Local Food Advisory Steering Committee
Conference call, 7/15/13

Present:
Wayne Martin
Jennifer Stephes
Jane Jewett
Kathy Zeman
John Mesko

Discussion of how to add new members to the larger advisory committee. There were several inquiries after the May 24 in-person meeting, from people who wanted to join. Greg Schweser was one; Megan O’Hara had asked about a student; and the other two we weren’t sure of. [We found the names after the call: Tim Jenkins, Food Access person for the MDH; and ????????????, Public Health in Olmsted County.]

John Mesko suggested that we should add people who plug into multiple aspects of local food and have a lot of connections.

Protocol: Have steering committee review requests for membership. Look at whether we have that type of member already; if we have an existing representative of an industry or an area of local food, connect those two people with each other so one can bring the other’s concerns to the meeting.

The next in-person meeting will be mid- to late-August. Wayne will send out a Doodle poll.

Ideas for the agenda, following the categories that we have set up previously:

Producers – John Mesko will present information about the meat processing project that is finishing up, which was funded by a Farmers Market Promotion Program grant.

Processors – We need to check with Ryan Cox.

Farmers’ Markets – Kathy Zeman can provide an update about food sampling at farmers’ markets.

Regulators – A couple of relevant issues: 1) The City of St. Paul’s delegated authority from the MDA is ending. A lot of retail-level inspections formerly conducted by the city will now be conducted by MDA staff. 2) The MDA its on-site USDA review in May, and the USDA is pushing 100% daily inspections for all state Equal-To meat processing. The practice in MN has been to have inspectors at the plants for all slaughter, but not for all subsequent processing. The 100% daily requirement is stretching the MDA’s resources thin. It’s not a sustainable requirement for MDA at the staffing level they have. The 100% daily inspection is not in statute. This is part of ongoing difficulty with trying to make regulations designed for very large plants work for very small plants. Kathy Zeman asked if there’s a way the local food community could try to influence this. That isn’t clear at this point; the MDA is currently in conversation with USDA about this.

Restaurants/Food Co-ops: We don’t have anyone from this category on the Steering Committee. Wayne will ask on the Doodle poll when it’s sent out if anyone has issues to bring forward in this area.

Educational Offerings: Jennifer Stephes reported that with the current 100% daily inspection demands on the MDA, they can’t offer any staff time to do workshops or trainings this summer or early fall. MDA will certainly assist with outreach and educational workshops in the future, it just isn't very feasible this summer and in the short term due to the staffing challenges they are currently facing. They are looking to hire a training/education person through the MDA, who would be the person to set up workshops; and who may become the MDA’s representative on this committee. They would expect that person to have a broader knowledge of all types of food, not just meat, poultry, and dairy. She and Nikki might also try to pull in a food inspection person from MDA for the same reason of a broader knowledge of different types of food.

Other items:

* Question about GAPs certification and confusion among wholesale & institutional buyers as to whether it’s a regulatory requirement for farmers to have it. This may be more of a marketing issue than a regulatory one; Jennifer Stephes will check on some resource people at MDA.
* Jane Jewett drafted a raw milk document and will circulate it for comments.