



RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes – July 22, 2020

Members Present:

Amanda Butler	Education Sector Technical Advisory Member
Matthew Coyle	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Tech. Advisory Member
Kirsten Dueck	Chair and Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Michelle Edwards	RRRC Liaison Member
Rebecca Gartner	Culpeper County Representative
Brad Jarvis	Madison County Representative
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative

Members Absent:

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Michael Sands	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Tom Weaver	Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member
Vacant	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member

Guests:

Janet Bearden	George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center
Jacob Gilley	American Farmland Trust
Tom McDougall	4P Foods

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Kirsten Dueck called the meeting to order and introductions were made. Michelle Edwards confirmed that a quorum was present. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually online with a call-in option, as requested by appointed members.

4P Foods Pandemic Response Efforts and Updates

Tom McDougall, 4P Foods

Tom McDougall presented an update on 4P Foods' pandemic response efforts from March 1st to the present. Prior to this March, 4P Foods operated under a 50:50 consumer vs wholesale model, with wholesale consisting of mainly universities and restaurants. On March 9th, the business moved into a bigger warehouse, and then on March 12th half of their business evaporated within a few days as wholesale businesses closed.

Mr. McDougall pivoted his team to grow direct-to-consumer side, which really took off, so much so they had to scale up to 24-hour operation with four shifts per day. Business plateaued in May and reached a new normal in June when wholesale business returned a little, but with new customers.

Together with partners across Virginia, Maryland and Washington DC, 4P Foods assisted with relief efforts by forming the Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition (MAFRAC). Washington DC government contracted 4P Foods to pack shelf stable food boxes for low income and homeless individuals. They also started a feeding program in Fauquier County with locally sourced and prepared local foods. They processed local apples into applesauce to provide a more nutritious alternative to mass-produced. 4P Foods has relied on local liaisons to connect with communities and meet their needs.

MAFRAC started a funding program to meet the gap between the cost of local food and local organizations', such as schools', budgets. Mr. McDougall stated that the bad news is that the funding is running out yet the pandemic is continuing. Funding for the program will run out in September if they do not raise additional funds.

Ms. Edwards asked where the funding for these programs came from. He replied that fourteen different investor donors supplied the funds, including the PATH Foundation, Washington Nationals and individuals donors, for example.

Ms. Dueck asked what the Council or local government can do to support these efforts? He answered that no Virginia distributors were awarded Coronavirus Food Assistance Program contracts by the USDA. New York started its own program to address gaps in the federal program. He is working with the Virginia Federation of Food Banks to start a similar program. Additionally, Charlottesville filtered some of its Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to feed families, and other communities could do the same. Food Councils can also advocate for regional infrastructure investment in local food, which is one of the biggest needs. Furthermore, an examination of local food procurement in government, universities and other institutions is needed.

Amanda Butler asked 4P Foods work with school's family feeding programs have fared. He replied that there are people in communities experiencing food insecurity for the first time and it is emotionally difficult for them. The need is there and ongoing. 4P Foods fed twice a week for several months and many of the same people continued to show up.

Ms. Dueck asked what if any steps can be taken to foster small food networks. Mr. McDougall responded that the most important step is to provide resources to people like Rebecca Gartner to go from hypothetical food infrastructure projects, such as the George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center, to having it up and running. Ms. Dueck asked Ms. Gartner if she had a wish list, to which she replied yes, they have a architectural plans, equipment lists and business plan, all of which includes phases for the project. She agreed to provide the information to Ms. Dueck including the projected costs to open the facility.

Mr. McDougall stated that his business is assuming a 40% decrease from their peak, with 60% retention rate, after the pandemic. Many people have learned to cook for the first time and fallen in love with cooking at home, and/or have tasted local food and appreciate the difference. Also, anecdotally, people are now realizing the serious flaws in the local food system.

Ms. Gartner asked if there is a need for healthy prepared meals? He answered yes, including hot, cold and shelf-stable meals.

Council Vice-chair Elections

Ms. Dueck stated that Clyde Firman's retirement has left the Consumption Sector Council seat vacant. Ms. Edwards responded that after asking for nominations at the previous meeting, she received one for Ruth Welch, Vice-president of the Rappahannock Food Pantry. Ms. Dueck asked if there were any further nominations and hearing none called for a motion to vote on the nomination. Ms. Butler seconded the motion. The roll call vote was unanimous in favor of electing Ms. Welch as the new Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member.

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.

Member Roundtable

- **Michelle Edwards, *Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission***– As agreed during the last Council meeting, Ms. Edwards contacted the school food service directors not

present to get their input regarding delaying the Farm to School Liaison position. The schools concurred with the Council's recommendation to reapply for funding for the Farm to School Liaison next year to be hired June 2021, and RRRC informed the grant funders, No Kid Hungry and the PATH foundation, of its decision.

- **Matt Coyle, Piedmont Environmental Council**– PEC's new Buy Fresh Buy Local website is now online, and includes an interactive map and ability for farmers to sell products. Print guides will now be published every two years instead of annually, with the next publication in 2021. PEC raised almost \$60,000 to provide local milk to area food banks. They are starting a similar local beef initiative to donate to Fauquier Food Bank each month beginning in July.
- **Amanda Butler, Rappahannock County Public Schools** – The District's final summer meal distribution will occur on Monday, July 27th. The program lasted 20 weeks and went very well. They are now transitioning to planning for the new school year, which will be a hybrid model with classes held two days/week. They anticipate feeding students both in school as well as virtual learners. Their Pop Up Buck program became a CSA-style bag this year due to the pandemic.
- **Brad Jarvis, Madison County Cooperative Extension**– The Madison Farmers Market has been very active with online sales and curb-side pickup. Their online service exploded with orders and shut down the system, so they have now migrated to the Square Storefront. They have approximately seventy transactions/week. He has been assisting with the opening of a meat processing plant in Madison County with the goal of having it online in October. He has also been pushing malt and barley to local farmers successfully with approximately 60 to 70 acres malting wheat sold to a malting house in Charlottesville, which will then be sold to local breweries.
- **Rebecca Gartner, Culpeper County Cooperative Extension**– She is starting an online food preservation course at a cost of \$15/person. Registration closes at the end of October and registrants have until December to view the classes. She and Janet Bearden have been updating the George Washington Carver Food Enterprise Center's business plan and have been talking with potential funders and other interested individuals.
- **Ray Pickering, Fauquier County Agricultural Development**– Fauquier's Finest expressed interest in expansion of their meat processing facility, and a couple farms are interested in on-farm meat processing. The County intends to apply for a grant to fund a feasibility study regarding farmers markets in the County.
- **Jacob Gilley, American Farmland Trust**– The Trust submitted a Local Food Promotion Program Grant application in partnership with PEC, RRRC and Virginia Tech among others to study beef processing needs and potential solutions in the region. This summer, they are studying grazing plots in Locust Dale planted in forages compared to fescue. The Trust is planning an in-person workshop to be held in September.
- **Kirsten Dueck, PATH Foundation**– The Foundation mobilized \$250,000 since the start of the pandemic in March, much of it around food. Its Board approved a Community Resilience Grant, which is a one-time program taking application through July with a maximum award of \$75,000. Unlike some grant programs, operation expenses are eligible.

Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development

Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting would be in late September, 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.rrregion.org/foodsystem.html.