

Joint Committee on Agriculture

Bill Summary

Bill Number: H.120

Title: An Act supporting the Commonwealth's food system

Sponsors: Representatives Duffy of Holyoke, Blais of Deerfield, Donahue of Worcester, Sabadosa of Northampton, Domb of Amherst, Ultrino of Malden, Sena of Acton, Uyterhoeven of Somerville, Kane of Shrewsbury, Montañó of Boston, Elliott of Lowell, Barber of Somerville, Arena-DeRosa of Holliston, Higgins of Leominster, Moran of Boston, Kushmerek of Fitchburg, Connolly of Cambridge, and Gentile of Sudbury; Senators Comerford, Tarr, and Moore

Hearing Date: Tuesday, May 13, 2025 at 10:30 AM - 01:00 PM, B-2

Reporting Date: Saturday, July 12, 2025

Similar Matters: None

Prior History:

2023-2024: Filed as H.92; Referred to the Joint Committee on Agriculture; reported favorably to House Ways and Means where no further action was taken

2021-2022: Filed as H.884; Referred to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture; Accompanied a study order H.5041

CURRENT LAW:

Section 6C of Chapter 20 of the Massachusetts General Laws establishes the Massachusetts Food Policy Council. The Council consists of 18 members:

2 from the House of Representatives with one appointed by the minority leader,

2 from the Senate with one appointed by the Minority Leader,

1 who is the Commissioner of the Department of Agricultural Resources or their designee,

1 who is the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health or their designee,

1 who is the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or their designee,

1 who is the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection or their designee,

1 who is the Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance or their designee,

1 who is the Secretary of the Executive Office of Economic Development or their designee,

1 who is an expert in healthy soil practices appointed by the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs,

1 farmer or representative of a farm organization appointed by the Governor,

1 to represent food distribution, processing and marketing interests appointed by the Governor,

1 to represent direct-to-consumer marketing efforts appointed by the Governor,

1 to represent a local health department addressing food safety and nutrition appointed by the Governor,

1 who is an expert in food safety appointed by the Governor,

1 who is an expert in food processing and handling appointed by the Governor,

And 1 to represent community-based efforts addressing nutrition and public health appointed by the Governor.

This section also specifies that members serve terms of 3 years or until a successor is appointed, and details how vacancies should be handled. This section also specifies that the Council should have an Advisory Committee consisting of at least 10 members, with the option for more to be added at the Council's discretion. This minimum membership must include:

2 active farmers or representatives of farmer associations,

1 to represent an organization engaged in farmland protection and conservation,

1 to represent an organization engaged in developing new farm businesses, urban and community supported agriculture, community gardening, immigrant and refugee farming or youth education through agriculture,

1 to represent the cooperative extension service at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst,

1 to represent food distribution, processing and marketing interests,

1 to represent a school of nutrition or public health,

1 to represent a community-based coalition or health care provider addressing obesity and chronic disease

1 to represent citizens in need of transitional assistance,

and to represent an anti-hunger organization.

This section charges the Council with making recommendations which will advance the food policy goals of Massachusetts, including increased production and sale of local food products, programs which encourage the consumption of healthy local foods, and land and water resource protection. The Council must send a report annually with their findings to the the governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the chairs of the Joint Committee on Public Health, the Chairs of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (now two committees, the Joint Committee on Agriculture and the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources), the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Clerk of the Senate.

SUMMARY:

This bill amends Section 6C of Chapter 20 by inserting a new subsection. This subsection would compel the Food Policy Council to hire a full-time employee to facilitate the council's functions. The employee's stated tasks would be to advise state agencies who maintain programs related to the food system, facilitate communication between these agencies, develop and track metrics related to food system goals, identify programs which overlap in effect or create gaps in coverage, and advise in community outreach efforts. The employee would be required to submit a report 1 week prior to each council meeting with their work to the House and Senate clerks, the Council's members, and relevant agency officials.