

**15th Meeting of the
Cass Clay Food Commission
July 12th, 2017
Fargo Commission Chambers**

Members Present:

Arland Rasmussen, Cass County Commission, Chair
Mike Thorstad, West Fargo City Commission
Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
Heidi Durand, Moorhead City Council
Mindy Grant, At-Large Member

Members Absent:

Jenny Mongeau, Clay County Commission
John Strand, Fargo City Commission
Jon Evert, At-Large Member
Chris Olson, At-Large Member
Kayla Pridmore, At-Large Member
Dana Rieth, At-Large Member

Others Present:

Kim Lipetzky, Fargo Cass Public Health
Gina Nolte, Clay County Public Health
Hali Durand, Cass County Planning
Noelle Harden, University of Minnesota Extension
Nikki Johnson, Joint University of Minnesota/North Dakota State University Extension Educator
Rita Ussatis, North Dakota State University Extension Agent – Cass County
Abby Gold, Cass Clay Food Systems Initiative
Deb Haugen, Cass Clay Food Systems Initiative
Adam Altenburg, Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

A quorum was not present at the meeting. Non-actionable items were presented as information to the Commission and no action was taken on any items.

1(a). Approve Order and Contents of the Overall Agenda

A motion to approve the order and contents of the agenda was made by Mr. Aasness and seconded by Ms. Durand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

1(b). Review and Action on Minutes from May 10, 2017

No action was taken.

1(c). Commission Check-In

Chair Rasmussen informed the Commission that members would have an opportunity to give an update on any news or events happening in the community.

Ms. Johnson stated that the One Vegetable One Community (OVOC) program distributed 1,300 packets of seeds in the Fargo-Moorhead area. She explained that the starter packets, which included kale seeds, growing information, and facts about cooking, were available at libraries,

public health, WIC offices, and local area coffee shops. She asked that any Commission members who were growing kale to consider sharing their pictures on the OVOC Facebook page.

Ms. Nolte explained that she had just handed out the 2017-2018 Minnesota Grown Directory for farmers markets, CSA farms, pumpkin patches, wineries, and Christmas tree farms. She stated that additional copies were available through Clay County Public Health.

Mr. Aasness informed the Commission that the Whistle Stop Park Farmers Market was now open every Thursday from 3:00 to 7:00 PM in Dilworth.

Ms. Grant stated that, despite the dry weather, the community gardens with Growing Together were doing well. She stated that Growing Together would be holding gardening training sessions and that more information could be found on their Facebook page.

Hali Durand explained that the Orchard Glen Park project, a partnership project between Audubon Dakota and the Fargo Parks District, received matching funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund for community orchard restoration, buckthorn removal, trail development, and additional maintenance needs.

Ms. Gold stated that the Norther Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS) was hosting a pollinator seminar 'Bringing Back Pollinators to our Gardens and Farms' that evening from 6:00 to 9:00 PM at the Baymont Inn. She stated that the event was free and open to the public.

Ms. Ussatis informed the Commission that Cass County Extension would be holding canning and food preservation workshops on August 15 and 16 at the Cass County Annex in the Bison Meeting Room.

Heidi Durand stated that the Moorhead City Council would be hearing from Ms. Myrdal and Mr. Altenburg at the Committee of the Whole meeting on August 28.

Ms. Harden explained that the Minnesota Food Charter would be holding a series of events in Minnesota to help advance Food Charter strategies. She explained that a regional Food Charter in Action event would be held in Moorhead in November and that Commission members interested in helping out could email her.

2. Gleaning Blueprint Discussion and Vote for Approval

No action was taken.

3. Prairie Roots Food Co-op

Jodi Regan provided the Commission information about the new Prairie Roots Co-op.

Ms. Regan stated that the idea to start a food co-op in the Fargo-Moorhead area began in 2010. She explained that a co-op is owned and democratically governed by its members, people who either purchase its products or services or are employed by the business. She iterated that each member owns an equal share and that this entitles a member to one vote in matters such as profit distribution and selecting the Board of Directors.

Ms. Regan explained that Prairie Roots was incorporated in 2011 and that an online market ran from 2013 to 2014. She stated that after 2014, online market efforts were pushed aside to focus on a brick-and-mortar location in the community. She explained that in 2016, Kurt Kopperud was selected as the store's general manager and that the site of the former Mathison's building

on NP Avenue was selected as the location for the new store. She stated that the store had its soft opening on July 5 and that an official grand opening was scheduled for late August.

Ms. Regan provided highlights on what can be found inside the store including: local produce from 55 providers, bulk goods, a hot food and salad bar along with assorted ready-to-eat items, and kombucha on tap. She stated that the co-op is proud to offer double SNAP benefits by providing \$20 gift cards when people first use their EBT cards at the store. She explained that Prairie Roots was looking for additional local partners to help sustain double SNAP benefits beyond the initial \$5,000 pilot program. She also informed the Commission that Prairie Roots and Essentia Health sponsored 10 memberships for low-income/disadvantaged community members and was looking to sponsor additional memberships through partnerships with local and area affiliates. Ms. Regan also promoted the co-op's community room that can be used for workshops and other events.

Ms. Regan explained that the co-op has a positive economic impact on the region including the creation of 35 new jobs and helping to support 75 local and regional producers. She stated that the starting wage at Prairie Roots is \$12 an hour and that they strive to provide livable wages to their workers. She provided a statistic that stated that for every \$1,000 spent at a co-op, \$1,604 is generated in the local economy. She also stressed that the co-op is focused on sustainability through composting and recycling efforts and by promoting reusable containers and providing real plates and silverware to help limit the need for disposable food packaging.

Ms. Grant asked if sponsored memberships were extended to producers as well. Ms. Regan responded that Prairie Roots would consider producers for sponsored memberships and that organizations could also apply to be members.

Ms. Johnson asked if the co-op had been in contact with local extension agents about SNAP benefits. Ms. Regan stated that Kaye Kirsch, membership and marketing consultant for Prairie Roots, has taken the lead on that and was unsure if she had coordinated with extension. Ms. Johnson said that agents in both North Dakota and Minnesota are available to assist on SNAP opportunities for businesses.

Mr. Thorstad asked a clarifying question on whether you need to be a member to shop at the co-op. Ms. Regan answered that people do not need to be members to buy items. She stated that members are able to receive sales discounts on some advertised items throughout the store. She iterated that lifetime memberships are a one-time \$300 fee and there are no additional annual costs.

Chair Rasmussen asked how big the community room was. Ms. Regan answered that the room can hold 25 people, with seating for 15 to 20 people at a time.

4. Commission Survey and One-on-One Conversation Results

Mr. Altenburg presented the results of a May survey completed by Commissioners about their views and knowledge of the Cass Clay Food Commission. He shared that, overall, Commissioners stated that their understanding of food and urban agricultural issues and practices has increased since the Commission began in 2015. He noted that, with regard to the blueprints developed, Commissioners were about evenly split on whether they thought their jurisdictions were ready to adopt one or more of the ideas.

Mr. Altenburg explained that members of the Steering Committee had recently sat down with each Commissioner for a series of one-on-one meetings. He stated that several takeaways from these meetings are that the blueprints are valuable tools and should continue to be shared with

jurisdictions. He noted that Commissioners valued the educational component of the Food Commission and that, when it came to moving from planning and education to action and implementation, it should be driven by community members rather than Commissioners themselves. He also stated that Commissioners believed it was important to involve youth and minority groups in the Commission and its activities.

Mr. Altenburg explained several themes that could be considered in future blueprint topics or Commission activities including: how to better address hunger, food skills and food preparation, combating food waste, looking at food access in low-income and rural areas, SNAP/WIC education, looking at potential farmland preservation needs, agritourism, and pollinator health.

Mr. Altenburg stated that, since 2015, the Commission has relied on the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan and its six action steps to increase the support for the local food system as well as address potential local food production and distribution issues. He explained that two action steps, the development of the Food Commission and studying best practices related to urban agriculture, have already been completed or examined thoroughly.

Mr. Altenburg explained that there are four additional action steps the Commission could examine more closely. He explained that one action step, economic development, includes the potential for supporting corner store initiatives that connect small farmers with convenience stores, as well as support for a local food hub which manages food products from local and regional producers for wholesale or institutional demand. He stated that a second step, food access, could look more at how better to support and promote charitable food programs which encourage healthy foods, as well as food service guidelines that align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in Public Institutions. He described a third step, food infrastructure, could include evaluating permanent locations for farmers markets, increasing food-processing capacity in the Fargo-Moorhead area, improving aggregation of local food to increase distribution efficiency and access to volume consumers, and establishing annual updates to the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan. He concluded with a fourth step, outreach and education, including the development of a marketing plan to increase knowledge about local food benefits, integrating food in school programs and curriculums, and education on food safety, as well as gardening, handling, preparation, and preservation classes.

Mr. Altenburg concluded that it was the Steering Committee's recommendation that the Commission begin to focus on food access issues that may be impacting the area. He stated that some potential blueprint or discussion topics in the future may include: looking at rural grocery store needs, healthy corner store initiatives, updating the area's food desert map that show places with less access to affordable, healthy foods, potentially looking at food source proximity to schools and the relationship between fast-food restaurants near schools and obesity, mobile food markets, SNAP/EBT acceptance, and healthy food guidelines for public places.

5. Cass Clay Food Partners: New Structure and Strategic Plan

Ms. Lipetzky stated that, with the changes seen in food systems issues in the community and the expanded opportunities to grow, sell, and purchase locally grown food, it was an opportune time to review and restructure of the Cass Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI). She explained that the key benefit of this new structure would allow more people to become involved in food systems considerations through grassroots efforts and networking opportunities.

She explained that a more formal presentation would occur at the Commission meeting in September but that Commission members could review the restructure outline presented in their packet materials. She stated that the new structure and strategic plan would first be presented to the six major jurisdictions in the coming weeks, along with a general update of the

Commission's activities since 2015, to see if any of the cities or counties had additional comments.

6. Case Study: Backyard Chickens in Fargo

Ms. Lipetzky shared the process of the City of Fargo's adoption of a backyard chicken ordinance.

Ms. Lipetzky began by explaining that, when the Commission began researching issues related to urban agriculture, the purpose was to help create policy documents that begin to provide some of the guidelines and background education should jurisdictions decide to move forward with different topic areas. She stated that, in order to better document the process of how an issue successfully moved forward from blueprint to ordinance, the steering committee developed a case study on the City of Fargo's backyard chicken ordinance. She explained that this study was intended to provide guidance to members of the community in bringing forth additional issues in their respective jurisdictions.

Ms. Lipetzky explained that the issue of backyard chickens had a bit of history with the City of Fargo and that the city was ready to resolve it. She stated that one of the guiding principles for Go2030, the current comprehensive plan for the city, is increasing access to healthy food and working to strengthen the local food system. She stated that prior negative media coverage had forced the city to consider how best to address the issue.

Ms. Lipetzky stated that their first step was to meet with city commissioners individually to gauge their support of the issue and provide them education and answer any questions they might have had. She explained that this process helped when moving to the next step by filing an official request with the Fargo City Commission to work with the city attorney to enlist their help in drafting an ordinance. She stated the Fargo City Commission approved this request in November 2016.

Ms. Lipetzky explained that, from November 2016 to April 2017, city staff worked on the language of an ordinance draft using the backyard chicken keeping blueprint as well as researching examples of other ordinances and additional assistance from the University of Minnesota and Cass County Extension. She stated that another key component was public input, including posting the draft ordinance on letseatlocal.org as well as holding an open house in March 2017 to provide education, review the draft ordinance, and allow opportunity for discussion and input.

Ms. Lipetzky stated that she conducted numerous media interviews and stories to provide factual, neutral information on the issue. She shared that, overall, the media interviews were positive and important for the success of the ordinance. She explained that the proposed draft ordinance was brought to the Fargo City Commission for a first meeting and public hearing on April 10. She stated that the ordinance was approved as written at that meeting, with subsequent approvals on April 24 and May 8.

7. Public Comment Opportunity

Chair Rasmussen informed the Commission that time would be allotted for public comments.

Mara Solberg, Solberg Farms, informed the Commission that Green Riders, a cycling group that travels to different areas across the country to perform community service and other acts of sustainability, would be coming to her farm in July to help construct Little Free Garden boxes for the Fargo-Moorhead area.

Janet Lindberg, PartnerSHIP4Health, stated that she is working to promote healthy food access in Otter Tail County including corner store and healthy restaurant initiatives, community gardens, and farmers markets.

Bjorn Solberg, Solberg Farms and Hugh's Gardens, spoke about a program intended to help bring local produce back into grocery stores. He stated that, through this program, local producers are able to drop off their produce at a store location and that the store's distribution chain is able to take some of that produce and deliver it to other stores or bring it back to their main distribution centers. He asked if gleaning practices may somehow incorporate aspects of that program. He also stated that he thought food waste was an important topic to consider as part of future Commission activities.

Jemima Heppner, FM Pay It Forward, informed the Commission that her site helps to provide donated items to people in need and that the site also includes information on where people can access food in the area. She stated that she was interested in future gleaning activities in the community.

8. Commission and Steering Committee Roundtable

Chair Rasmussen asked for the Commission and the steering committee to share any additional updates.

Mr. Thorstad asked if any of the blueprints had been disseminated to the jurisdictions. Ms. Lipetzky responded that they are available at letseatlocal.org but was unsure if jurisdictions had all of the blueprints that had been approved. Mr. Thorstad stated that it would be good to include parks and schools as applicable. Ms. Durand noted that she had shared blueprints with Moorhead's city manager but that she had not shared them with other council members.

9. Commission Action Steps

Mr. Altenburg provided a preliminary schedule of when the steering committee would be meeting with each jurisdiction to talk about the Cass Clay Food Partners new structure. He stated that information on each of the approved blueprints could also be provided at that time.

Chair Rasmussen stated that the next meeting would be held on September 13, 2017.

Chair Rasmussen adjourned the meeting at 11:52 AM.