

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Trevor Nichols Research Center
6237 124th Ave, Fennville, MI 49408

MEETING MINUTES February 15, 2018

PRESENT:

Creela Hamlin, Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Steven Hunt, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Shelly Hartmann, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Cheryl Sullins, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Jacob Clemons, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dennis Vander Kooi, Michigan Blueberry Commission
James Sumners, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dr. Ron Bates, Michigan State University/Michigan Blueberry Commission
Heather Throne, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mark Longstroth, Michigan State University
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC
Dave Trinka, MBG Marketing
Lorrie Merker, MBG Marketing
Emily Helson, MBG Marketing
Dr. Ron Goldy, Michigan State University
Dr. Rufus Isaacs, Michigan State University
Carlos Garcia, Michigan State University
Ash Harris, Akea Web Solutions

ABSENT:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:02 am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum. Chairman Hamlin stressed that the agenda will be followed and to please hold all public comments to the that point in the agenda to keep the meeting flowing in a timely manner. Each officer will have time on the agenda.

Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from January 16, 2018 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to approve the January 16, 2018 meeting minutes as written, seconded by Steve Hunt; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Adoption of Agenda (ATTACHMENT B):

Dennis Vander Kooi asked for time on the agenda to discuss an opportunity for a booth at the Ottawa County Food Expo in June as well as a request for research cooperators from Phil Moore.

Steve Hunt remarked on the form in which we communicate as a board.

Jacob Clemons requested time under New Business to discuss the Commission's Facebook page/social media use.

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

Reports of Committees or Officers

Chairman's report:

Creela Hamlin stated that there wasn't a necessary consensus to create a Facebook page for the Commission and the soon to be developed website will suffice as a web presence. No need for multiple forms of social media.

Jacob Clemons stated that the Facebook page was created as an avenue to disseminate meeting times in the absence of a website. Feels it's a quick way to get information out to the public.

Discussion about the need for everyone, including on social media, to give same message via the talking points (**ATTACHMENT C**) yet refer major requests (newspapers, radio, television) to the Executive Director. Kevin Robson explained that the Talking Points is a document that he will update as needed and distributed to the board so everyone is always giving same message. Discussion about needing a system in place in regard to social media and someone to man it regularly to present valid, updated, and appropriate information if that's what the Commission wishes to do.

Vice-Chairman's report:

Steve Hunt attended a meeting recently and had an opportunity to speak to several growers and chemical representatives. The consensus is that the labor pool our industry has utilized for many years is drying up. There is an urgent need for our industry to follow suit of other commodities and move to less hand labor and more mechanization due to the outlook and challenges regarding labor. Chairman Hamlin stated that the USHBC is hosting a Mechanical harvesting symposium at the meetings in Salt Lake City in a couple weeks.

Treasurers Report:

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins gave the Treasurer's Report and distributed a balance sheet/financial (**ATTACHMENT D**). The Commission has collected, since its last meeting, an additional \$3,067.20 which represents 1,022,398 pounds of fruit. This brings the total number of reported pounds to 88,271,301.

Regarding the First Handler who has filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy, Kevin Robson stated that a letter has been submitted to the Director and the process has started at the Department of Ag to collect any unpaid assessments. He then recognized that it's an incredible feat to collect the assessments and the Commission should be proud that there are so few Handlers that we need to pursue. Kevin will continue to work with the couple of Handlers from whom we need reports and assessments.

It was noted, discussed, and confirmed by Heather Throne that in the case where a Handler files bankruptcy, the assessment responsibility does not fall back on the grower who delivered to said handler.

Jacob noted the need to update the Talking Points to

Cheryl then reported that she has paid \$159.16 in expenses and the new bank account balance is \$258,635.26. Cheryl stated that when the PNC bank account was opened, 3 signatures were set up- the Secretary, the Treasurer, and the Chairman as we did not have an Executive Director yet. The process has started to remove the Chairman and add the Executive Director.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to accept the Treasurer's Report, seconded by Jacob Clemons. Motion passed unanimously.

Kevin stated that the next meeting's Treasurer's report will be in a new, easy to read format.

Secretary's report:

Shelly stated she had nothing further to add as we have already discussed the Handler's from whom we are missing assessments.

Research Committee's report:

The Research Committee met last week with Extension and research personnel at TNRC and reviewed the potential planting at Trevor Nichols should we get approved for the grant. They are meeting immediately following this meeting.

Public Comment: Dr. Ron Goldy asserted that the blueberry planting at the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (SWMREC) is in bad shape and could use help with new plantings.

Steve Hunt noted that he was approached by a grower asking if higher priority can be given to finding ways to convert old plantings into higher yielding varieties over SWD. Chairman Hamlin stated that we can revisit our priorities and sort accordingly.

Kevin Robson replied to Dr. Ron Goldy's public comment noting that we are aware of SWMREC's condition but it is not in a county covered by the Rural Development Grant, therefore, Trevor Nichols was chosen as site for research planting should we be awarded the grant. There may be grants or opportunities to use research funds for projects at SWMREC in the future.

New Business:

- A.) Blueberry Video presentation (Dr. Ron Goldy, Michigan State University) - a presentation was given to show the Commission a potential opportunity to make a video showcasing the blueberry. He showed the Commission 2 videos they have made so far, one on pickles and the other on cherries. Dr. Goldy provided the Commission with an estimated budget (**ATTACHMENT E**) for making a blueberry video. It was discussed that it would be best to make a fresh blueberry video as well as a process blueberry video. The final video would be shown to the Commission for approval before being made public. If the Commission decides to proceed, Dr. Goldy would need to know by end of September 2018. Lorrie Merker made **public comment** that it's important to show the fresh berries being rinsed prior to

consumption and that USHBC has made a similar video with Art Galleta in New Jersey. Dr. Goldy replied that the video would not have the descriptive narration, allowing the consumer to make own decisions and opinion. The video would be invoiced after production. Chairman Hamlin suggested putting a viewing of the video made by USHBC on next month's meeting agenda so the board can make the decision to proceed with Dr. Goldy's video or not.

Old Business/Open Issues

A.) Website Presentation (Ash Harris from Akea We Solutions) – a website development, support, and maintenance proposal (**ATTACHMENT F**) was distributed to the board for review and discussion. Akea uses WordPress for content management; it's very easy to use and flexible. Akea will draft designs and submit to the Commission for review and approval. Once approved, they will begin building the site. MBC needs to own the domain name and can grant Akea access for renewals. Akea is fully versed in Americans with Disabilities Act and will ensure compliance. It will be no issue to have our forms and publications on the site. Akea will need content writers. Cheryl Sullins suggested we have a liaison for content. Kevin Robson will be primary contact for Ash at Akea but is in favor of having a liaison for content the board wishes to provide. It was suggested that Jacob Clemons be the website content manager to which he agreed. Akea can set up content admins who can edit the site. The timeline for launching of the website, provided content is readily available, is 12 weeks (approximately May 2018). Akea can secure the domain with GoDaddy (or a like hosting company) but it is important to keep a valid credit card on file. It was noted that proposal is only good until the end of the Commission's referendum. We will have to revisit the proposal should the growers renew the PA-232 for another 5 years. The software is updated twice per month by Akea. They have security measures in place to keep site safe and secure. Discussion about whether Facebook page is needed or will website be sufficient web presence. It was consensus of the board to remove the current Michigan Blueberry Commission Facebook page. Discussion on the 2 pricing options of the website development from Akea Web Solutions.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to accept OPTION 2 of the Akea Web Solutions Project Proposal (ATTACHMENT F) with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

Board recessed at 10:42 am

Board reconvened at 10:48 am

Policy/Procedure Development Committee Report:

Steve Hunt, Cheryl Sullins, and James Sumners met twice since the last board meeting and worked to rewrite and/or edit some policies and procedures. The first presented was the revised Research Initiative Requests Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT G**) that was amended per board's request last meeting.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adopt the newly revised Research Initiative Requests Policy and Procedures as written with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.

The second document provided was the Assessment Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT H**) for review and approval. Non-Sufficient Funds policy was needed for any checks that may get returned.

MOTION: Jacob moved to adopt the Assessment Policy and Procedures as written with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion passed unanimously.

The third document presented was a newly created Blueberry Grower Assessment Report (**ATTACHMENT I**). This report is similar to something that USHBC sends to growers that will collect information directly from the grower versus the First Handler to aid in the checks and balances to ensure every assessment is collected.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adopt the Blueberry Grower Assessment Report as presented with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

The fourth document presented for review and adoption was the Recordkeeping Procedures (**ATTACHMENT J**). The Commission reviewed- the following changes were noted- in second paragraph stating the minutes binder will be stored with the Executive Director. Strike "Executive Director" and change to "Secretary or Secretary's designee". Same paragraph- strike "that have been approved" and replace with ", once approved,".

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adopt the Recordkeeping Procedure as amended with support Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

The fifth and already approved policy was the Business Expense and Travel Reimbursement Policy (**ATTACHMENT K**). Already adopted, no need to discuss.

The final document presented was the Financial Policy and Procedures (**ATTACHMENT L**). Steve Hunt read the entire document to the Commission. Discussion on adding verbiage stating any non-budget item over the amount of \$250 requires Commission approval. TABLED to allow Policy/Procedure Committee to redraft and present at next meeting.

Discussion on conflict of interest. Heather Throne stated that an annual Conflict of Interest statement is required from the board.

Discussion regarding creating by-laws for the Commission. Heather Throne stated that generally, the program is the Commission's by-laws but ok to draft. The Committee is looking to include officer terms and reduce the need to write additional policy/procedures.

New Business, continued:

B). Talking points- The Commission thanked Kevin Robson for putting together the talking points regarding the Michigan Blueberry Commission so any board member speaking on behalf of the Commission gives consistent message.

C.) Upcoming USHBC Meeting- Discussion regarding board attendance to the USHBC meetings in Salt Lake City, Utah, February 27-March 2. It was noted that Shelly Hartmann and Lorrie Merker are attending. Cheryl Sullins inquired if USHBC's request for Regional Council Member and Alternate nominees (**ATTACHMENT M**) is responsibility of the Commission to which Shelly Hartmann replied that

it's her understanding that the state can elect to submit names for the state's representative but she will find out for sure and report back at the next meeting.

Commission/Board Insurance: Kevin Robson stated that some Commissions have exposure insurance to cover the board. He is working with Farm Bureau Insurance to put together a proposal for a Directors and Officers Liability Insurance policy. Kevin will present a proposal at a future meeting.

Discussion on Fruit Grower's News request for nominations for 40 fruit/vegetable growers under age 40. It is up to individuals to nominate on their own.

MDARD Update:

Heather Throne reminded everyone about the Pure Michigan Ag Summit coming up on March 14th. Their website is www.puremiag.com. There will be 35 purchasers with their list of needs. The keynote speaker is a Meijer representative focusing on their new SHIPT program.

As far as grants, 10 projects of 80 submissions were awarded Value Added grants (**ATTACHMENT N**) on February 1st. Rural Development grants are being compiled. There were 86 submissions and anywhere from 7-10 projects will be awarded a portion of the \$800,000 funds allocated for this grant. Awardees will be informed at the end of March. Specialty Crop Block grants are also due to Heather today. Kevin Robson announced that Dr. Rufus Iscaacs' gall wasp research Specialty Crop Block Grant application was submitted yesterday and he will keep the Commission updated as things progress.

Dennis Vander Kooi stated he was invited to a Farm to Food Expo for Ottawa County where they're hoping to educate consumers about their food. Discussion regarding the Commission's possible involvement by having a booth there. ***Public Comment:** Lorrie Merker stated USHBC has many promotional materials available for events like this. The event is June 9th. Dennis Vander Kooi will get more info. TABLED until next meeting.

MSU Update:

Dr. Ron Bates noted that MSU has been in the news under horrific conditions the last few months and are empathetic to the victims of Larry Nassar and are dedicated to taking care of them.

Small fruit pathology position will be filled by Dr. Tim Miles starting on July 1st, 2018. Dr. Bates passed out and reviewed with the Commission, "Examples of MSU Partnerships with Commodity Organizations" (**ATTACHMENT O**).

Public Comments

Lorrie Merker stated that she recommends the Commission join Michigan Ag Council; all the other commodities are involved. As far as a media policy- it would be good for growers to know that there is a single voice for the blueberry industry. Lorrie also stated that the number of pounds for which assessments were collected can be checked for accuracy after the numbers are released at the USHBC meetings. It would be useful to have one centralized location for Michigan blueberry statistics. Discussion regarding Michigan's national position in growing blueberries.

Discussion regarding Michigan Ag Council membership. Kevin will check into joining the IPM Alliance and the Mi Ag Council.

Next meeting will be at 9:00 am on Tuesday, March 20th, 2018 at the Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville.

Adjournment

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adjourn meeting with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 01/16/18 Meeting Minutes**
- B. 02/15/18 Meeting Agenda**
- C. MBC Talking Points**
- D. Financial/Balance Sheet**
- E. Estimated Budget for Michigan Blueberry Video**
- F. Akea Solutions Website Proposal**
- G. Research Initiative Requests Policy and Procedures**
- H. Assessment Policy and Procedures**
- I. Blueberry Grower Assessment Report**
- J. Recordkeeping Procedures**
- K. Business Expense and Travel Reimbursement Policy**
- L. Financial Policy and Procedures**
- M. USHBC Regional Council Member and Alternate nominee requests**
- N. Value Added MDARD grant recipient announcement**
- O. Examples of MSU Partnerships with Commodity Organizations**