

# MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Trevor Nichols Research Center  
6237 124<sup>th</sup> Ave, Fennville, MI 49408

## MEETING MINUTES January 16, 2018

### PRESENT:

Jacob Clemons, Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Steven Hunt, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Shelly Hartmann, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Cheryl Sullins, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Creela Hamlin, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Dennis Vander Kooi, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
James Sumners, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Ron Bates, Michigan State University/Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Mark Longstroth, Michigan State University  
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC  
Dave Trinka, MBG Marketing  
Emily Helson, MBG Marketing  
Ernie Birchmeier, Michigan Farm Bureau  
Heather Throne, MDARD- participated via phone

### ABSENT:

N/A

### Call to Order

Chairman Jacob Clemons called the meeting to order at 9:55am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum.

### Open Nominations:

Chairman Clemons called for nominations for the Chairperson seat.  
Cheryl Sullins nominated Creela Hamlin with support from Shelly Hartmann. No other nominations presented.  
A verbal vote unanimously elected Creela Hamlin as Chair for the term of one year.

Newly elected Chairman Hamlin called for nominations for the Vice-Chair seat.

Shelly Hartmann nominated Steve Hunt with support from James Sumners. No other nominations presented.  
A verbal vote unanimously elected Steve Hunt as Vice-Chair for the term of one year.

Chairman Hamlin called for nominations for the Secretary seat.

Steve Hunt nominated Shelly Hartmann with support from James Sumners. No other nominations presented.  
A verbal vote unanimously elected Shelly Hartmann as Secretary for the term of one year.

Chairman Hamlin called for nominations for the Treasurer seat.

James Sumners nominated Cheryl Sullins with support from Steve Hunt. No other nominations were presented. A verbal vote unanimously elected Cheryl Sullins as Treasurer for the term of one year.

Kevin Robson offered his congratulations to the newly elected Executive board members and asked Jacob Clemons to continue leading the meeting as Chair for the remaining duration of the meeting.

### **Meeting Minutes Approval**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from December 6, 2017 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

Steve Hunt asked that the word “table” be changed to “Commission” in the meeting minutes approval section. Chairman Clemons requested that a comment from Tom Bodtke stating the importance of organics and the domain name suggestion as well as a comment from Travis Carini regarding fund expenditures be added.

**MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to approve the December 06, 2017 meeting minutes with amendments, seconded by James Sumners; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.**

Adoption of Agenda (**ATTACHMENT B**):

Steve Hunt requested time under New Business to discuss a video opportunity.

Chairman Clemons requested time under New Business to discuss recordkeeping.

**MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adopt the agenda with the added items with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried unanimously.**

### **Reports of Committees or Officers**

#### **Treasurers Report:**

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins gave the Treasurer’s Report and distributed a balance sheet/financial (**ATTACHMENT C**). \$81,587.36 is currently in the checking account and \$174,117.15 is in savings. To date, assessments have been collected on 87,248,903 pounds of blueberries. Two expenses were paid; one to Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee and one to True Blue. Two expenses were presented to be paid; \$76.00 for the setup of the Pullman Post Office Box and \$83.16 for the printing and mailing of the First Handler mailings.

Cheryl Sullins, Shelly Hartmann, and Jennifer Spears met to review who would be sent the necessary First Handler/Marketer/Grower noncompliance/correction mailings. Shelly Hartmann gave report as to who has responded to those mailings and who has yet to do so. Discussion on how to proceed with remaining noncompliant First Handlers/Marketers/Growers. Discussion regarding how to proceed with handling assessments due from Spiech Farms and if MBC can be on list of receivership.

The policy/procedure committee is working on a form that will help collect information from all growers to accurately capture the necessary data.

In sending out the noncompliance/correction mailings, MBC collected \$13,025.23 on 4,341,743 pounds of blueberries.

Shelly requested that if anyone knows of a blueberry Grower, Marketer, or First Handler that has not paid or has not received the mailings/information, please let her know.

**MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to pay the expenses as reported by Cheryl with support from Steven Hunt; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.**

**MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to accept the Treasurer's Report, seconded by Shelly Hartmann. Motion passed unanimously.**

Policy/Procedure Development Committee Report:

Steve Hunt, Cheryl Sullins, and James Sumners met a couple times and wrote some policies and procedures (**ATTACHMENT D, E, F, G**) to present to the Commission for discussion, amendment, and/or approval. They are putting together an official Policy/Procedure Manual as they are approved.

The first document presented was Assessment Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT D**). The Commission reviewed and discussed amending the policy to give a grace period to First Handlers before anything sent to office of MDARD for collections as well as sending a certified letter to assure receipt. Per Heather, many commodities call or establish a one-on-one meeting to discuss noncompliance.

\*Public Comment: Ernie Birschmeier suggested that a brief opening sentence be at the beginning of each policy/procedure to establish the purpose of the document. The Policy/Procedure Development Committee will rewrite and present at next meeting for board approval.

The next document presented was Business Expense and Travel Reimbursement Policy (**ATTACHMENT E**). Steve noted the need to amend the word "many" to "manner" in the second to last paragraph and pointed out that the Committee felt a per diem rate of \$50 per day was sufficient for this Commission vs the originally proposed amount of \$75 per day. Chairman Clemons suggested we exclude any alcohol purchases from being eligible for reimbursement.

**MOTION: Shelly moved to approve the Business Expense and Travel Reimbursement Policy and Form with discussed amendments with support from Creela; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Conversation regarding the per diem and the Commission Board's decision to take it or not was added to the agenda under New Business, i.

The next document presented was the Research Initiative Requests Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT F**). Steve suggested the Committee amend the policy and present for approval at next meeting. Chairman Clemons noted the need to grant authority to the Executive Director in the interim to write research support letters for research that is aligned with the MBC's priorities and report any such letters to the board at the next scheduled meeting.

**MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to grant authority to the Executive Director in the interim to write research support letters for research that is aligned with the MBC's priorities and report any such letters to the board at the next scheduled meeting with support from James Sumners; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.**

The final document presented by the Policy/Procedure Development Committee was the Financial Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT G**). This was tabled until the next meeting.

Chairman Clemons presented a policy for "Recordkeeping for Polices and Grants and Minutes" (**ATTACHMENT H**) for board review. Tabled until next meeting.

Board recessed at 11:02am

Board reconvened at 11:10am

Research Grants: Kevin presented a copy of the final draft of the Rural Development Fund Grant Application Proposal with the proposed soil amendments and excavating work estimates (**ATTACHMENT I**) that was submitted to MDARD.

The Specialty Crop Block Grant was approved for \$30,000 to help with startup costs to develop a website and brand for the MBC for this fiscal year. Kevin will email the quote for the website from Akea Solutions to the board. We must use these funds and request reimbursement by September 2018. The board will meet prior to blueberry season to discuss content of website. Steve Hunt asked about cost of website maintenance. Akea Solutions will include 5 years of maintenance/service as the referendum was approved for that period of time. Chairman Clemons asked that the hosting of the website be included in expenditures of the grant funds.

Dr. Rufus Isaacs of MSU joined the meeting via telephone to discuss Project GREEN grants. Kevin presented 2 letters of support (**ATTACHMENT J**) for Dr. Isaacs' proposals to Project GREEN.

Discussed if priority is given to grant proposals that have pledged matching funds from stakeholders.

Tentatively penciled in a matching MBC fund of \$20,000 for Stem Gall Wasp proposal and \$5,000 for bee research proposal as a placeholder while awaiting approval from MBC board. Dr. Ron Bates of MSU has committed \$5,000 to the Stem Gall Wasp project.

Chairman Clemons asked that we consider committing funds now but we will wait until the next meeting when we have a firm number that Dr. Isaacs will need.

Dr. Isaacs announced a Specialty Crop Block Grant that is due in one month (Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018) that will have to come directly from the Blueberry Commission. However, since the MDARD grants are all reimbursable, MBC must ensure that funds are allocated should all of the grants be approved. Kevin will review what has been committed to date and if the Commission will have enough to cover all. USDA has pushed the grant process up 60 days so timing is crucial.

Kevin passed around stationary he had made for the Commission. It still has the Grand Junction address on it so we will keep the Grand Junction PO Box open for a while longer.

Committee Appointments for 2018

**MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to keep the Committees as they are with same appointees with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

## **New Business**

A.) Research Proposals policy- already discussed during reports of committees.

- B.) Farm Roundtable Meetings- Chairman Clemons is proposing some outreach to growers through partnering with MSU or another organization who hosts Grower Meetings to inform growers of the Michigan Blueberry Commission and their purpose. Our website will have a function to allow growers to join a mailing list. Steve Hunt suggested the need for an Outreach or Public Relations Committee. Discussion on Kevin representing Michigan Blueberry Commission. Kevin will put together talking points/message that everyone who represents MBC at an event will give same message. No need for Committee if everyone gives same message.
- C.) Forming a letter to MSU regarding need for a blueberry focused individual to fill the small plant and fruit tree pathologist position- will discuss when Dr. Ron Bates gives update
- D.) Closer working relationship with MSU by MBC expressing interest in having representative attend board, Dean, and Extension meetings- will discuss when Dr. Ron Bates gives update
- E.) Review of Policies and Procedures- Tabled until next meeting
- F.) Upcoming USHBC meeting- USHBC has invited board to attend the meetings in Salt Lake City. Shelly stated that she is going; Chairman Clemons expressed that he is planning on going. Dennis Vander Kooi also plans to go. Kevin will make sure they have talking points before hand. Discussion regarding voting to send a representative to USHBC meeting. Anyone attending will do so on own accord as Michigan growers would prefer assessments spent on research. Shelly noted that it will now be Michigan Blueberry Commission's responsibility to present nominations for Michigan Member and Alternate Member representative for USHBC.
- G.) Steve Hunt was approached by Ron Goldie regarding creating a video on blueberries from farm to table. Steve requested that we invite him to a meeting to give a proposal to the board. This video would be similar to the "pickle" video on MSU Extension's website and Youtube channel.
- H.) Recordkeeping policy- discussed during reports of committees.
- I.) Per Diem rate- Commission discussed not taking the mileage or per diem for regularly scheduled meetings at TNRC but if sent far, can request it.

**MOTION: Shelly moved that the board not take the per diem or mileage for regularly scheduled board meetings until the next organizational meeting next year where it will be reevaluated; Support from Steve; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Shelly expressed thanks to the board for being volunteer as it will mean a lot to the growers.

### Old Business/Open Issues

- A.) Amend Research Support Policy- already discussed during reports of committees.
- B.) Startup Grant update- already discussed during reports of committees.
- C.) Amend budget- Chairman Clemons discussed amending the research budget. Chairman Clemons will amend and send to new Chairman Hamlin.

**MOTION: Shelly moved to table budget amendment discussion to next meeting with support from Creela; motion carried by unanimous verbal vote.**

MDARD update- already discussed

MSU Update- Dr. Ron Bates passed out “Save the date” magnets for MSU’s Agriculture Innovation Day on June 28, 2018 and discussed the many educational opportunities that will offered at the event. He asked that MBC publicize the event when or where possible.

Dr. Bates addressed the request from MSU to have a blueberry focused pathologist fill the open position at MSU. He stated a letter of concerns or support to let MSU administration know what is important to MBC and its constituents. MSU respects the urgency and is trying to have something in place before season.

As far as MBC being involved in MSU meetings- Dr. Bates stated that the Director has quarterly commodity meetings in which Kevin can be involved and interact with leadership. Dr. Bates expressed appreciation for being a part of the Blueberry Commission’s board and will attempt to be at all meetings but if he cannot, Mark Longstroth will. Mark requested topics for MSUE’s March kickoff meeting. Shelly suggested gall wasp, mechanical harvesting for fresh, SWD, and immigration. Chairman Clemons suggested the handling of mechanically harvested for fresh as well as best practices for it.

Dr. Bates has a Request for Proposal that he will send to Kevin.

Review of calendar from 12/6/17 meeting. Changed February’s meeting to 2/15/18 at 9am; Changed March’s meeting to 3/20/18 at 9am; Removed April’s meeting; Changed May’s meeting to 5/15/18 at 9am. All meetings are scheduled to be at Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville.

### **Public Comments**

Ernie Birschmeier thanked the board for the opportunity to sit in the meeting. He’s been at Farm Bureau for 29 years and has been a part of many meetings like this. It’s very interesting to see the unique blend of energetic personalities and how well they all bring their strengths work together; fun to watch. Good job to board.

Thank you to Jacob Clemons for serving as the first Chair of the Michigan Blueberry Commission.

Jacob thanked the board as well as MSU staff and Kevin Robson for braving the weather to drive here and for the opportunity to serve as Chairman.

**Next meeting will be at 9am on Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at the Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville.**

### **Adjournment**

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adjourn meeting with support from James Sumners; motion carried unanimously.**

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:38pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann

- A. 12/6/17 Meeting Minutes**
- B. 1/16/18 Agenda**
- C. Financial/Balance Sheet (2)**
- D. Assessment Policy & Procedures**
- E. Business Expense & Travel Reimbursement Policy & Form**
- F. Research Initiative Requests Policy & Procedures**
- G. Financial Policy & Procedures**
- H. Record Keeping for Policies & Grants & Minutes**
- I. Rural Development Fund Grant Application Proposal**