

## **9-29-25 Summary**

### **Aquaculture Collaboration Exploration Meeting**

The meeting began with introductions, including Liz Wiley, Executive Director of Marion Institute, and several participants from the Cape Cod area involved in fishing and aquaculture. Keith Wilda, president of Aquacultural Research Corporation, joined remotely. The group discussed the purpose of the meeting, which was to explore collaboration opportunities, with Liz expressing enthusiasm about the potential for partnership.

### **2026 Food System Assessment Update**

Rita and Liz discussed the ongoing work of updating the 2021 Southeastern Massachusetts Food System Assessment, which aims to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the local food system. They explained the process of identifying gaps and opportunities, creating a community advisory board, and developing working groups to address priorities. The team is now preparing for the 2026 assessment by expanding the geographic scope to include all six counties in Southeastern Massachusetts and incorporating a community self-assessment tool called CARAT. This tool will help gather information more quickly and promote collaboration across municipal boundaries, providing a shared language for stakeholders and informing policy at various scales.

### **Enhancing Fishing Industry Data Assessment**

Rita and Liz emphasized the importance of developing a process to own the timeline for data collection and generate conversations among stakeholders. Seth highlighted the distinct challenges faced by the fishing industry compared to agriculture, suggesting that the CARAT assessment tool might not fully address the needs of the fishing sector. The group agreed to further explore how to incorporate fishing industry concerns into the CARAT tool, with Shareen suggesting a new theme or adjustments to existing indicators.

### **Aligning Goals with CARAT Indicators**

The group discussed aligning the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan's goals with the CARAT indicator framework. Rita presented the five main goals from the action plan, which focused on resilient marine ecosystems, strong local seafood markets, accessibility and affordability of local seafood, collaboration in the seafood system, and active research. Shareen shared a spreadsheet she created with potential indicators and themes based on the action plan goals. The group agreed that many of the action plan goals could be translated into indicators by aligning them with existing CARAT themes. They also discussed the possibility of adding a new theme for fisheries if needed.

### **Food Systems Resilience Framework**

The group discussed a framework for assessing resilience in food systems, focusing on marine ecosystems, sustainable fisheries, water quality, and other environmental themes. Shareen presented a document outlining key indicators and programs, which Rita commented could be used to identify gaps and strengths across different counties. The team agreed to share this document with Seth, Abby, and others for feedback, with the goal of identifying assets and resources in Barnstable County that support fishing and aquaculture. They also discussed the need for a cross-sector approach involving stakeholders from various sectors to contribute to this assessment.

### **Integrating Fisheries in Food Systems**

The group discussed integrating fisheries into the existing CARAT indicators to create a more comprehensive food system approach that includes both land and sea producers. They agreed that while fisheries are important, they should not be separated from broader food system

discussions, and that each county should develop specific food action plans that address their unique needs. Shareen proposed creating stand-alone indicators for different food production methods, while Rachel suggested adapting existing indicators to be more inclusive of all food system components.

### **Fisheries Integration in CARAT Framework**

The group discussed how to integrate fisheries into the CARAT assessment framework, with conflicting views between treating it as a separate standalone assessment versus incorporating it into the existing framework. Shareen proposed tailoring the existing themes to include fisheries, while Rita and Liz emphasized the importance of elevating fisheries within the assessment. The discussion highlighted the need to potentially change the framework's name and consider creating a new theme dedicated to fisheries.

### **CARAT Assessment Expansion for Fisheries**

The group discussed concerns about a CARAT assessment for Bristol County, particularly regarding the exclusion of New Bedford's fishing industry. Liz clarified that while a Food System Assessment for 2021 had been published, the CARAT for Bristol County was still in progress and would be expanded to include fisheries data. The team agreed to create a separate fisheries theme with its own indicators to better represent the unique needs of fishing communities, while still allowing for cross-county comparisons.

### **Comprehensive Food System Assessment Challenges**

The group discussed challenges in creating a comprehensive food system assessment that addresses both fishing and farming, with concerns raised about how to balance broad coverage with sector-specific details. Shareen emphasized the need to maintain value across different industries while keeping the focus on food access and resilience, suggesting that separate documents could be combined into a single report. The discussion highlighted the importance of including social infrastructure data and community voices in the assessment, with the goal of producing a more accurate regional food system analysis for 2026 that can be adapted by local counties for various purposes.

### **Food Access Assessment Framework**

The group discussed a framework for assessing food access and community resilience, with Shareen presenting initial themes. They agreed to build on Shareen's work while incorporating goals from the Massachusetts Food Action Plan, with Rita and Liz taking the lead on organizing a working session for further input. The team decided to maintain flexibility in the approach, allowing themes to evolve and potentially adding new areas if needed, with the ultimate goal of creating a comprehensive Barnstable County assessment.