence the supply, quality, price, production, distribution, and consumption of food” (Harper et al. 2009, 1). However, the activities of FPCs are not limited to policy change, as many of them have a significant focus on programmatic work (Schiff 2008). FPCs have existed in the United States since the 1980s and usually operate at the state and the local or county level. Compared to more farm- and agriculture-focused organizations such as Agricultural Commissions, FPCs are more frequently found in urban areas and have a more prominent representation of consumers and environmental social justice groups (Sharp et al. 2011).

How Are Food Policy Councils Created and Structured?

FPCs can be created by community organizations and residents or through a government act such as an executive order or joint resolution (Harper et al. 2009). There are tradeoffs to keep in mind when considering the structure and relationships of an FPC. Having an official connection to local government can provide a FPC with resources, status, and access within a community. Independent FPCs may have less access to those benefits, but in

⁴Food Policy Councils sometimes go by names such as “food council,” “food system network,” or “food policy coalition.” This toolkit uses Food Policy Council as a general term for all of these groups.

exchange have more freedom to set their own agenda and priorities (Borron 2003).

Who Are the Members of a Food Policy Council?

Ideally a FPC includes representatives from all sectors of the food system and from many constituencies in the community.

Membership may include any and all of the following:

- Farmers
- Anti-hunger and food justice advocates
- Educators and other school system representatives
- Nonprofit organizations
- Concerned citizens
- Government officials
- Grocers
- Chefs and restaurateurs
- Food processors, wholesalers and distributors
- Community and religious leaders
- Scholars and researchers (Borron 2003; Harper et al. 2009)

What Municipal Priorities Do Food Policy Councils Address?

FPCs address many of the municipal priorities discussed in **Chapter 3**: economic development, health, conservation, equity and education. They provide a forum and structure for collaboration among municipal departments, and similarly between municipal departments and community groups and residents. FPCs can also serve as a bridge organization between a specific municipality and its neighboring communities by encouraging collaboration and resource sharing. From initial assessments to the resulting projects, much of a FPC's work will address health and economic development concerns, such as understanding and meeting the nutritional and food access needs of the community, and following the flow of "food dollars" spent by residents and directing that money to local businesses and markets.

Food Policy Council Resources

- The APA's Planning and Community Health Research Center offers many publications about food systems planning and food policy councils, including a **Food Policy Councils Briefing Paper**, available at <http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/briefingpapers/foodcouncils.htm>.
- In 2010, the **Massachusetts Food Policy Council** was established. For more information on its members, purpose, and activities, see **Chapter 2** and <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/boards-commissions/food-policy-council.html>.
- Some Massachusetts towns and cities have active Food Policy Councils; their structure and activities can be used as models for municipalities that are creating new FPCs. Examples include:
 - **Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council**
<http://www.worcesterfoodpolicy.org>
 - **Springfield Food Policy Council**
<http://www3.springfield-ma.gov/planning/466.0.html>
 - **Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council**
<http://holyokefoodandfitness.org/>

Agricultural Commissions

What Is an Agricultural Commission?

Agricultural Commissions (AgComs) are another type of food system group, usually found in rural areas and communities with a significant agricultural history and/or current agricultural presence. As the name implies, AgComs are generally more focused on agriculture and the production sector of the food system than FPCs and other food systems groups. The number of AgComs in Massachusetts has increased dramatically in recent years, from 6 in 2001 to 156 in 2013 (MAAC 2013a; 2013b).