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Expand strategic funding for the food system

- Utilize existing programs
 - Don't overlook existing state programs or assume that new efforts must be created in all cases. Many successful programs should be further funded – within DACF, and DMR. (Example: During the pandemic, there were additional meat inspectors which was very helpful. Funding ran out and this workforce contracted.)
- More long-term, permanent funding of the food system
 - Much of the above requires long-term permanent funding in support of the local food system.
- Support producers to adopt climate change mitigation and resilience strategies
 - Tag public funding for farms to focus on climate resilience
 - Implement regenerative ag practices as a carbon sequestration strategy
- Increase financial support for producers
 - Improve whole farm revenue funding and crop insurance
 - Emphasize viability of existing farms and infrastructure
 - Offer cash matches to help access loans
 - Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund: stand this program up with 131st Legislature seed funding, then seek additional substantial funding from the 132nd.
 - Prioritize projects that involve SHARED infrastructure between multiple small farm operations. This will have the added benefit of creating higher-paying jobs and more livable wages.

- Expand local food incentive programs
 - Grow low-income spending on local food by leveraging current – and growing – state funds and existing conduits and programs
 - Expand Local Food Fund to CACFP
 - Expand local food fund to include a regional tier eligible for reimbursement and make this reciprocal with other New England states

Increase technical assistance

- Increase technical assistance for producers
 - Educating producers about proper packaging for shelf life
 - Hub or clearing house about opportunity for funding, need human resources here – staff position
 - Business technical support
 - Access to funding support
- Teach producers to educate consumers
 - Help producers educate consumers about appearance of local foods – not necessarily an indication of taste or nutrition

Support cooperative models

- Support the establishment of more cooperatives or the equivalent.
 - Support small producers who don't have the infrastructure – help them band together to form a coop or the like to help them navigate state and federal regulations on things like packaging or any other thorny regulatory requirement. Could be helping them build a peer mentoring group – to tackle thorny issues. Target resources for this.
 - Cooperative purchasing power and access to capital
 - Small aquaculture companies are highly collaborative – this is an opportunity –for example sharing transportation and machinery.
 - Build on cooperative infrastructure: provide financial support that is tied to targeted technical assistance.

Support food hubs

- Support the creation of a food hub
 - Support a non-profit entity to offer enhances aggregation/ distribution channels for small and medium sized businesses that can compete, offer traceability and be economically viable
 - Protect
 - Create verifiable tracking system for fresh products – retailers and consumers need to know who, what, where their food comes from
 - This entity would need to cover liability insurance for all members – or like hub model, they take on liability after buying the product
 - This entity would need to offer cold storage – freezer and refrigeration
 - Aggregate
 - Distribute

- Get product to market destination
- Support current local distributors

Create more markets for producers

- Connect producers and buyers
 - Building resource hub for middle of the supply chain businesses that connects and facilitates relationships to increase in-state access to and knowledge of Maine markets
 - Expands 'Meet the buyer' model to collaborate between processors and distributors
 - Takes into consideration sustainability goals
 - Support farmers in accessing new markets
 - Easiest in would be through institutions – incentives for institutions to buy local
 - Scale for retail and restaurants where most food is sold
 - But challenge of food safety regulations and price point
 - Help producers develop relationships with supermarkets
 - In seafood industry, most producers work with Hannaford or Whole Foods, - the latter, particularly the Portland store - encourages local. Need to find the right person. Develop program that provides assistance to producers in developing relationships with supermarkets.
 - Help producers develop relationships with markets that serve BIPOC communities
 - To expand seafood markets, establish relationships with Asian markets – non-white Mainers eat substantially more seafood. Whole fish and underutilized species are an under tapped market. (Hannaford is a bit more challenging because their headquarters are not local.)

Protect spaces

- Land for Maine's Future Preserving working waterfront access program is underway, and Working Farmland Access Protection Program is protecting farmland

Educate consumers about the value of Maine food

- Consumer focused education
 - Educate consumers on the true cost of food – there is a reason why ultra processed, Big Ag food is so cheap. Talk about the true cost, including health, workers, climate, etc.
 - Target those who don't eat local and have a conversation on the factors contributing to their choice.
- Build on Real Maine
 - Coordinate state departments, agencies, interested groups to communicate more unified messaging to identify Maine food and its value – to the economy, nutrition, climate etc.
 - Compliment "Real Maine" and seafood branding with campaign to show that Maine can generate a delicious, nutritious, fun and varied diet. We don't have to rely on food from away. One example is Maine Local 20 idea by Cheryl Wixson at MOFGA.

- Reimagine existing Real Maine and other (seafood) origin quality certification / seals considering traceability, quality, common definition, standard which may become regulatory – mindful that regulatory equals time and money resource intensive
- Incentivize the use of Real Maine and seafood branding – with funding. Including awareness and outreach, for example “look for Real Maine”, quality, and collaborate with retail and education and health outcomes
- Increase visibility for local farms and agritourism – for example web tools and maps of local farms as New Hampshire does
- Producers
 - Encourage producers to tell their story. Telling stories is important – for retailers. Putting a human face on the product; sharing recipes.

Define local food

- Look for regional alignment
 - Must be aligned with Northeast / New England Region as well
 - Look to Vermont – and soon Rhode Island – for definition of local food and regional food
 - Align definitions, data collection, report formatting among producers, retailers, agencies and organizations across states and regions
- Get feedback from retailers, institutions etc.
 - Bring in community to give input on definition and collection of data
 - Tap into retailers and organizations that have access to consumer data
 - Be mindful of restrictive impacts, for example if definition is 75% Maine ingredients, what happens to a salsa brand if they can't get Maine tomatoes for one growing season?
- How to use data
 - How do we validate and regulate this?
 - Brainstorm ways to share data in meaningful ways – who collects, interprets, aligns and reports on the data
- Align food strategies with existing Maine strategic plans

Gather and use food data

- Support local food counts project
- Gather market research and use it to shape strategy and policy
- How to measure progress toward greater resilience of food storage and distribution system?
What data do we need?

Expand social programs

- Social systems / services support
 - Universal health care
 - More affordable childcare

Other

- Ensure that the revised recommendations with strategies include seafood!
- Improve power grid, generators, etc. to maintain refrigeration of key facilities during storms and disasters
- Increase easy access to local food, especially in the off season.
- Establish recognition program for food serving institutions that serve more local food