

SEMAC Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 21, 2020 10:30 – 11:30AM Conference Call

In attendance

Members: Dale Leavitt, Judy McDowell, Les Hemmila, Rick Karney, Mike Maguire, Seth Garfield, Andrew Cummings, Chloe Starr, Chris Gargiulo, Matt Charette, Ed Baker, Diane Murphy, Gregg Morris

Staff: Abigail Archer, Josh Reitsma, Harriet Booth

Guests: Sean Bowen (MA DAR), Bonita Oehlke (MA DAR)

1. Welcome from Co-Chairs Mike Maguire and Rick Karney

2. Meeting Minutes of 4-16-20

MOVED by Rick Karney to approve the minutes as written. SECONDED by Dale Leavitt. Roll call vote.
APPROVED 12 YES/0 NO/ 1 Abstention

3. Water Quality Monitoring Equipment Update

Harriet Booth gave an update. Barnstable County successfully applied for funding from DMF through the Climate Change Resiliency grant program. Used it to purchase new sondes from a company called In Situ, to replace the aging YSI ones, and continue the long term water quality monitoring program. Also purchased sondes to measure ocean acidification. Ran into delays due to the pandemic but the manufacturers are working with us to fill the order. A Total Alkalinity system and a pH sensor is a high-quality pairing of instruments for collecting acidification data. They will arrive in the next several months and the plan is to run trials with them in the Summer and Fall. This will allow us to get snapshots of acidification related water quality in different areas.

4. Covid-19 relief funds for aquaculture industry – Updates and Discussion

MM: Sarah Peake and Julian Cyr are on the Cape Cod Re-Opening Task Force and they are well informed about the aquaculture industry and the effects the pandemic and the restrictions have had

EB: Umass Dartmouth Professor Erin Bromage wrote a social media post about covid transmission that has been shared widely (Attachment #1)

SB: There's a conference call with the Food Security Task Force today. There is a USDA program – Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. There's discussion about what types of aquaculture can be included. Controlled environment aquaculture is eligible but that does not include shellfish. Shellfish hatcheries may be eligible. Division of Marine Fisheries will be disbursing the CARES Act funding and will be sharing more information soon. The Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans are available but have challenging applications.

BO: On May 17th a press release went out announcing \$56 million to combat food insecurity in the Commonwealth (Attachment 2). \$36 million of that will go towards a **Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program**. It includes Increasing capacity for food direct delivery, Increasing capacity of food banks and food pantries, Increasing capacity of local food distribution partners, Innovative solutions to enable those receiving SNAP and WIC benefits to receive food more easily, Innovative solutions for urban farming and Farms, retailers, fisheries and other food system businesses to help them adapt to the disruptions and to allow them to provide greater access to local food.

MM: Mass Aquaculture Association sent a letter to MDAR describing how the pandemic has affected sales. Aquaculture is in a more dire situation than land-based farmers.

Mike Maguire invited the growers present on the call to describe their situation.

GM: No sales since March 13, laid off crew and now a one man show. Crew is eligible for unemployment. Have to catch EVERY tide in order to do the work of 6 people. Seed will be showing up any day now. Money is going out but not coming in. The usual plan is to sell product in March & April and that is money for seed. Just signed up for the Paycheck Protection Program. There will be no sales until restaurants get going again. Direct sales would have been useful, other states have done it. Have lots of product and so does everyone else. Nervous about what will happen in the Fall.

MM: It's a domino effect, a glut at the beginning of the summer will compound issues

SG: Mass Aquaculture Association had a meeting yesterday. This is an important time for MAA to represent the industry and convey the issues

LH: Applied for the EIDL but haven't heard anything for a month

MC: National Sea Grant offered the opportunity for each Sea Grant program to apply for \$100,000 in COVID-19 Rapid Response funding to assist the aquaculture industry.

AA and JR described the proposal that Woods Hole Sea Grant is submitting. The idea is to build upon previous work looking into shucked oyster products. Purchase large oysters from growers, solicit interest from businesses with shucker-packer licenses, work with them to get the oysters shucked, get the frozen containers of shucked oysters to people in need through the Greater Boston Food Bank. The goal is to get some product moving and free up space on grants. The other component of the program is to offer towns the opportunity to apply for funding to purchase oysters from growers in their town and move that product to recreational areas. There are disease concerns – so only transfers within the same waterbody would be allowed.

AC: concerned about moving product off of farms into different areas for recreational fisheries, it could spread disease. Are there any opportunities to move product to the European Union? That works seems to have been on hold. Can we send promotional product?

BO: Bob Rheault with East Coast Shellfish Growers Association has been looking into this. There is funding available through USDA and the Agricultural Trade Promotion Program. There's also funding through the USDA Market Access Program.

MC: Is there work that can be done ahead of sales being allowed to the EU?

BO: Yes, MDAR hosted wholesalers from other countries last year. MDAR is developing a regulatory road map and turning it into a plain language guide.

MM: Food Banks can take oysters more easily if they are in a shelf stable form. CG asked for examples of that. JR replied that a canned oyster stew product would be considered shelf-stable. CG: there are canned oyster products on the market – pasteurized and canned products from the South. Also a vacuum packed product from Texas.

EB: Link Murray at Blue Gold in New Bedford tried a mussels in marinara or lemon pepper sauce – family sized portions that you could cook in a bag. They got up and running but then had to fold due to lack of supply.

CG: The biggest challenge is finding a processor. Plenus Group in Lowell is a good connection. It has to be cost effective to shuck.

JR: A frozen half-shell product could be explored too with Plenus Group

5. Other business

MM: Been on calls discussing a variety of relief money opportunities that could come to the County.

SG: The pandemic is frustration on many levels but we're all in this together. On the bright side, the product can stay in the water and doesn't have to be thrown away like some other food products. Scott Soares is keeping aquaculture up in conversations with elected representatives and decision makers. We need to make sure funding gets to the right places where it's most helpful. Senator Cyr is hearing from shellfish farmers. Keep contacting your elected representatives.

AC asked MM to describe the Cape Cod Reopening Task Force. MM: It's a Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce lead working group. There are 19 subgroups. There are good open lines of communication through this. Many things are being discussed such as how does a 14 day quarantine request work for short term renters? How can towns change the permitting process to help restaurants have outdoor seating? How to support businesses? Three restaurants have closed on the Cape so far.

MM encouraged people to call him with any questions about the Task Force.

6. Schedule Next meeting

Attachment #1

<https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>

<https://www.umassd.edu/news/2020/umassd-biology-professor-bromage-covid-19-blog.html>

UMass Dartmouth Biology Professor gains international attention for COVID-19 blog

Associate Professor Erin Bromage has been featured on CNN, MSNBC, and the New York Times for his work on the practical spread of COVID-19

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Posted Thursday, May 14, 2020



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Associate Professor Erin Bromage (Biology) created a blog to help friends and family understand the practical ways that the virus can spread through a community. On May 6, 2020, he posted “[The Risks – Know Them – Avoid Them](#)”, an explainer that showed how people breathing and talking spread particles in the air in common locations like restaurants, churches, and offices. As the world grapples with how to safely reopen society, Dr. Bromage’s post started to become widely shared on social media. Fast forward a week and the post has been viewed more than 13 million times and Bromage has become a fixture on national nightly news shows.



Dr. Bromage, who teaches in the [UMassD Biology program](#), researches the evolution of the immune system and the immunological mechanisms responsible for protection from infectious disease. In spring 2020, his course *Ecology of Infectious Disease* allowed students to track the emerging COVID-19 outbreak in China and beyond. These classroom experiences, informed by Bromage’s research, have given his students a real-world look at the topics they are studying and led to the creation of his blog.

Bromage was first featured in [The New York Times](#) for his “impressively clear explanation” of how COVID-19 can spread as states reopen their economies. He has since appeared on MSNBC’s [The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell](#), CNN’s [Erin Burnett OutFront](#), the [NBC Nightly News](#), the [BBC](#), and many more news outlets.

BOSTON — The Baker-Polito Administration today announced \$56 million to combat urgent food insecurity for some Massachusetts families and individuals as a result of COVID-19. This funding is consistent with findings of the Food Security Task Force, which was convened by the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center in response to increased demands for food assistance. The task force is comprised of a broad group of public and private members charged with ensuring food insecurity and food supply needs are addressed during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

“These funds jump start some of the recommendations to address urgent needs and food supply chain issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic for communities across the Commonwealth,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “While COVID-19 has had a statewide impact, some of our communities and residents who have historically experienced food insecurity have been even more disproportionately impacted.”

“Our Administration has always been focused on supporting residents and families dealing with food insecurity, especially now during the COVID-19 outbreak,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “We thank the Food Security Task Force for their work on these important issues, and are glad to make these crucial investments.”

The Administration will continue to utilize the Food Security Task Force and work with the Legislature to address food security issues going forward.

“Longstanding food assistance programs including the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)) and Women, Infant and Children’s Program ([WIC](#)) are experiencing significant increases in assistance applications. In addition, community-based food banks are seeing skyrocketing demand and local grocers and farmers are struggling to meet the needs of consumers,” **said COVID-19 Command Center Director and Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders**. “I am appreciative of the task force’s practical recommendations to meet immediate needs as well as the longer-term solutions.”

“We are pleased to provide new funding to a wide array of programs and initiatives in order to help ensure individuals and families have access to affordable, nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Secretary of Administration and Finance Michael J. Heffernan**. “This funding builds upon other critical COVID-19 resources which are being distributed by the Administration in partnership with the Legislature, including the \$502 million in federal Coronavirus Relief Funds which will support important municipal initiatives, such as food assistance, during this public health crisis.”

“Increasing food security is essential to protecting the health of Massachusetts residents, and the funding and recommendations made available through the Task Force will help meet greater demand for nutritional assistance among vulnerable populations and those struggling with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Kathleen Theoharides**. “The ongoing crisis has also highlighted the importance of reinforcing our local food supply chain, and this investment from the Baker-Polito Administration will provide needed capital to the farmers, fishermen, food banks, and distributors that are helping the Commonwealth respond to this unprecedented public health emergency.”

In less than a month, the Food Security Task Force, which was convened on April 22, synthesized and prioritized more than 80 recommendations into the following four key actionable categories:

- Develop and implement an emergency food program

- Fortify the food bank system
- Maximize federal resources for food and nutrition
- Reinforce and redeploy the food system infrastructure

As the task force continues its work going forward, today the Administration announces:

- A **\$36 million COVID-19 Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program** with a goal of ensuring that individuals and families have access to food. Eligible services include:
 - Increasing capacity for food direct delivery;
 - Increasing capacity of food banks and food pantries;
 - Increasing capacity of local food distribution partners;
 - Innovative solutions to enable those receiving SNAP and WIC benefits to receive food more easily;
 - Innovative solutions for urban farming and
 - Farms, retailers, fisheries and other food system businesses to help them adapt to the disruptions and to allow them to provide greater access to local food.
- **\$5 million** increase for the [Healthy Incentives Program](#) to meet increased demand for local produce and to increase access points that process SNAP and HIP benefits.
- **\$12 million** for the provision of 25,000 family food boxes per week through a regional food supply system. Each family food box contains 30 to 35 meals. Food boxes would be distributed throughout the state to food pantries.
- **\$3 million** in funding as an immediate relief valve to food banks.

The work of the task force builds on Massachusetts' initiatives to increase access to food, including establishing emergency food distribution sites and school meal sites for food distribution, implementing Pandemic EBT to provide food to 500,000 youth who usually receive free or reduced priced lunch, distributing additional SNAP benefits to households, requesting online EBT purchasing approval from the federal government, and streamlining food benefit program administration.

Additionally, the Commonwealth recently [released funding](#) from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to local cities and towns of up to \$502 million and highlighted food insecurity as an eligible program.

Reporting up to the COVID-19 Command Center and Secretary Sudders, the work of the Food Security Task Force will continue as a private-public partnership, chaired by Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Department of Transitional Assistance Commissioner Amy Kershaw and Jill Shah, President of the Shah Family Foundation.