

**6th Meeting of the
Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission
January 13th, 2016
Fargo Commission Chambers**

Members Present:

Heidi Durand, Moorhead City Council, Chair
Mike Thorstad, West Fargo City Commission
Jenny Mongeau, Clay County Commission
Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
Mike Williams, Fargo City Commission
Jessica Arneson, At-Large Member
Jon Evert, At-Large Member
Janet Paul, At-Large Member
Dana Rieth, At-Large Member

Members Absent:

Arland Rasmussen, Cass County Commission
Andrea Baumgardner, At-Large Member

Others Present:

Megan Myrdal, Project Coordinator
Kim Lipetzky, Fargo Cass Public Health
Rita Ussatis, North Dakota State University Extension
Noelle Harden, University of Minnesota Extension
Abby Gold, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Adam Altenburg, Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

Chair Durand called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM.

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

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

1(b). Review and Action on Minutes from November 4, 2015

Mr. Evert stated that a small correction needed to be made to the 2016 Commission Chair Appointment discussion to reflect that the motion was seconded by Mr. Aasness. Mr. Altenburg replied that that correction would be made.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Evert and seconded by Mr. Williams. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2(a). Urban Chickens Education

Ms. Myrdal explained that the topic of urban chickens was previously discussed at the Commission meeting in November 2015. Ms. Myrdal stated that since several Commissioners were absent at that meeting, the Steering Committee would review the information again so as to give everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts and provide input on the issue and the accompanying blueprint.

Ms. Myrdal explained that the growing desire in backyard chickens is partly attributable to the growing interest as a food source (eggs) and also people seeking a closer connection to their food. Ms. Myrdal stated that one hen is able to provide three to four eggs a week. Ms. Myrdal stated that chickens may also be kept as companion animals that can provide a source of comfort. Ms. Myrdal explained that backyard chickens may also be a way to teach children about nature, agriculture, and how to responsibly care for animals. Ms. Myrdal concluded that chickens are omnivores and are able to help with food waste reduction as part of an integrated food system.

Ms. Myrdal stated that there are many different breeds of chickens that are available that have been specifically bred for a backyard environment. Ms. Myrdal explained that breeds often used in an urban setting have been bred to have a mellow temperament, sustained egg laying, and northern climate tolerance. Ms. Myrdal provided several examples of heavier breeds adaptable to northern climates including the Buff Orpington, Ameraucanas, and the Speckled Sussex.

Ms. Myrdal explained that a proper diet and fresh water are important to maintain backyard chickens. Ms. Myrdal stated that chickens will eat grains, fruits, vegetables, and insects, as well as fruit, vegetable, and garden scraps. Ms. Myrdal stated that feed requirements tend to increase in the winter and decrease in the summer due to metabolic changes. Ms. Myrdal explained that chickens need to be fed daily, let out of their coops each morning and put inside their coops at dusk each night, and that eggs should be picked up twice a day.

Ms. Myrdal stated that hens begin laying eggs at around six months and continue for five to ten years depending on the breed, nutrition, and health of the animal. Ms. Myrdal explained that peak production usually happens within the first two years and drops each year as the hen molts in the early fall, in tandem with the loss of daylight hours every season. Ms. Myrdal stated that it is essential that hens have at least 12 to 14 hours of daylight each day to continue laying eggs and that a regular light bulb inside coops is essential to allow for sufficient lighting to keep producing eggs.

Ms. Myrdal explained that a coop and a run are two important structures for backyard chickens, as well as nest boxes, with one nest box per four to five birds. Ms. Myrdal stated that chickens also like to be up high and a place to roost is important. Ms. Myrdal stated that coops must provide protection from weather and predators and be well-insulated. Ms. Myrdal also stated that coops should have a light bulb or heat lamp for winter months, as well as ventilation for fresh air. Ms. Myrdal stated that it is recommended that coops have a minimum three to five square feet per bird, including outdoor space. Ms. Myrdal explained that the main predators to chickens are raccoons, rats, owls, hawks, and cats – and that an enclosed space at night is essential for their protection. Ms. Myrdal stated that the run is important to provide chickens a fenced, protected area while they are outside.

Ms. Myrdal stated that Fleet Farm and other retailers have, in recent years, noticed an upward trend in backyard chicken keeping. Ms. Myrdal explained that 2015 was the first year in which Fleet Farm held poultry clinics, which explained best practices on how to keep backyard chickens. Ms. Myrdal stated that nine clinics were held in 2015 and that 20 were scheduled for 2016, including one in Fargo. Ms. Myrdal stated that urban chicken keeping requires about a \$500 minimum investment.

Ms. Myrdal explained that chickens raised in backyard settings generally stay healthy and are not easily susceptible to diseases. Ms. Myrdal stated that monitoring changes in a chicken's personality or energy level is important in monitoring a chicken's health. Ms. Myrdal stated that sanitation is also key and that coops and outdoor areas should be cleaned weekly or as needed to control manure and odor build-up. Ms. Myrdal explained that feeders and waterers should be regularly cleaned and

disinfected. Ms. Myrdal stated that troughs, perches, and nests should also be regularly cleaned and disinfected and that thorough cleaning of the coop and run is done once a year.

Ms. Myrdal informed the Commission of common concerns that are expressed with raising backyard chickens and how they may be addressed or debunked. Ms. Myrdal explained one concern in that roosters are loud and that allowing chickens in an urban setting is a nuisance. Ms. Myrdal stated that egg-laying hens are female while roosters are male and that most urban settings ban roosters. Ms. Myrdal explained that hens at their loudest speak at the same decibel level as human conversation but is also personality based, with some hens being more talkative than others.

Ms. Myrdal stated that another common concern is that birds carry diseases, and of particular concern salmonella, and that people will get sick from backyard chickens. Ms. Myrdal explained that live poultry may have salmonella germs in their droppings and on their bodies and that people become infected with salmonella when they put their hands on areas that have been in contact with feces in or around their mouth. Ms. Myrdal provided information from the Centers for Disease Control on guidelines to reduce salmonella infections from live poultry including: washing hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling live poultry, using hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available, supervising young children anytime they are around live poultry, washing hands after removing soiled shoes and clothing, thoroughly cooking eggs, cleaning any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry, and always assuming that anywhere that live poultry has roamed is contaminated. Ms. Myrdal explained that children younger than five, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems should not handle live poultry. Ms. Myrdal also stated that people should not eat or drink in areas with live poultry and that chickens should not be allowed roam inside people's houses. Ms. Myrdal stated that most outbreaks of salmonella have been linked with people bringing live poultry into their homes.

Ms. Myrdal expressed that another common concern is that urban chickens will attract unwanted pests such as flies. Ms. Myrdal stated that flies and other pests lay their eggs in droppings because of the moisture content and that waste should be removed every four to five days. Ms. Myrdal also stated that proper bedding care is important to prevent pest breeding. Ms. Myrdal stated that chicken owners often use materials such as wood shavings, sawdust, dry leaves, or straw provide a dry cushion and also help control odor and pests. Ms. Myrdal explained that coop bedding may be collected with manure and disposed in a composting bin or that manure and soiled bedding may be separated and cleaned on a daily basis.

Ms. Myrdal stated that an increased presence of predators such as rats, raccoons, and hawks into the urban setting has also been listed as a common concern. Ms. Myrdal explained that chickens should not attract urban predators more than a cat or dog. Ms. Myrdal stated that, with the exception of hawks, most predators are nocturnal while chickens are active during the day, and that enclosing chickens at night should prevent predators from accessing them. Ms. Myrdal explained that not leaving feed out overnight is also a good practice.

Ms. Myrdal addressed a final common concern in which the egg-laying potential of chickens is limited to only a few years and concerns with what to do with chickens after that period. Ms. Myrdal explained that hens do outlive their ability to produce eggs but that there are options to do after that period including: slaughtering and processing options in the region, donating to local producers, or choosing to keep birds as companion animals regardless of egg production.

Ms. Myrdal concluded that people desire to keep backyard chickens for a variety of reasons including food, education, companionship, and sustainability. Ms. Myrdal stated that a number of communities across the United States and in the region have changed ordinances to allow for a certain number of backyard hens with defined guidelines and restrictions.

2(b). Urban Chickens Blueprint

Ms. Harden informed the Commission that several revisions had been made to the backyard chickens blueprint since the Commission meeting in November 2015. Ms. Harden explained that the background section includes reasons people choose to keep backyard chickens, as well as a list of common issues that ordinances address. Ms. Harden stated that within the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area, chicken keeping is permitted in Cass County, Clay County as an accessory use, and Fargo with conditions.

Ms. Harden explained the framework for evaluating urban chickens including health, environment, economic, and social aspects. Ms. Harden explained a health benefit of urban chicken includes an increased access to nutritious food source, while a concern would be disease risk. Ms. Harden stated that environmental benefits include keeping yards clean of bugs, pests, and weeds, utilizing chicken droppings as fertilizer, and reducing overall food waste, while a concern may be the attraction of unwanted predators. Ms. Harden explained that economic benefits include possible financial relief for low-income families and the potential for individuals to sell backyard chicken eggs, while concerns may be cost of permitting fees and costs associated with setting up a coop along with concerns about disposal of dead birds. Ms. Harden stated that social benefits include regarding chickens as companion animals and increasing awareness of the food cycle, while concerns may include noise, odor, visual worries, and difficulty in keeping chickens in winter.

Ms. Harden addressed a list of common concerns, as well as potential solutions for backyard chickens including: disease, pest attraction, predator attraction, costs to low-income families, disposal, noise, smell, and winter keeping.

Ms. Harden informed the Commission of the status of backyard chicken keeping in regional jurisdictions and those which allow backyard chicken keeping including: Duluth, MN, Lincoln, NE, Rochester, MN, and Sioux Falls, SD. Ms. Harden stated that Bismarck, ND and Grand Forks, ND do not allow backyard chickens.

Ms. Harden stated that some of the common themes in the example ordinances on backyard chicken keeping include: licensing or permitting process, restrictions on the number of hens allowed, prohibition of roosters, and coop design.

Mr. Evert asked what areas of the blueprint have been changed since the previous Commission meeting. Ms. Myrdal explained that information on the North Dakota State University Vet Diagnostic Lab has been added to the section on disposal.

2(c). Public Input

A member of the audience displayed eggs she had collected from her chickens that day. The member reiterated that she believed urban chickens are a great idea and that she and her family had learned a lot in the past 15 months. The member stated that she believed there were simple ways that the blueprint could be modified so that it could be utilized by each of the jurisdictions.

Lindsay Breuler, citizen, asked whether copies of the blueprint were available to the public. Ms. Myrdal answered that the backyard chickens draft blueprint as well as the other previously approved blueprints on backyard beekeeping and community gardens are available on the Let's Eat Local website (letseatlocal.org).

2(d). Commission Discussion

Mr. Thorstad asked one of the audience members to expand upon her thoughts of what else could be included in the blueprint. The audience member stated that it had more to do with coop design and

that by incorporating a plate or piece of wood under the roosting bar, it would be able to catch much of the bird droppings and help keep the rest of the coop cleaner. The audience member stated this is a very easy modification to incorporate into the coop design and the blueprint.

A motion to approve the Backyard Chickens Blueprint was made by Ms. Mongeau and seconded by Mr. Williams. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3. Growing Together

Jack Wood of Growing Together stated that when the organization first started out in 2006, it had one garden plot and eight families that gardened there. Mr. Wood explained that today, Growing Together involves over 150 families and encompasses five sites, six gardens, and produced over 45,000 pounds of food in 2015. Mr. Wood stated that Growing Together has worked with seven different organizations to help them develop their own gardens through a toolkit which it has developed. Mr. Wood stated that Growing Together also works with schools and community groups including Bennett Elementary and Charism. Mr. Wood stated that as the organization moves forward, it will continue to work with churches to develop additional community gardens. Mr. Wood also talked about several youth programs which promote gardening to children and young adults.

4. Meeting with Metro-Area Planners

Mr. Altenburg informed the Commission that on December 10, 2015, the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments and the Steering Committee hosted a meeting with area planners to discuss their experience with regard to food systems and urban agriculture. Mr. Altenburg stated that planners from the cities of Fargo, West Fargo, and Dilworth were in attendance. Mr. Altenburg expressed that this meeting was a good opportunity for the Steering Committee to get a better sense of what some of the cities' attitudes were regarding food systems and urban agriculture, as well as find out what types of questions and requests cities were receiving. Mr. Altenburg stated that it was also an opportunity to share with planners some of the projects the Commission has worked on and to share experiences

Mr. Altenburg stated that some of the questions asked of metro-area planners included: what were jurisdictions hearing from local residents in regard to food systems issues, what were their thoughts on their department's role in food systems issues, what were cities' receptiveness towards food systems changes, and what additional resources or assistance could the Commission or the Steering Committee provide in the future.

Mr. Altenburg explained that planners from both Fargo and West Fargo have been receiving more questions about what's allowed and not allowed in the area, notably the issue of urban chickens. Mr. Altenburg stated that planners from Fargo, West Fargo and Dilworth expressed that they would like to know more about what resident's attitudes are currently with regard to food systems and urban agriculture. Mr. Altenburg shared a view from the meeting that it really is the public contacting the cities, as well as individual city commission or council members, that helps move an issue such as urban agriculture forward. Mr. Altenburg stated that it was in one planner's view that it is more productive for an individual citizen to sit down with an elected official rather than having a larger group or organization try to press an issue forward.

Mr. Altenburg stated that each of the planners present were very interested in any additional resources, including handouts or brochures, that could be provide to the cities. Mr. Altenburg concluded that planners were impressed with the work the Commission has been doing, especially with regard to the blueprints that had been developed, and to continue the dialog and apprise planners about future Commission endeavors.

5. Meeting with Twin Cities Food Systems Consultant

Ms. Harden informed the Commission that on November 24, 2015, the Steering Committee met with Maggi Adamek, a food systems consultant who has done an extensive amount of work on food systems and food policy. Ms. Harden explained that Ms. Adamek provided examples of work done with other food policy councils active in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Ms. Harden also stated that Ms. Adamek provided key strategic guidelines related to communication with the public and the media. Ms. Harden also explained that Ms. Adamek provided examples of additional opportunities the Commission may be able to tap into as the Commission heads into its second year.

6. NDSU Masters of Public Health Student Projects

Ms. Myrdal informed the Commission that in late 2015, the Steering Committee was approached by Dr. Mary Larson of North Dakota State University Masters of Public Health program about several possible collaboration opportunities. Ms. Myrdal explained that through initial conversations, the Steering Committee worked to develop three student group projects that explored the Commission.

Ms. Myrdal explained that the first project was a report based on interviews with Commission members. Ms. Myrdal stated that the purpose of this project was to hear from Commission members about what they felt was going well and areas where Commission members saw room for improvement. Ms. Myrdal stated that a series of ten questions were summarized as part of the report including: issues that are most pressing, changes or suggestions to improve the Commission, whether the makeup of the Commission is sufficient, and whether there were additional community entities that the Commission should be working with.

Ms. Myrdal stated that two other student group projects dealt with message framing and how to share messages that may appeal to people on a value-based perspective. Ms. Myrdal explained that the first of these two projects was related to the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative as a whole and some of the implementation strategies included as part of the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan. Ms. Myrdal explained that the second of these projects dealt solely with urban agriculture and key messaging and framing approaches.

7. Online Community Input

Ms. Lipetzky explained that community members who may not be able to attend Commission meetings are able to submit public comments through the City of Fargo Let's Eat Local website. Ms. Lipetzky stated that two public comments had been received between November and December 2015 and that both were related to urban chickens.

Ms. Lipetzky stated that the first comment came from a Moorhead resident who was in favor of backyard chickens and having the right to provide fresh food for yourself, as well as the benefits to children about the education that comes from raising chickens. Ms. Lipetzky stated that the second comment came from a Glyndon resident who was in attendance at the November 2015 Commission meeting. Ms. Lipetzky explained that the commenter had provided additional thoughts on ways to mitigate concerns regarding urban chickens.

Ms. Myrdal added that she had also spoken with the commenter from Glyndon and that one of the biggest issues they wanted to share was the need to form a poultry producers association should there be a need for education, networking, and resource sharing among people interested in urban chicken practices.

8. Public Comment Opportunity

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

Paul Peter Nielson of Dirthead Microgreens informed the Commission that he produces microgreens for small, local-area restaurants, as well as wholesale bulk sales for several grocery stores. Mr. Nielson stated that he would like to move his business into urban farming which would utilize plots of land that are currently unused or underused in the metro area for restaurant-style production. Mr. Nielson asked for support from the Commission on potential issues that may come up including: production rules, food handling, packaging, and distribution – in addition to any additional laws and regulations for urban growing on a commercial scale.

Mr. Williams asked what type of scale Mr. Nielson was looking at producing microgreens in the metro area. Mr. Nielson answered that he would initially like to start with a half-acre, depending on the property and the need for raised beds, and moving towards two to three acres total. Mr. Nielson also stated he would like to utilize season extenders such as hoop houses, greenhouses, or high tunnels for year-round production of cut greens.

Mr. Evert asked if it was Mr. Nielson's intention to have the two to three acres all in one location or different plots spread out across the metro area. Mr. Nielson replied that pieces of land in various locations would be fine but would prefer them to be in or around the downtown area close to where most of the produce would be going. Mr. Nielson also stated he would prefer properties that already had access to plumbed water.

Lindsay Breuler informed the Commission that she is a new resident to the Fargo-Moorhead area and has previous experience in working with urban gardening and identifying food deserts in Columbus, OH. Ms. Breuler stated that part of her work involved the creation of a farmers market that had initiatives to allow people with SNAP benefits to receive double benefits on produce purchased at the market. Ms. Breuler stated that she was interested in knowing where the Commission was at on those types of activities.

Ms. Lipetzky answered that the Red River Market in downtown Fargo allows SNAP benefits and that work was being done on getting more farmers markets in the area to accept SNAP benefits.

Mr. Williams asked Ms. Breuler on the types of funding mechanisms used in her projects. Ms. Breuler stated that one program was a locally funded program through grant funding through the City of Columbus, as well as and private donors. Ms. Breuler explained that that program then went in on a state-wide grant through the United States Department of Agriculture and the State of Ohio, all of which helped to fund 15 gardens and 15 farmers markets in the Columbus area.

9. Commission and Steering Committee Roundtable

Chair Durand asked for the Commission and the Steering Committee to share any additional updates.

Mr. Thorstad shared information on an experience that West Fargo went through five years ago when a young couple approached the city about allowing backyard chicken keeping. Mr. Thorstad stated that discussion was spirited but that the neighborhood was against the prospect by a ten to one ratio. Mr. Thorstad agreed that a small part of this may have been due to misinformation, including the thought that this would allow roosters in urban areas. Mr. Thorstad explained that the City Commission's biggest concern was the attraction of predators, as the couple owned property along the northern edge of West Fargo and the area already had issues with skunks, fox, and coyotes. Mr. Thorstad also stated that West Fargo didn't believe it had the means to conduct proper inspections. Mr. Thorstad concluded that many of the neighbors against the prospect of backyard chicken keeping at the time viewed it as a rural activity not suitable to an urban environment.

Ms. Paul asked Mr. Thorstad for clarification if those who were against urban chickens were neighbors of the couple. Mr. Thorstad answered that many of those opposed were indeed from the development area.

Ms. Paul provided information to the Commission about Concordia College's efforts to work with the Fresh Connect food hub to provide locally-grown produce. Ms. Paul stated that she was very satisfied with the produce that they received and that the model tended to work well. Ms. Paul explained that she was looking forward to continuing the partnership Fresh Connect in the summer.

Ms. Mongeau stated that she appreciated the efforts that had been made in reaching out to area planners and other leaders as the Commission moves forward on urban agriculture efforts.

Ms. Gold expressed gratitude in what the Commission has been working to achieve and the efforts of each of its individual members to increase access to healthy foods in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Ms. Gold emphasized that the Commission is becoming a model on how to move forward with food systems issues and that it is one of only three networks in North Dakota and Minnesota moving ahead on different food access and public health concerns.

Ms. Myrdal informed the Commission that Ken Foster and Jerry Raguse would be at the next Commission meeting to discuss the high tunnel project at Concordia College, including the challenges they ran into in trying to build a structure of that nature within city limits.

Mr. Evert expressed his appreciation in the work that Jack Wood has been doing with Growing Together and that the community has seen a lot of change in the past five years with how it

Mr. Evert asked Ms. Paul whether Concordia College was concerned with what may be termed 'ugly' food as opposed to what a grocery store may be concerned with. Ms. Paul answered that it depended on the item but for those which may be diced or mixed, it doesn't matter. Ms. Paul stated there had been minor issues with locally-grown apples that were completely edible but were not as visually appealing as store-bought apples.

Mr. Williams informed the Commission of the Fargo Land Development Task Force and how it is working to meet the goals of redevelopment, infill, and creating walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. Mr. Williams stated that is important that other Commission members try to find ways to integrate their work on the Food Systems Advisory Commission with other committees and task forces they may work on. Mr. Williams shared that it may be beneficial for Ms. Myrdal to be part of the Land Development Task Force.

Mr. Aasness stated that he was working on expanding the community gardening network within the City of Dilworth.

10. Commission Action Steps

Ms. Myrdal stated that the next meeting would be held on March 9, 2016.

Mr. Altenburg explained that in the past year, the Commission had been focusing on ways to improve urban agriculture, one of the six focus areas of the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan. Mr. Altenburg stated that Commission members would begin to look at other focus areas including: economic development, food access, food infrastructure, and outreach and education. Mr. Altenburg asked Commission members to be prepared to discuss which future focus areas they would like to work on at the Commission meeting in March.

Chair Durand adjourned the meeting at 11:52 AM.