

August 6, 2015 | WEBINAR SUMMARY

On August 6, ten people attended our first webinar in 2015. The agenda covered tips and tools for public policy advocacy at the state and local level. Below is an overview of each item and links to more information.

Public Policy Advocacy

Jean Doss, Governmental Affairs Consultant to the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

- Advocacy = promoting a cause through both non-political and political means, including lobbying
- Lobbying = asking an elected or appointed official to vote in a particular way on a particular piece of legislation or rule
- Organizations can involve themselves in monitoring public policy-making bodies, building relationships and raising awareness without the activity being considered lobbying
- Michigan Legislature contains 110 members in the House and 38 in the Senate
- Typically only 20% of the 5,000 bills introduced in the 2-year legislative session become law
- Bills are introduced in committee first, then can move to the first chamber (House or Senate) for action; this is repeated in the second chamber
- The governor must sign or veto legislation
- Term limits make it difficult to establish working relationships
- Most elections are decided in the Primary
- Elected official act because something is right and feasible
- It's an advocate's job to educate elected officials about what is right and help create an environment in which right things are feasible
- Power of constituents – 10 letters can be a mandate
- Bottom line = need 56 votes in the House, 20 votes in the Senate, and the Governor's signature

Megan Masson-Minock, Facilitator for the Local Food Council Network for the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

- At the local level, the legislative players are elected city councils and township boards
- Executive players are mayors and supervisors
- Appointed committees and commissions involved in public policy at the local level
- Managers, superintendents and professional staff manage day-to-day
- Important to know the rules of the game: review municipal charter and commission bylaws to see how many votes are needed to approve actions
- Ordinance adoption or amendments typically starts in a committee or with the Planning Commission
- If a zoning change, the Planning Commission makes a recommendation to the elected

body after holding a public hearing

- The council or board will hold another public hearing before taking action
- Budget development starts 3-4 months before adoption and involves determining priorities based on feedback from elected officials, staff, citizens, interest groups, businesses
- Just as with state elected officials, local elected officials will act if it's the right thing to do and it's feasible
- A crowd of 10 people at a public hearing is a powerful thing
- Every public meeting must allow for public comment per the Open Meetings Act

Jean Doss

- A lobbyist's template:
 - What do you want?
 - Who can give it to you?
 - What do they need to hear?
 - Who do they need to hear it from?
- That's why it's so important to develop a written strategic plan
- Relationship building is the single most important component in public policy advocacy
- Educating and engaging local officials on food policy work will influence State food policies as these officials get elected to the Legislature
- Have a plan
- Do your homework – anticipate opposing arguments
- Be patient and persistent – be in it for the long haul

Attendees asked the following questions or contributed the following advice:

- Tonya Price asked about urban agriculture in Battle Creek. The City Planner says only non-commercial areas since the state has no enabling legislation and that GAAMP applies to cities of 100,000 or more. Megan said the cities of Ypsilanti and Muskegon have gone ahead and taken the risk with their urban agriculture ordinances, and could be examples for the Battle Creek planner. She would not bank on having the state Urban Agriculture Act completed in the next year, but suggested that urban agriculture be incorporated into the City's current master planning process. Also, look at Flint and Detroit for master plan and ordinance examples, and other Midwest examples. In Battle Creek, this issue has a lot to do with economic development and youth development and advocates should speak to that.
- Amanda Edmonds shared the importance of inviting all local officials at all levels to events sponsored by local food councils. Jean said that any event allows the opportunity to invite elected officials to join you – and that's not lobbying. Have a point person be a special host to that person. If see you at events, get a sense of what about, little connections start at these gatherings. Megan added that could go to public meetings and invite them to come to events. Share your point of view.

Click [here](#) to access the recording and slides used during the meeting. Click [here](#) to download

the worksheets.

Update on Michigan State University Extension Webinar on Urban Agriculture Zoning

Kibibi Blount-Dorn, Detroit Food Policy Council Program Manager, reviewed the June 24 webinar on sample zoning for urban agriculture and “agriculture-like” activities, presented by MSU Extension and Michigan Association of Planning, which touched on the Right to Farm Act and GAAMPs. She said there are three things to remember about what you’re allowed to do or not:

- Determine jurisdiction
- Determine what areas are covered by Right to Farm
- Determine what powers are delegated back to the local unit of government

Megan pointed out that there is a committee that sets the GAAMPs, and this committee has public meetings, which is another opportunity for people to give testimony.

OUTCOMES:

- 10 people from 6 Local Food Councils and other agencies and businesses had the chance to network and learn from each other.
- Increased network knowledge about how to advocate to state elected officials
- Increased network knowledge about how to advocate to municipal elected and appointed officials
- Increased network knowledge about urban agriculture zoning

GOALS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Hands-on training activities
- Sharing of knowledge between Food Councils

The Michigan Local Food Council Network is sponsored by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, http://foodsystems.msu.edu/activity/info/local_food_council_network, made possible through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Network coordinators are Megan Masson-Minock at ENP & Associates and Andrea Brown with Lauren Carlson at Michigan Association of Planning. All information is shared for educational purposes only.