

**1st Meeting of the
Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission
March 25th, 2015
Fargo Commission Chambers**

Members Present:

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

Members Absent:

Mike Williams, Fargo City Commission

Others Present:

Megan Myrdal, Interim Chair
Kim Lipetzky, Fargo Cass Public Health
Noelle Harden, University of Minnesota Extension
Deb Haugen, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Whitney Oxendahl, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Adam Altenburg, Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

Chair Myrdal called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.

2. Approve Appointment of Commission Chair

Mr. Altenburg informed the Commission that the provision of a Chair for future meetings may be selected in of two ways: a non-jurisdictional member appointed biannually by a majority vote of the Commission; or rotated annually amongst current jurisdictional members. Mr. Altenburg stated that the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI) Steering Committee has recommended that the Chair be rotated amongst jurisdictional, beginning with the member from the City of Moorhead, Ms. Durand, for the remainder of 2015. Mr. Altenburg explained that the member from Cass County, Mr. Rasmussen, would be slated to fill-in as Chair if the City of Moorhead representative is unable to be in attendance at a meeting.

A motion to recommend approval of the appointment of Ms. Durand as the 2015 Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission Chair was made by Ms. Mongeau and seconded by Mr. Aasness. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3. Approve Appointment of At-Large Members

Chair Myrdal and Mr. Altenburg provided information to the Commission that, in addition to the six (6) appointed jurisdiction members, the Commission would also include five (5) additional at-large members with varied expertise as it relates to food systems issues. Chair Myrdal

explained that the Steering Committee would be responsible for selecting possible candidates which would serve on the Commission, each for a two (2) year term.

Chair Myrdal provided background information on five candidates the Steering Committee was recommending for appointment. These candidates included: Andrea Baumgardner, Janet Paul, Jessica Arneson, Dana Rieth, and Jon Evert. Ms. Baumgardner is a culinary-trained chef and restaurant owner who has sourced and utilized local food, developed relationships with local producers, and helps a nonprofit agency which researches and develops health and nutrition initiatives. Ms. Paul is the Director of Dining Services at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, with 27 years of hospitality management experience. Ms. Arneson works as the Agency Relations Manager for the Great Plains Food Bank and has worked to raise support and awareness for a more local, regional, and global food system. Ms. Rieth is a registered dietitian with Lakes Country Service Cooperatives and has provided consultation services to K-12 food service programs in west-central Minnesota. Mr. Evert is a retired farmer and former Clay County Commissioner who has served on numerous boards and committees related to farming, hunger advocacy, local foods, and economic development.

Mr. Thorstad asked if terms for at-large members would be staggered. Mr. Altenburg stated that it would be the intention of the Commission and the Steering Committee to stagger terms after the terms of the first appointed at-large members.

Mr. Rasmussen asked if at-large members would be able to serve multiple terms or if term limits would be placed. Mr. Altenburg stated that it would be at the discretion of the Commission on whether to approve consecutive terms and that at-large members would not be subject to term limits.

A motion to approve the five (5) at-large members was made by Ms. Durand and seconded by Ms. Mongeau. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

4. Review Purpose and Powers of the Commission

Mr. Altenburg described that the Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission is the culmination of a Joint Powers Agreement signed between the City of Fargo and Clay, representing the entities responsible for public health in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Mr. Altenburg explained that, as laid out in the Joint Powers Agreement, the purpose of the Commission is to advise policy makers and elected officials in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area on how to assure that residents have access to safe, nutritious, and affordable foods. Mr. Altenburg spoke about the activities that the Commission would pursue including, amongst others, assessing the food system in the area, educating policy makers on food systems issues, proposing recommendations on improvements to the food system, cultivating partnerships and community input, and overseeing the implementation of the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan.

Mr. Altenburg clarified that the powers of the Commission were limited to the coordination of planning efforts, the ability to enter into agreements with entities, and the ability to expend funds received in accordance with any and all stipulations.

Mr. Altenburg reminded the Commission and the general public that the Commission consists of members appointed by the Cities of Fargo, Moorhead, West Fargo, and Dilworth, Cass and Clay Counties, and five (5) at-large members recommended by the Steering Committee and agreed upon by a majority of appointed Commission members. Mr. Altenburg also stated that ex-officio

membership would be extended to Fargo Cass Public Health, Clay County Public Health, the Steering Committee, and the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments.

5. Presentation

Chair Myrdal and Ms. Lipetzky gave a presentation on the history of the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI) and the national “Good Food Movement.” Ms. Lipetzky explained that in late 2010, members from Fargo Cass Public Health, Clay County Public Health, and North Dakota State University and the University of Minnesota Extension Services came together as a response to a national movement as more people became interested in increasing access to healthy and local food and more interest in knowing where food came from. Ms. Lipetzky described that a planning group made up of dozens of representatives with various food system backgrounds helped to form the structure and goals of the CCFSI, assisted with public input and education, and helped create different task forces to better understand local food system issues.

Chair Myrdal transitioned to the “State of Food” in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Chair Myrdal highlighted three key topic areas including: food security, overweight/obesity issues, and economic development.

Chair Myrdal explained that in terms of food security in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area, 28,130 individuals were served through the Great Plains Food Bank in 2014 which was approximately one in 10 individuals in the area, 38 percent of which were children. Chair Myrdal provided information on emerging food deserts and the effect that limited access to affordable and nutritious food has. Chair Myrdal spoke of food systems indicators including farmers markets, produce stands, community-supported agriculture, and community gardens and that the Commission may want to look at encouraging Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation at farmer’s markets.

Chair Myrdal provided information on health indicators in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area which showed that 36.6 percent of adults were overweight and 25.1 percent of adults were obese, while 11.7 percent of youth were overweight and 14.8 percent of youth were obese in Cass County and between 18 percent and 27 percent of youth in Clay County were overweight or obese. Chair Myrdal spoke of the influence of the food environment, encompassing the proximity to fast food restaurants and grocery stores among other factors, and its effect on people being able to make healthy food choices. Chair Myrdal explained the phenomena in the public health community of people being overfed and undernourished, where people can be both overweight and food insecure.

Chair Myrdal talked about the impact of economic development and direct-to-consumer and local food purchasing, with local food sales estimated at \$4.8 billion in 2008. Chair Myrdal spoke of shoppers’ perception of local food purchasing including obtaining foods of superior quality, learning more about farming practices, and supporting agriculture in their local communities. Chair Myrdal explained that, looking at price comparisons between farmers markets and mainline grocery stores, average farmers market price per pound are generally less than grocery markets. Chair Myrdal talked of the important of millennials and food demand and how food systems considerations should be taken into account.

Chair Myrdal provided the Commission with a sample of small-scale growers and producers in the Red River Valley and their conversations with the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI)

about the challenges and potential solutions to increase their ability to bring more product to market in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. These included: Larsen Farm, Yellow Bird Organics in Prosper, ND, Legacy Gardens in Moorhead, MN, Woodchuck Community Farm in Moorhead, MN, Plain State Farm in Dilworth, MN, Gram's Produce in Embden, ND, Heart and Soil Farm in Grandin, ND, and Freedom Rangers in Vergas, MN. Chair Myrdal discussed several perspectives of local producers including a campaign to raise awareness of local food, support of a more robust and inclusive farmers market, support of a food hub facility to alleviate infrastructure limitations, and potentially establishing a city-wide rating or star system for buyers who purchase a certain amount of local produce on an annual basis.

Chair Myrdal transitioned to information on economic development and small-scale growers with examples of farmers markets in the region. Chair Myrdal explained that the Town Square Farmers Market in Grand Forks, ND had an annual market attendance of approximately 35,000 with an estimated \$500,000 spent in 2008. Chair Myrdal iterated that farmers markets in Bemidji, Fergus Falls, and Baudette, MN have also all experienced rapid financial success in recent years.

Ms. Lipetzky provided information to the Commission on the three working task forces established by the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI): Urban Agriculture, Food Access/Outreach and Education, and Food Infrastructure/Economic Development. Ms. Lipetzky provided examples of the activities that task forces have been involved in through recent years including: the "One Vegetable, One Community" annual program that promotes the growing, preparation, and community education of a single vegetable, the "GardensAlive!" initiative to inspire the community to become involved in gardening through the one million square feet challenge and an educational mobile garden, community gardening workshops, grower/buyer networking meetings, and other activities including the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan, the Minnesota Food Charter, and the Fargo GO 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Myrdal concluded the presentation with examples of food policy councils and food systems commissions in other parts of the United States. Chair Myrdal spoke of Homegrown Minneapolis, a government-appointed advisory body that has taken a closer look at urban agriculture issues (gardening, land use, and zoning) and healthy food access including SNAP incentives and healthy vending. Chair Myrdal provided information on the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council, a government-appointed advisory body under a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that has prioritized a food policy action plan, agricultural preservation, model policies for local governments, regional benchmarks, and education and outreach on food system issues. Chair Myrdal finished with the Douglas County Food Policy Council, a government-appointed advisory body in Lawrence, Kansas with notable achievements including a food hub feasibility study, expanding urban agriculture and community garden programs, a SNAP dollar-for-dollar matching program, and a land leasing program which leases city-owned vacant properties for food production.

Ms. Durand asked whether, in regard to the significant new American population in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area, representation had been afforded to these communities in the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI) and if there were current food system/safety outreach programs. Ms. Lipetzky stated that the CCFSI planning committee did include representation from new American populations and has involved different new American communities in community gardening programs. Ms. Baumgardner stated that the Family HealthCare Center also provides classes on food safety to new American populations.

Ms. Mongeau asked, in regard to the 28,130 individuals served through the Great Plains Food Bank in 2014, whether there has been an increase in the number of people seeking assistance and whether there has been communication between the food assistance programs in Cass County and Clay County so that individuals are unduplicated. Ms. Arneson stated that there has been a considerable uptick and expressed she would provide additional statistics at the next meeting. Ms. Arneson explained that the Great Plains Food Bank is a warehouse, providing assistance to a charitable food network of over 300 food programs in North Dakota and Clay County, MN. Ms. Arneson stated that that numbers are unduplicated from partnerships but that it may not account for people taking advantage of two or more food pantries.

Ms. Mongeau asked if individuals with SNAP and/or WIC benefits are counted in these numbers. Ms. Lipetzky stated that number may or may not include individuals with food assistance benefits, especially elderly populations. Ms. Arneson stated that North Dakota has the highest percentage of people eligible for SNAP benefits who do not take them.

Ms. Paul asked if the increase in individuals seeking assistance through the Great Plains Food Bank correlates with a percentage increase in population size. Ms. Lipetzky answered that two years ago, one in 11 people in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area sought food assistance and that currently the number is one in 10.

6. Public Comment Opportunity

Chair Myrdal informed the Commission that 15 minutes would be allotted for public comments.

Cheryl Stetz, Fargo Cass Public Health and contact for the Whistle Stop Park Farmers Market through the City of Dilworth Park Board, said she would like to see the Commission provide assistance on updating urban agriculture ordinances and also help support smaller farmers markets, such as the one in Dilworth, MN, with finding and sustaining vendors.

Patrick Hollister, Active Living Planner for PartnerSHIP 4 Health, informed the Commission of the third biannual SHIP/Certs/GreenStep Summit (GreenSHIP 2015) on Friday, May 15 from 9:00 AM to 3:30 PM at Lakes County Service Cooperative in Fergus Falls, MN. Mr. Hollister explained this is an event would focus on the intersection of transportation and healthy local foods, with a tour of the Fresh Connect Food Hub.

Brad Fricson spoke of the need for more resilience in the food supply. Mr. Fricson explained that the average American city has enough food on its grocery shelves for three days. Mr. Fricson explained that if there were fuel shortages or other disruptions in the food supply chain, these could become serious issues for cities. Fr. Fricson posited that he would be interested for the Commission to examine these “what if...” situations.

Dean Huse suggested a program or private-public partnership that could look into harvesting surplus apples in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan area. Mr. Holst also suggested that, with possible future water shortages, it may be beneficial to look at xeriscaping in future developments that could also incorporate edible shrubs.

Mara Solberg of Solberg Farms and Prairie Roots Co-op asked if it would be possible for the co-op to have representation on the Commission. Ms. Solberg spoke of the desire for one single large farmers market that is both visible and accessible.

Mindy Grant, citizen from West Fargo, iterated the point that poverty and food security are not the same issue and that local production and access to local foods is security for everyone regardless of poverty status. Ms. Grant stated that it would be beneficial to look at the food desert map as part of the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan when planning for a potential larger farmers market.

7. Commission Action Steps

Ms. Oxendahl explained that, as part of the initial efforts of the Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative (CCFSI) Steering Committee, a series of draft blueprints have been created to address current possible gaps and needs with regard to food system issues in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Ms. Oxendahl stated that two draft blueprints addressing urban agriculture have been compiled to date, one looking at the issue of backyard chickens and the other addressing urban beekeeping. Ms. Oxendahl explained that each blueprint will include background information, benefits and concerns as they relate to the evaluation framework (health, environment, economic, and social perspectives), common concerns, and examples of policies and ordinances in other jurisdictions in the United States.

Chair Myrdal asked the Commission to consider additional food system issues to review at the next Commission in meeting as well as review the implementation strategies as laid out in the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan.

Chair Myrdal stated that four additional meeting dates have been set for 1:00 PM on May 13, July 8, September 9, and November 4. Chair Myrdal asked if any Commission members would have a conflict with any of the proposed dates. Mr. Thorstad stated that he may have a conflict with the proposed dates as they would conflict with his meetings on the Fargo-Moorhead Flood Diversion Board. Chair Myrdal stated the Steering Committee would review possible alternative dates and/or times.

Chair Myrdal asked Commission and Steering Committee members to stay for a photograph following adjournment of the meeting.

Chair Myrdal adjourned the meeting at 2:12 PM.