Local Food Advisory Committee
May 24, 2013
10:30 am – 12:30 pm
385J AnSci/Vet Med Building, St. Paul Campus, University of Minnesota

**Present:**

Mike Phillips, Red Table Meats
Sarah Leach, MN Dept of Health
Paul Hugunin, MN Dept of Ag
Nicole Neeser, MN Dept of Ag
Jon Christensen, MN Assoc. of Meat Processors
Mary Liebenstein, MN Dept of Ag
Jennifer Erickson, MN Dept of Ag
Megan O’Hara, MISA/Endowed Chair in Ag Systems
Kathy Zeman, MN Farmers Market Assoc.
Colleen Paulus, MN Dept of Health
Greg Schweser, Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
Jennifer Stephes, MN Dept of Ag
Wayne Martin, U of MN Extension
Jane Jewett, MISA
Jan Joannides (via phone), Renewing the Countryside
Ryan Cox (via phone), U of MN Extension

**Updates on Educational Activities:**

1. Egg & Poultry Workshops. N. Neeser and J. Stephes reported on these. Two workshops were held: Duluth on March 9, and Rochester on March 16. About 20 attended at each location. There was good discussion, hands-on candling practice, and lots of requests for information that came in to MDA afterward. Also, producers not previously registered requested registration materials.

M. O’Hara asked about particular areas of confusion about regulations.

J. Stephes & N. Neeser reply: - sale of meat birds; when licensing is needed or not needed; candling & grading requirements for sales at different venues; - how to grade & candle eggs.

There may be another workshop done in north central or central MN; possible St. Cloud.

Action items:

* Post PDF of MDA’s egg workshop presentation on the MISA website
* J. Jewett send Local Food Advisory Committee web page URL out to everyone on committee
1. Megan O’Hara, Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems, Senior Fellow with MISA

M. O’Hara described her plans for this position. She will be taking a look at regulations and issues for local food, including farmers’ markets, commercial kitchens and small-batch processing, and Farm-to-School; how small-scale producers can access institutional markets.

She noted there is interesting work around commercial kitchens. Some are forming in the state and some are not being used as originally intended. Question about why that is; M. O’Hara said that some kitchen operators had become discouraged over encountering stricter regulations as they tried to scale up.
P. Hugunin asked if there was a list available of commercial or licensable kitchens in the state? Answer was not really; Minneapolis may have a list.
Discussion about community kitchens vs. commercial kitchens:

* Churches with “community kitchens” may not be commercial or usable for licensed food processing.
* S. Leach noted that once a kitchen attains commercial status it may not be able to be used for its original intended purpose; for instance, a church kitchen that is commercial can no longer be used for potlucks.
* C. Paulus noted that in some areas, the kitchens fall under MDH or the local delegated authority
* M. O’Hara said part of her goal is clarification of what can or can’t be done at various levels of operation and licensing
* P. Hugunin offered some of Brian Erickson’s staff time to assist with that clarification.

Action items:

* M. O’Hara should contact Brian Erickson at MDA: 651-201-6539, brian.j.erickson@state.mn.us re: assistance in developing commercial kitchen information.
1. P. Hugunin reported on legislative session just past. Allocation of $9 million in AGRI funds: these will provide money for Value-Added agriculture grants. These grants will be available to meat processors, commercial bakeries, other value-added processing; also can be used for feasibility studies. Farmers’ markets can get grant money for infrastructure: electricity, coolers, handwashing stations, etc.

MDA is still working on the RFP for this program, but based on last year, likely components:

* Last year’s maximum award of $75,000 will probably be raised this year
* 25% match from the state; 75% private funds for equipment or infrastructure
* Higher % match from the state for feasibility studies
* The 75% non-AGRI funds have to be non-state funds; for example, AURI grant $ are not allowed to make up part of the 75% if the AURI funds originate from the state. Unclear if state-originated loans could count as part of the 75%.
* Different RFPs and different timelines for different facets of the program
* Expect an RFP for schools for Farm-to-School sometime this summer
* Last year was only available to K-12 schools (any school part of the National School Lunch Program); this year may open to post-secondary institutions and daycare.
* Will have multiple rounds of RFPs; will allow re-submission of applications.
* Also have reimbursement to farmers for costs of GAP certification; this is a straight reimbursement, no application required, for 75% of costs up to $2500.

The AGRI grants will be publicized through press releases and other networks. This group will receive notice. Suggestion to inform AgStar, as that may be a source of the 75% non-AGRI funds for projects.

Suggestion that these AGRI funds could be targeted to solving problems noted by regulators: a food inspector identifies a problem; the business owner applies for an AGRI grant for improvements needed to solve the problem.

C. Paulus offered two MDH communication venues to publicize this program and other information relevant to MDH regulators:

 (1) First Wednesday of every month, videoconference for regulators

 (2) Food Safety Partnership videoconference 3 times/year, involves industry and citizens, can attend by computer

 Action item:

* P. Hugunin will be in contact with Colleen Paulus about using the MDH communications tools to publicize AGRI.
* P. Hugunin will send information about AGRI grants to Local Food Advisory Committee members
1. Jan Joannides: Farm-to-School question.

School food service directors are worried about whether local food (mainly produce) is safe. One food service director didn’t want to use produce from the school garden over food safety concerns. J. Joannides asked if others had heard of similar concerns. Discussion; J. Jewett and J. Stephes agreed that there are questions and situations where food service directors don’t think it’s okay to use local food, and it’s often honest confusion.

* Sometimes the MDH’s delegated authority isn’t aware that locally grown produce is an “approved source” and tells a food service they can’t use it. C. Paulus asked that MDH be informed of such instances; they can work with the delegated authority to resolve.
* Suggestion to have successful school or nursing home programs serve as mentors to others who are considering using local food.
* C. Paulus noted that “nursing homes” and “assisted living facilities” fall under different rules.
* P. Hugunin and G. Schweser are on the Farm-to-School committee, so questions about how this works for schools can be referred to them.

Action item:

* Refer instances of apparent delegated authority confusion to C. Paulus for resolution.
1. Jane Jewett: Listening Session at Sustainable Farming Association Conference, 2/16/13

The session began with 10 minutes of brainstorming of ideas that were written up on large posters; followed by discussion of the points brought up, and then a dot-survey in which each participant received four sticky-dots to place on the posters to vote on their most important issues.

The summary of the listening session is on the Local Food Advisory Committee web page:
<http://www.misa.umn.edu/FarmFoodResources/LocalFood/LocalFoodAdvCmte/index.htm>

Discussion of points from the summary document:

* On-farm self-processing of a goat or sheep. N. Neeser said that several establishments are set up to legally offer this. An approved facility is needed. This could qualify for an AGRI grant. Discussion of whether several farmers could use the same facility; yes, it’s possible. Interested parties should contact N. Neeser for more information about requirements. Could be a good niche market.
* Availability of inspectors is an issue; more funding is needed to make this possible. J. Jewett noted that there were suggestions to look to Economic Development authorities; also Doug Peterson has indicated interest in supporting additional funds for inspectors.
* Travel distance to processing and lack of enough poultry processors were brought up.
* The topic with the most dot-votes was Custom-Exempt processing; these plants are the most accessible and farmers need information on how to make the best use of them for marketing. Also high interest in on-farm Custom-Exempt processing.
1. Jan Joannides: Question about Title V Interstate Shipment of meat. What is the status of Wisconsin’s application for this and is there potential for MN farmers to use WI meat plants? This is relevant to a group in Duluth that is considering building a meat processing plant; it affects the business decision of whether to build a plant in Duluth if farmers can go get the processing in Superior.

N. Neeser responded with information about Title V:

- Part of the 2008 Farm Bill

- Was described as allowing interstate shipment from state Equal-To plants, but that’s not what it is. It’s a separate inspection program, “CIS” for Cooperative Interstate Shipment, and is the “same as” USDA rather than “equal to.” State programs need to use USDA computers and send inspectors to USDA trainings in order to have a CIS program.

- Not every product can go across state lines; only those that have a CIS process approved. CIS plants may or may not be approved for slaughter.

- CIS has a unique inspection symbol (“bug”)

- Few plants in WI are interested in this; just a few on the border.

- Producers need to really do their homework to make sure they can get what they want out of a plant that claims CIS status.

 Further discussion:

* In MN, USDA has been very willing to work with small meat plants. There is no cost difference to the plant of having USDA vs. CIS vs. state Equal-To inspection.
* The exception is with “voluntary species.” Bison, elk, deer, rabbit, llama, yak – the USDA considers inspection of these species at slaughter to be voluntary and charges for the inspection. In MN, inspection of these is mandatory under state law and state Equal-To plants do not charge for the inspection.
1. J. Jewett, question about Board of Animal Health (BAH) rules on identification of livestock headed to slaughter.

N. Neeser responded:

- New BAH rules were issued, and accidentally left state-inspected processing plant language out of the rules for swine. The language should have been there to not require ID on swine headed to slaughter in state plants.

- Nothing will change with BAH enforcement. If pigs are going to slaughter, they don’t need ID.

K. Zeman had a scenario about feeder pigs being moved across a state border. Yes, in that case, animal ID would be required. N. Neeser described requirements:

- Can create a swine production plan to move pigs as a “lot” without individual ID

- Can get free tags and tagger from BAH

- Tattoos and brands are allowed as ID

- Need certificate of veterinary inspection to cross state lines.

- ID and certificate are the responsibility of whichever party owns the pigs at the time the state border is crossed.

K. Zeman raised a concern over the $30 per pig cost that she had heard as the fee for the veterinary certificate. Discussion of this; may have been primarily a travel and on-farm visit fee for the vet rather than the actual cost per pig to verify health. Longer discussion about availability & cost of vet services particularly in rural areas; vet practices tend to focus on small animal practice and on-farm visits are very costly.

8. Greg Schweser: Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDPs) & MISA work on fact sheets

Community Kitchens are cropping up all over; the intermediate processing level is needed to allow producers access to a larger market than farmers’ markets. These kitchens are business incubators for people who need to move beyond the level of processing allowed by the Pickle Bill. The RSDPs want to make a matrix of food types, processing types, and regulations. Points to address:

* What are the thresholds to move from Pickle Bill exemptions up to a licensed status?
* Clarify all the levels of rules and authority – which agency has jurisdiction
* Expand the universe of products for which there are guidelines and fact sheets available.

Discussion of fact sheets. Currently there are three dealing with locally grown products for sale: Produce, Meat & Poultry, and Shell Eggs. These are combined fact sheets from MN Dept. of Agriculture, MN Dept. of Health, and Extension. The RSDPs are looking at a fact sheet about grains and dried beans.

J. Jewett noted that Jim Topie had worked on fact sheets when he was at the MDA, but he has now moved to MDH with different job responsibilities. Getting new fact sheets through the layers of review and approval required at MDA and MDH will take a “champion” from one of those agencies to shepherd it through the process. Need to have MDA and MDH logos on the fact sheets; that opens doors with potential buyers. N. Neeser said to send her the drafts of the fact sheets and she would find a point person from MDA to work on them.

M. Phillips suggested having a mentor from private enterprise help with understanding the process of scaling up production of a product for a larger market. J. Christensen countered that in the food sales sector there is already so much competition for market share that you would be unlikely to find a business willing to mentor a potential competitor.

 Action item:

 \* RSDPs/MISA will submit fact sheet drafts to N. Neeser

9. Meat Processing

R. Cox said most calls he has received lately are requesting help with developing a recall plan. He asked if there is a recommended template for recall plans.

N. Neeser noted that a USDA requirement went into effect on May 8, requiring all USDA and state Equal-To plants to have recall plans. Recall plans are voluntary for Custom-Exempt plants. MDA has a template and webinar about creating recall plans. There are 4 basic things that have to be part of the plan, but flexibility around how to do those.

J. Christensen noted that MAMP has a template also.

Discussion of the product tracking requirement:

* Very small processors are struggling with tracking of product
* Tracking is time-consuming
* Have to issue a press release to the public if there is no way to recover all of the affected product

Discussion of recall plan for farmers:

* Need to have this as a workshop session at farmer conferences
* Crisis management plan should include how to talk to the media; managing the message
* Emotional time if there’s a recall; need to have the plan in place so you’re not making it up as you go
* General emergency preparedness planning; farmers need to have backup plan for freezers & coolers in case of power outage; farmers’ markets need emergency response plan

Action item:

* K. Zeman will plan a recall and/or crisis management session at MFMA conference

10. Food samples offered at Farmers’ Markets. Meeting was held May 15; included MFMA, MDH, MDA, SHIP participants. C. Paulus and K. Zeman attended. Highlights of that meeting:

 - Old statutes and existing food licensing categories don’t fit farmers’ market situations with non-vendors coming in to do food sampling.

 - Compromise was hammered out for this year; plan to write legislation specifically to deal with farmers’ markets for next year’s legislature.

 - MFMA is working on a new certification program for managers and vendors to legally do sampling; would include training and a fee; working with Katherine Simon at MDA

 - Goal is long-term, sustainable program for sampling at farmers’ markets.

11. Raw milk

N. Neeser stated that research shows a higher level of food-borne illness among people consuming raw milk. These are all reactive studies; you can’t set up a randomized double-blind study assigning some people to consume raw milk and others to consume pasteurized milk, since raw milk is considered hazardous.

C. Paulus noted that farmers who drink raw milk from their own animals often don’t get sick because they build immunity from being around the animals all the time.

Further discussion on availability of information about benefits vs. hazards of raw milk consumption; effective public health messaging about raw milk; illegal activity of raw milk deliveries happening off the farm premises.

 Action items:

* MFMA will continue to educate and warn vendors against selling raw milk at farmers’ markets
* J. Jewett will draft fact sheet on raw milk

12. Questions coming from MFMA contacts with farmers’ market managers and vendors

K. Zeman posed a general question about how to go about bringing up issues of concern or notifying inspectors of problems without being seen as the “nark.” Issues need to be surfaced; at this point we are not ahead of the burgeoning local food movement in terms of education and training, so issues come up all the time.

 - In some cases a general question can be posed without naming names.

 - N. Neeser stated that she needs to hear about things that are being interpreted incorrectly by inspectors, so that they can be corrected. Virtually impossible to do that without details and names.

Several questions raised by K. Zeman and answered by MDA staff:

 Q. Is a bulk hauler’s license needed by someone who is picking up milk in cans for processing?

 A. Bulk hauler’s license not needed to pick up milk in cans. May need a sampler’s license.

 Q. What is potable water?

 A. Municipal water is potable. Well water is considered potable water if it’s been tested. Well water testing is readily available.

 Q. What are the rules for selling homemade dog treats at the farmers’ market?

 A. Dog treats and pet foods fall under the authority of the MDA’s Feed Division and the commercial feed laws. The seller needs a permit and each different item of pet treat or pet food needs its own listing in the database. There is a $75 annual fee. A fact sheet is available from the Feed Division. No nutrition label is needed for items considered pet treats, but nutrition label is required for items considered pet food.

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