

Full Council Meeting Minutes

July 18, 2023

Attendees: Lori Adkins (Oakland Schools), Diane Bertalan (Ascension Michigan), Robin Danto (OCHD), Tony Drautz (OCHD), Russell Estill (Lighthouse), Angela Gill (Lighthouse), Anne Ginn (Forgotten Harvest), Angelya Higginbotham (OCHD), Carrie Hribar (OCHD), Trevor Johnson (resident and business owner), BreAnna Koenig (Macomb County Health Department), Theresa Krell (Trinity Health Oakland), Whitney Litzner (PHAB), Jennifer Lucarelli (Oakland University), Kelsey Merz (OCHD), Alejandra Solorzano (Benefits Data Trust), Claudia Terrell (OCHD), Lindsay TerHaar (OCHD), Amanda Woods (OCHD), Madelyn Wright (OLHSA), Joann Wrobel (OCHD).

Special Guest: Keesa Johnson, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

Farm Bill 101

Amanda reviewed June's presentation and shared group's decision to focus advocacy efforts on the upcoming Farm Bill. Amanda invited Keesa Johnson to provide an overview of the Farm Bill, focusing specifically on the Nutrition Title. Keesa's PowerPoint presentation is attached (below are notes, comments, discussion shared during the presentation).

Keesa introduced herself as the local food policy council fellow with MSU CRFS. She is an equity and access designer, works with food policy councils across the state, and on projects to develop tools to create equitable food systems. She also uses black and indigenous learning frameworks and imbeds them in the co-creation and co-design process.

The Farm Bill is authorized every 5 years. It is a large piece of federal legislation centered around food and agriculture policy. Today, many communities are struggling with food access and insecurity, and the new Farm Bill has the potential to be transformational and make significant headway toward an equitable food system.

The Farm Bill began in 1933 as part of FDR's New Deal legislation with three original goals: to keep food policies fair for farmers and consumers, to ensure adequate food supply, and to protect and sustain natural resources. The 2018 Farm Bill had 12 titles ranging from trade and energy policies to food security and crop insurance.

The Senate Agriculture Committee Chairperson is Debbie Stabenow from Michigan, and the ranking member is John Boozman from Arizona. In the US House of Representatives Agriculture Committee, the Chairperson is GT Thompson of Pennsylvania, and ranking member is David Scott of Georgia.

The Nutrition Title is largest part of the Farm Bill, and it includes: SNAP, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Nutrition Assistance Program, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Community Food Projects, GusNIP programs, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition programs.

From a black and brown lens, these programs need to be expanded. SNAP needs to be expanded and barriers removed, such as purchasing restrictions and eligibility requirements. There are also barriers that need to be removed for farmers to participate in food assistance programs. Emergency food assistance funding needs to be protected in the Farm Bill. Strengthening the buying relationship between schools and local producers is an important part of the bill and increases access to local foods and fresh food at food pantries and food banks. The Farm Bill could consider allowing Medicare and Medicaid to reimburse for food and for prescription food programs. School meals is not funded by the Farm Bill, but the use of commodity foods which contributes to the ability to have free meals for all at schools, is funded through the Farm Bill. Food waste is not included in the Farm bill but 40% of our food is wasted and maybe it could be addressed through the Farm Bill.

A question was asked, “What areas of the Farm Bill are encountering the most resistance?” Keesa responded the barriers for people accessing and receiving SNAP benefits is a major problem, like benefit amount reductions, paperwork requirements, work requirements, and asset tests.

With the current draft there appears to be funding cuts and now is the time to address these cuts. SNAP and WIC cuts are being proposed to offset student loans forgiveness in the federal budget. According to Sen. Debbie Stabenow, there is a push to not increase program spending which will limit programs reach due to inflation. Anne shared Feeding America is encouraging people to advocate now for funding. Anne will send this language to Amanda to share with council members.

Keesa shared additional questions to consider:

- Who writes the Farm Bill? Target those people in those committees to write in priorities.
- Who benefits from the Farm Bill? This is something we need to think about when advocating
- Where do we go after the Farm Bill has been written? How do we support it? How is our food shed prioritized around the Farm Bill? This is what the food policy council does.
- Where does urban agriculture fit in?
- The best time to get involved is now.
- Lastly, we need to look at programs not funded by the Farm Bill but are still important when addressing food access and food security.

Amanda thanked Keesa and shared Thursday’s meeting of the local food council network was going to discuss the Farm Bill and all were invited to participate.

Building Our Council's Farm Bill Strategy

Amanda polled members on which programs within the Nutrition Title to target advocacy efforts. See results of Menti poll. Programs that received the highest percentage of votes are (and council determined to group aligning strategies): 1) SNAP + GusNIP and, 2) Emergency Food Assistance Program.

Amanda asked members how best to frame and focus our efforts: do we want to advocate for maintaining funding or advocate for a funding increase? Anne Ginn shared that because of COVID, inflation, and the increased cost of living, Feeding America is encouraging increases to the SNAP budget. Amanda shared that Fair Food Network is advocating for a funding increase because of increased program demand with Double Up Food Bucks.

Trevor expressed he believes we need to expand the conversation into food sovereignty. Although the Farm Bill is important, it does not address food sovereignty. Anne Ginn agreed.

A question was raised if any of the programs are at greater risk for a funding cut. Lori expressed she believes the nutrition programs will be the most susceptible to cuts since it is largest part of the Farm Bill and there is no new money. Anne shared that she understands the House may be looking at 2012 levels of funding as a starting point.

Group ran out of time to finalize advocacy efforts and action items. Amanda will schedule a meeting on August 15th at 9am to build out next steps and action items. She will send out a calendar invite.

Partner Updates

- Madelyn Wright: OLHSA shared that Meet Up and Eat Up is now up and running and they have great participation. Updated flyer attached with meeting minutes.
- Carrie Hribar shared that Rx for Healthy Oakland is enrolling people that are eligible for Medicaid or SNAP and the program has funding for a couple of years. Megan Page (pagem@oakgov.com) is the program contact.
- Tony shared that there is money through Great Lakes Water Authority to help with water bills.

Housekeeping

Amanda asked members to hold their calendars for January 16, 2024, 9-10:30 AM for an in-person meeting.

Next Meeting: Special Ad Hoc Meeting

August 15, 2023, at 9:00 - 10:30 AM, virtual