

Notes – MA Food System Collaborative Forum

Date: 21st November 2025

SESSION 1

From Barns to Bodegas: Why Independent Food Retail Is a Key Component of Food Access

Presenters

- Hannah Sobel – FCCDC
- Alan Singer – LEAF Fund
- Sam Newell – Fruit Fair
- Jared N. – Fruit Fair
- Note: Jose Luis Rojas of LEAF Fund was listed but did not speak.

Key Points – Hannah Sobel (FCCDC)

- A significant number of people rely on retail outlets for their food.
- 56.87% of food is purchased from grocery stores.
- Healthy food includes more than fresh produce—proteins and other nutrient-dense foods are essential.
- HIP supports access but cannot solve everything; retailers play a crucial role.
- Food deserts remain a significant concern.
- Lack of supermarkets reflects systemic disenfranchisement in the market.
- Close proximity to grocery retailers is essential.
- MFTP provides low-interest loans, grants, and support to retailers in low-income, low-access communities.
- MFTP addresses root causes of food insecurity, especially income inequality.
- 107 projects have been funded by MFTP.
- Stores supported by MFTP accept SNAP and HIP.

Fruit Fair Case Study – Sam

- Fruit Fair has been operating for 9 years.
- Purchased the store in September 2019, shortly before COVID-19.
- Facility layout issues affected production.
- Received a grant from FCCDC to support expansion.
- Later received a state grant.
- LEAF supported loan payments, enabling operations to restart.
- Improved facilities increased product shelf life, reducing waste and losses.
- SNAP accounts for 30% of their sales.
- State and LEAF support was essential for reopening.

Additional Notes – Jared (Fruit Fair)

- In 2019, Chicopee was designated a food desert.
- Residents previously traveled long distances to shop for groceries.

- Fruit Fair significantly improved community access to food.

Questions & Responses

1. 1. What challenges did they face?
 - Produce spoiled quickly due to facility issues.
 - Most grant funding initially went toward reconstruction, leaving limited support for inventory.
 - Consumer trust declined because residents believed they sold poor-quality produce.
 - Upgrades funded by FCCDC and the state improved quality and restored trust.
 - Small profit margins made it difficult to maintain operations without grants.
2. 2. What programs have been provided to the community with the grant support?
 - Purchase of equipment including refrigerators, coolers, and a truck.
 - Delivery of food boxes to community members with disabilities or mobility challenges.
 - Improved ability to support residents with limited food access.
3. 3. How many employees do they have?
 - They currently have two employees and collaborate with partner agencies for additional support.
4. 4. How did they hear about Mass Food Trust?
 - They heard about it through Rebecca and connected with TDI, who linked them to Rebecca.
5. 5. What are the key factors for working with local growers?
 - Sourcing from certified growers.