

## MASSACHUSETTS RESTAURANT PROMOTION COMMISSION

Minutes from the Sixth Meeting of the Commission  
College of the Holy Cross  
Hogan Campus Center, Worcester, MA  
February 11, 2020

### Commissioners in Attendance:

**Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall**, Executive Director, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism  
**Senator Edward J. Kennedy**, First Middlesex District in the Massachusetts Senate  
**Pat Lee**, Owner and Operator, Horseshoe Grille  
**Bob Luz**, President and CEO, Massachusetts Restaurant Association  
**Kathi Maino Turner**, Turner's Seafood Companies  
**Ted Twinney**, Co-Founder and Manager, Start Line Brewing Company  
**Representative Paul McMurtry**, Eleventh Norfolk district in the Massachusetts House of Representatives

### Commissioners not In Attendance:

**Senator Julian Cyr**, Cape and Islands District  
**Christopher P. Jamison**, Co-Founder, COJE  
**Rebecca Roth Gullo**, President, Gallows Group  
**Tiffani Faison**, Chef and Owner of Sweet Cheeks Q, Tiger Mama, Fool's Errand and Orfano

### Other Attendees:

**Brad Mitchell**, Deputy Executive Director, Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.  
**Jared Auerbach**, Owner & CEO, Red's Best  
**Aide to Representative McMurtry**  
**Daniela De Caro-Heavey**, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism  
**Steve Clark**, Massachusetts Restaurant Association  
**Mete Habip**, The Ripples Group

The sixth meeting of the Massachusetts Restaurant Promotion Commission ("the Commission") was held at the Hogan Campus Center at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, pursuant to notice being duly given under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall called the meeting to order at 10:12 A.M.

Commissioners Orrall, Lee, Luz, Turner, Twinney, Representative McMurtry and Senator Kennedy were present. Commissioners Faison, Gullo, Jamison, and Senator Cyr were not present.

Chairperson Orrall announced that the Commission meeting was being voice recorded. Chairperson Orrall then asked the present commissioners to introduce themselves, and motioned to approve the meeting minutes from January 28, 2020. All Commissioners approved the minutes at 10:14 A.M.

Chairperson Orrall stated that the Commissioners would be hearing testimony from representatives of the Agriculture as well as Seafood industries, and that the Commissioners would also be hearing from their consultant Mete Habip of The Ripples Group.

Chairperson Orrall invited Brad Mitchell, Deputy Executive Director, Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, Inc. to provide testimony. Details provided include:

- Details on his organization, which represents farmers, and has about 6,000 members statewide. A little more than half of the members of the Farm Bureau are commercial farmers, which consist of livestock, crop, fruits and vegetable, Mass Agriculture Association, breweries, wineries, and distilleries
- Farm Bureau has some similarities with restaurants and farms, and co-sponsors National Small Business Day with the MA Restaurant Association
- Stated that "by far the biggest costs and biggest challenges in agriculture" are the availability and cost of labor. Costs, regulatory costs, and taxes are rising
- Renaissance in MA Agriculture the past 15 years in which the 'Buy Local' movement has become popular. Mr. Mitchell went on to state that the 'Buy Local' movement seemed to be waning as of late. He noted that the fad element is waring off, and the industry is competing with people who do home delivery services as well as Amazon

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- His goal is to keep as many people in business as possible when the cycle goes down.
- Compared to agriculture in other states, Massachusetts has a very high production cost, labor cost, land cost, and regulatory cost.
- Farmers have been selling directly to consumer whether a restaurant or farm stand, or start to add value to product with farm to table dinners and alcohol/food tastings
- 'Agritourism' events add value to the farm through an experience. Examples are corporate events, weddings and catering

Mr. Mitchell mentioned that the Agritourism Study Commission had not met yet, and he is hoping that the Commission picks up soon.

Further details on Mr. Mitchell's testimony include:

- Direct to restaurant sales is a way that Massachusetts farmers can compete
- Massachusetts faces seasonal challenges for buyers and restaurants
- Believes that there is an opportunity for local meat production, and noted that he thinks MA is struggling with that as a regulatory issue
- Untapped potential for ethnic crops that are popular
- There are 10 Buy Local Organizations in the Commonwealth and he is not sure that they reach the full universe of restaurants out there
- Believes there is a lot of opportunity in Agritourism, but some barriers to agritourism include local zoning, as farmers did not anticipate things like wedding bands at midnight on a Friday night
- Suggests looking towards the Agritourism Study Commission to come up with a report to see where the opportunities lie

Commissioner Lee asked Mr. Mitchell to talk more about the labor issue that he mentioned at the beginning of his testimony. Mr. Mitchell replied that the availability and cost of labor are the biggest challenges faced by the Agriculture industry. He noted that the availability of labor has decreased due to its seasonal and labor-intensive nature, and the cost challenge is due to a recent Supreme Judicial Court ruling regarding exemptions to overtime for agriculture activities. He stated that post-harvesting activities are not exempt from overtime under Massachusetts Law, and that this puts Massachusetts at a great disadvantage with other states that have an exemption for overtime, and have a lower base prevailing minimum wage.

Senator Kennedy arrived at 10:27 A.M.

Commissioner Turner asked Mr. Mitchell what kind of legislative work is being done with regulatory challenges in local poultry and meat producers. Mr. Mitchell replied that the biggest challenge is that there are only three red meat slaughterhouses in Massachusetts, which doesn't meet the demand and slighting new slaughterhouses is an issue. Mr. Mitchell noted that slaughterhouse regulation has switched from the Department of Public Health to the Department of Agriculture in neighboring New England States, and that the lack of slaughterhouses is cost prohibitive for farmers in Massachusetts.

Commissioner Twinney asked Mr. Mitchell about the 'buy local' marketplace in Massachusetts. Mr. Mitchell noted that there are multiple Buy Local organizations, and not a central distribution location, which can pose challenges for restaurants. A discussion ensued with Commissioner Twinney, Mr. Mitchell, Chairperson Orrall, Commissioner Lee, and Commissioner Luz.

Commissioner Luz inquired about the technology used to extend the agricultural season in Massachusetts. Mr. Mitchell replied that there are high tunnels and UV containers, which can pose potential barriers such as rising energy costs for farmers. A discussion on energy costs ensued with between Commissioner Luz and Mr. Mitchell.

Representative McMurtry asked Mr. Mitchell for further information on the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation. A discussion ensued.

Senator Kennedy asked Mr. Mitchell to tell the Commission more about the lettuce facility in Devens, MA. Mr. Mitchell described the technology based indoor facility at Little Leaf Farms, its expansion, along with energy cost challenges.

Chairperson Orrall invited Mr. Jared Auerbach, owner and CEO of Red's Best Seafood, to provide testimony. Details provided include:

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- Red's Best is 12.5 years old, with four wholesale facilities and one brick and mortar location at Boston Public Market
- Takes pride in the seafood industry and its regulations
- Company uses web-based technology to manage data, and "ground level" working mentality
- Main message is that he takes pride in the regulation and complimented the MA Division of Marine Fisheries for taking care and being responsive to the Seafood Industry
- Believes that biggest impediment is lack of young people getting into the seafood industry. Young people are buying boats, but are having a difficult time getting crew to work on the boats

Commissioner Turner noted that there is a push for a seafood industry apprenticeship program. Mr. Auerbach noted that Red's Best has a database of potential deck hands. A discussion ensued with Commissioner Turner and Mr. Auerbach regarding challenges surrounding training wages, and supply and demand.

Commissioner Turner asked Mr. Auerbach to talk about distribution challenges and how it affects the seafood industry. Mr. Auerbach discussed his successes of working with a distribution company, and colleges and universities.

Representative McMurtry asked Mr. Auerbach how he got into fishing. Mr. Auerbach stated his love for compelling stories of commercial fishermen, and fondness of people who "get up and live off the land." A discussion ensued with Representative McMurtry and Mr. Auerbach regarding wild caught and farm raised fish.

Commissioner Turner asked Mr. Auerbach how the Commission could advocate for the seafood industry. A discussion ensued with Mr. Auerbach and Commissioner Turner about permitting challenges, and dock-side access.

Chairperson Orrall opened the floor to public comment at 11:29AM:

Mr. Brad Mitchell, Deputy Executive Director, Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, Inc. offered public comment. He stated that he believes that the Division of Marine Fisheries really cares.

Chairperson Orrall noted that the next meeting of the Restaurant Promotion Commission is on February 24 at the Scargo Café.

Chairperson Orrall invited Mr. Mete Habip, Consultant with The Ripples Group, to speak. Mr. Habip stated that he was going to discuss the preliminary outline of the Restaurant Promotion Commission's report. Details include the following:

- The Ripples Group conducted several focus groups across the state
- Ongoing interviews with stakeholders
- Customer surveys
- Highlighted three chapters of key findings including – declining industry profits, disproportionate geographic impact, and challenges to starting a new restaurant in Massachusetts
- The Ripples Group is formulating recommendations to match the three chapters of key findings

Mr. Habip asked the Commissioners if there were any major groups missing from his outline. A group discussion ensued.

Commissioner Turner asked that the customer and employee surveys be re-distributed to Commission members, so that they could share it again. Mr. Habip also asked for support with the owner/operator surveys and asked the Commission members to encourage their colleagues to fill out the surveys.

Commissioner Luz made a motion to extend the next meeting of the Restaurant Promotion Commission by one hour. Motion approved.

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Senator Kennedy made a motion for the Commission to add an additional meeting on March 9 at 1:00PM in Boston. Motion approved by all Commissioners.

Chairperson Orrall asked if there were further comments that the audience would like the Commission to consider. With no further public comment, Chairperson Orrall closed the meeting to public comment at 12:18PM.

### Handouts for this meeting:

1. Commission Meeting Agenda
2. Minutes from the fifth meeting of the Restaurant Promotion Commission– 1.28.20

*Recorded by Daniela De Caro-Heavey, Special Projects Manager, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, February 11, 2020.*