



RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes – May 27, 2020

Members Present:

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Amanda Butler	Education Sector Technical Advisory Member
Kirsten Dueck	Chair and Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Michelle Edwards	RRRC Liaison Member
Rebecca Gartner	Culpeper County Representative

Members Absent:

Matthew Coyle	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Tech. Advisory Member
Brad Jarvis	Madison County Representative
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Michael Sands	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Tom Weaver	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
Vacant	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member

Guests:

Ruth Welch	Rappahannock Food Pantry
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Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order and introductions were made. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually online with a call-in option, as requested by appointed members.

Regional Farm-to-School Liaison Update

Michelle Edwards, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC)

As discussed during the previous Food Policy Council Meeting, RRRC has been working with public school food service directors in the region, No Kid Hungry and the PATH Foundation to hire a full-time Regional Farm to School Liaison. RRRC submitted a funding proposal in March to No Kid Hungry and the PATH Foundation, accompanied by support letters from each school district in the region. RRRC Commissioners also committed to providing matching funds from the Commission. A June start date had been planned, but moved to late summer due to the pandemic.

Ms. Edwards stated that funding is budgeted for the next fiscal year beginning in July, but currently on hold due to the pandemic. She asked the two school food service/nutrition directors present whether they would prefer to move forward with hiring the liaison or wait until next school year, acknowledging that funding may not be available next year. Kirsten Dueck clarified that PATH Foundation funding would likely be available next year.

Amanda Butler stated that much about the coming school year is undecided in her school district. Linda Blair agreed. Students starting the year with distance learning, staggered starts and meals in the classroom have all been discussed as possibilities. Ms. Butler stated she should know more in two weeks. Ms. Blair stated that her food budget has been essentially eliminated and she will have to rely solely on USDA funds.

Ms. Edwards and Ms. Dueck asked whether the proposal objectives could be reshaped to fit school districts' current needs. Ms. Butler and Ms. Blair felt that the uncertainty, obstacles and lack of opportunities would make it difficult for the liaison to succeed. Ms. Edwards noted that there also did not appear to be an alternate need for the liaison to fill, because the school staff were already meeting those needs associated with the pandemic.

The general consensus of those present was to reapply for funding for the Farm to School Liaison next year to be hired June 2021. After further discussion, it was agreed that Ms. Edwards would contact the other school food service directors to get their input prior to making a final decision.

For additional information or suggestions regarding RRRC's regional farm to school efforts, please contact Ms. Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org or (540) 829-7450.

American Farmland Trust Local Food Promotion Program Grant

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Ms. Edwards provided a summary of the USDA Local Food Promotion Program Grant that American Farmland Trust submitted and to which RRRC is a partner. Other major partners include Piedmont Environment Council and Virginia Tech, as well as Mike Sands.

The proposed project would:

1. Perform an economic impact analysis on processing and selling of beef products locally and regionally, including to local and regional institutions.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and local producer willingness to participate in different producer cooperative strategies.
3. Evaluate the environmental benefits and impacts of increasing local processing capacity; look specifically at transportation and fuel consumption.

RRRC would be tasked with taking the lead on the economic analysis and market analysis. This project is looking to fill niches in beef production such as further processing, storage, freezing, etc. rather than a full slaughter facility. It is an outgrowth of previous studies RRRC, PEC and American Farmland Trust conducted to fill the remaining knowledge gaps prior to implementation.

Tween Rivers Trail Update

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Ms. Edwards provided an update from RRRC staff member Hunter Berry on the Tween Rivers Trail agritourism program. Due to COVID-19, most of the trail sites have been closed to visitors since mid-March. Many sites remain closed, or are only offering curbside pick-up, delivery or outdoor seating, if available. Some require reservations for outdoor seating to ensure they do not exceed capacity. Tween Rivers Trail has a few ongoing advertisements that are targeted to getting people to buy local and choose curbside, delivery or other options available.

Additionally, businesses have sought information for financial assistance from the federal and state government as well as non-profit assistance. Local economic development departments and the Lord Fairfax Small Business Development Center have been a tremendous help and resource for local businesses in the region.

Council Vice-chair Elections

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Ms. Edwards stated that Clyde Firman's retirement has left a vacancy on the Council. A new Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member will need to be appointed. She asked members to consider nominations to be discussed and voted on during the next meeting.

Member Roundtable

- **Rebecca Gartner, Culpeper County Cooperative Extension** – Virginia Cooperative Extension is under the directive of no in-person programming until September 1. They are moving programming online where possible. She is working with a group to start an online food preserving course.

She is also working on the Virtual Farm to Table Project with Fauquier 4-H Agent Lenah Nguyen. This state-wide program includes free online sessions exploring various local food producers and their products, including a cooking segment. Sessions are scheduled Fridays at 2:00pm through September. Visit

<https://fauquier.ext.vt.edu/programs/FarmtoTable.html> for more information, including recordings of past sessions.

- **Ruth Welch, Rappahannock Food Pantry**– The Food Pantry has been very busy during the pandemic, and everyone has been very generous with donations, including 50 gallons of milk every week from Piedmont Environmental Council, sourced from a local dairy cooperative. They also received grants from PATH Foundation and Northern Piedmont Community Foundation. The Lions Club has been working with local restaurants to provide meals at the Food Pantry.

They have been doing very well over the last two months, but are concerned what will

happen once unemployment ends. They are anticipating a resurgence of people coming in for help. Additionally, they are still working on building their new food pantry facility.

- **Amanda Butler, Rappahannock County Public Schools** – The District is busy with their feeding program. All students and youth under age 18 in the County are eligible for free breakfast and lunch during this time. Pick-ups are Mondays, and they are also doing deliveries. The school provides 5 days-worth of meals and the food pantry has donated a “weekend backpack,” covering the full week of meals. The School District is below 50% free and reduced participants so is typically not eligible for a summer meal program. However, the USDA provided a waiver, so the District can provide meals through June. The state has requested another waiver to allow them to provide meals through the rest of the summer.

Rappahannock Farmers Market opened last week and went well. The Market operating with pre-orders only and in a drive-through format. Ms. Butler stated she has a PATH intern that starts in June. They are hoping to continue doing Pop Bucks for use at the Farmers Market, doing virtual bucks that students can redeem for a CSA-style “market bag.” They hope to get the program started in June.

- **Kirsten Dueck, PATH Foundation**– The Foundation has been involved with several farm-to-fork initiatives recently under the umbrella of Community Cooks. The program involves local cooks cooking local farm products for local food pantries, shelters, etc. in regular weekly drop-offs and pop-up sites. Starting this week, 4P Foods will also be supplying min-CSA shares. PATH Foundation made a grant to that project and has been doing some of the coordination.

She also alerted the Council to grants that the Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition (MAFRAC) provides to support local food systems. Applications are available on the group’s website: <https://mafrac.com/>. MAFRAC has been fulfilling up to \$45k per week in grant requests, with individual grants up to \$15k per organization. They are especially interested in supporting growers and food service workers.

- **Linda Blair, Orange County Public Schools** – The School District is providing seven breakfasts and lunches to children in the County every Thursday, including a half gallon of milk. After a slow start, they have had very high participation rates. The District has four distribution sites, and volunteers bring meals to those unable to pick up on-site. Now that the school year is over, the District is down to one distribution site at the high school, because food service workers’ contracts do not cover the summer. Under the District budget, she is able to keep three workers for the summer feeding program.

She has been in contact with several area food banks and churches that provide meals, so she can provide a list to families that are unable to pick-up at the distribution site. They partnered with community groups looking for exposure, such as 4-H and the Dairy Alliance, by allowing volunteers to distribute flyers and other materials at the pick-up sites. Additionally, they partnered with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, who will be providing a “kid pack” of non-perishable food at an alternate site at the other end of the County through the end of July.

Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development

Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting would be in late July, and asked attendees whether they would prefer a virtual or in-person meeting. After discussion, members chose to hold the next meeting in the same on-line format. Ms. Edwards will poll appointed members via email to schedule the date and time. Council meeting materials will be available on RRRC's food system webpage at www.rregion.org/foodsystem.html.