

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

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

MEETING MINUTES

March 20, 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
Dr. Ron Goldy, Michigan State University
Ben Smith, Michigan State Horticultural Society
Elaine Bristol, MI Ag Council
Steve Shine, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

ABSENT:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:10 am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum. Introductions around the table.

Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from February 15, 2018 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

MOTION: James Sumners moved to approve the February 15, 2018 meeting minutes as written, seconded by Steve Hunt; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Adoption of Agenda (ATTACHMENT B):

Reviewed agenda; Jacob Clemons requested time in New Business to discuss abandoned fields.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adopt the agenda with the added item, supported by Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

Presentation from Elaine Bristol of Michigan Ag Council.

Elaine shared the goals and initiatives of the MI Ag Council- to bring the farmers and their stories to the consumer (**ATTACHMENT C**). Their website is currently in the redesign phase (michiangrown.org) but will be complete and launch in approximately one week. Michigan Grown / Michigan Great is a brand designed to build trust between the farmer and the consumer and to increase consumption of Michigan grown ag products/commodities. They are looking for more farmers' stories to share. Their primary target is Michigan consumers but when asked by a board member if they plan to expand nationally or globally, she replied that perhaps eventually, through social media. The MI Ag Council is composed of 15 board of directors who are partners at the \$10,000 level. They have 2 ex-officio board members; one from MDARD and one from MSU Extension. If MBC were to join the Council, we could grant logo permissions to growers. The brand is not currently used on packaging but heading in that direction. When asked by board member about the amount of traffic their website sees; her reply was about 3,000 visits per month. MBC will advise of the decision to join the Council by May 15, 2018. Chairman Hamlin thanked Elaine for coming and giving her presentation.

Presentation by Steve Shine of Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Steve shared a PowerPoint presentation in regard Wetland Mitigation Banking. The MDNR is assisted by DEQ and has aligned themselves with the nonprofit 501c3 organization- Michigan Municipal Wetland Alliance (MMWA). They are trying to offset wetland impacts from drain road, municipal, blueberry production expansion, and production ag (Swampbusters). Wetland restoration preplace functions and value loss. State owned lands with hydric soils are eligible to be wetland mitigation bank sites. Restoring will enhance recreational opportunities for the public. Their goal is to replace wetland functions. Nearly 600 landowners & 1700 acres in Michigan were affected by Swampbuster non-compliance. Swampbusters have 4 options to compensate for lost wetlands- Restore, mitigate by creating new wetland on property elsewhere, purchase credits, or "good faith". All wetlands are not equal the ratios are- wooded 2-1; scrub shrub 1.5-1; emergent 1.5-1- they mitigate like with like. The DNR's role is to hold easements, manage sites after construction, allow construction of bank sites on DNR lands where private land is available. They are looking for sites. SW has a need. MMWA's role is to serve as bank sponsor, coordinate site construction, and coordinate with NRCS. Most conversions have happened recently. The credits are 30,000 per acre and through the program, 50,000 per acre. Steve recommends that if you are buying property, ask the DEQ if it is already a wetland.

Board recessed at 10:04am

Reconvened at 10:12am

Reports of Committees or Officers

Chairman's report:

Chairman Hamlin informed the board of a Michigan Blueberry Grower "Think Tank" session with legislatures such as Fred Upton and Tonya Schuitmaker on Tuesday, March 27th, 11am, at Leduc's in Paw Paw.

Vice-Chairman's report:

Steve Hunt serves on Trust Committee of Michigan State Horticultural Society and they recently approved funds/grant to Dr. Rufus Isaacs for Stem Gall Wasp research.

Treasurers Report:

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins gave the Treasurer's Report and distributed a balance sheet/financial (**ATTACHMENT D**). Another assessment was collected of \$1,807.48 bringing the total amount of assessments collected to \$266,684.39 representing 88,894,795 pounds of Michigan blueberries. There were no bills or invoices to pay. All checks have cleared. We will have an expense to pay by next meeting for an external hard drive to store all MBC info. Cheryl is looking for a better format on which to present the financials; working with Shelly, Jennifer, and Kevin on that. Examples are included in **ATTACHMENT D**.

Kevin detailed his visit to A&L Farms and meeting with Miguel Ochoa. Discussion on the need for an email list comprised of all Michigan blueberry growers.

Discussion on if there is a need for a newsletter to disseminate information. Determined that website is first priority but may consider a quarterly e-newsletter in the future. For now, if there is a need to get information out, send it to the First Handlers who can forward on to their grower lists.

Secretary's report:

Shelly Hartmann reported on her trip to the USHBC meetings in Salt Lake City and the one-day symposium on mechanical harvesting for fresh. USHBC made a video of the event and will send out to their contact list. The symposium included a panel of manufacturers who presented many promising ideas. The final 2017 crop reports were shared at their meeting; the Michigan production closely matched what was reported from First Handlers. Results of research projects that have concluded will have be published soon. It was noted that other state's commissions send their directors to the USHBC meetings. Kevin is willing to attend the next meetings in the fall at the direction of the Commission.

Shelly reminded everyone that USHBC election ballots for regional representatives will be sent to growers on April 20th; they have until May 25th to vote. She also emphasized that growers should attend these meetings and serve on any committees possible to keep the grower voices heard and ensure it's not only marketing companies making decisions for growers.

Shelly noted that the Michigan Frozen Food Packers Association (MFFPA) will be hosting a "Snack & Seminar" on March 27th from 3-5pm at Beeches Golf Club. Scholarship and Guesstimate information will be going out soon. The Guesstimate is tentatively set for Wednesday, June 20th at Doubletree Hilton in Grand Rapids.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to approve all reports of officers with support from Denny Vander Kooi; motion passed with unanimous verbal consent.

Research Committee's report:

The Research Committee met last month with Rufus Isaacs and John Wise. They are waiting to hear the outcome of grants before acting but have done some initial prep work in anticipation of positive grant news. MSU would like MBC to have a meeting with structured feedback/sounding board of growers to express their wants and needs in regard to research priorities. Many feel the MSU visit last October by the MBC board was important and would like to make it an annual event. They discussed that any funded projects will be acknowledged and published on our website. When researchers give reports, they normally have to select what to present in the interest of time and may not be able to necessarily present all- good and bad research. Often, we can learn a lot through bad research. Kevin Robson stated that on the Monday before the Great Lakes Expo begins, commodity groups host their meetings and the researchers go from room to room to present ALL research. MBC should plan to meet at that time as well.

- a.) Denny reported that they discussed the need for another MBC board member to serve on the Research Sub-Committee as there are currently only 2. Appointment of Jacob Clemons to the Research Committee is confirmed as he has volunteered.

Policy/Procedure Development Committee Report:

Steve Hunt reported that they met once since the last meeting. A revised Financial Procedure was passed around (**ATTACHMENT E**)

Cheryl stated the need to add verbiage that all information will be stored on an external hard drive in order to easily transfer the information to the next Secretary or Treasurer to the Recordkeeping policy (**ATTACHMENT F**).

- a.) A Conflict of Interest statement (**ATTACHMENT G**) was passed around for review and signing of the board as well as Jennifer Spears. Heather Throne noted the signed copies may be stored with the Secretary or Kevin Robson.

The Committee also presented a Freedom of Information Act policy (**ATTACHMENT H**)

The Committee is currently working on by-laws and will meet again in April.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adopt all presented policy and procedures as written with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

New Business:

- a.) Kevin Robson reported that Ash Harris of Akea Web Solutions has provided an updated quote (**ATTACHMENT I**). Kevin suggests that we choose option #1 in the interest of budget responsibility. Jacob asked if the hours accrue monthly to which Kevin replied that he would inquire.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to accept Option #1 for Akea Web Solutions' proposal of website development with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried unanimously.

- b.) Kevin Robson summarized his fact-finding task regarding the IPM Alliance. Many commodity groups pay \$500 per year to belong to this long existing organization. The Alliance proactively sent Kevin an invoice should the MBC decide to join. The Alliance plans an annual tour for the EPA decision makers

from Washington, D.C. It is vital as this is how they learn about Michigan agriculture and what is important to Michigan growers.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved for the MBC to join the IPM Alliance with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

- c.) Discussion on the benefits of joining the Minor Crop Farming Alliance. The \$10,000 annual dues will provide a seat on the board. May consider joining next year.
- d.) Embroidered shirts for Commission board members. Kevin provided 2 options for embroidered shirts for the board to select and wear to events where they are representing Michigan Blueberries. It's important to make MBC's brand visible.
- e.) Michigan Ag Council- Discussion on joining and the benefits of the investment of \$1,000 dues vs \$10,000 dues for joining Minor Crop Farming Alliance and how it may be best to start out small. Heather Throne noted that Ag Council has blueberry videos we could share.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved for MBC to join the Michigan Ag Council at the \$1,000 level with support from Cheryl Sullins; motion carried unanimously.

- f.) Abandoned blueberry acres- Discussion on the growing problem of growers abandoning certain fields/varieties that near producing fields. MDARD has a mechanism in place to handle but is delicate situation. There is no money for enforcement. There is a need for legislation. It best to approach and fix the problem neighborly rather that involve government agencies. There is a need to define abandoned acres and not mistake for organic or transitional.

Old Business/Open Issues

- a.) MBC Spokesperson at MSU meetings- discussion on need for this. Important to have representation at meetings and events.
- b.) Ag Day at the Capitol- discussed that this event will need to have MBC representation next year.

Commission/Board Insurance- Kevin Robson stated that the quotes for Commission/board insurance are not ready but will be soon. Other commodities carry this insurance.

MDARD Update:

Heather Throne noted that Jamie Clover Adams has left MDARD for USDA and Gordon Wenk is the new director; they are in process of replacing the Chief Deputy Director which was Gordon Wenk's previous position. Not seeing a lot of change due to this.

Grants- USDA SCBG – received \$2.1 mil; proposals are all in and there were less proposals submitted than in previous years. Kevin noted that MBC does have one for Rufus Isaacs' research in that group. Will know in April if that is approved. Won't have a formal announcement until the end of September.

11 projects were approved including one for MBC yesterday at the Rural Development Fund board meeting. They will work with Kevin to get grant agreement in place for a May 1st start. Heather reviewed the other

grant awardees. Kevin has updated MBC's Talking Points (**ATTACHMENT J**) to reflect the awarding of this grant. There were 85 grant proposals submitted and the \$100,000 awarded to MBC was one out of 11; should be proud.

Michigan State Horticultural Society (MSHS) Update:

- a.) Ben Smith reported on a training program for which Carlos Garcia is requesting funds to support (**ATTACHMENT K**). This training will target Hispanic blueberry growers. His program last year had 31 participants and aided in the control of SWD (spotted wing drosophila). Project GREEN funding has been exhausted; Dr. Garcia is requesting \$900 from MSHS. Kevin Robson supports partnering with the Hort Society to aid Dr. Garcia's outreach program.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to partner with MSHS and provide half of the requested \$900 Dr. Garcia needs, or \$450.00, with support from Dennis Vander Kooi. Motion carried by unanimous verbal vote.

MSU Update

Dr. Ron Bates is looking forward to having Tim Miles on the blueberry team.

Dr. Bates elaborated on Ag Innovation Day which is June 28th at SWMRC in Benton Harbor and the benefits of sponsorship (display, recognition on printed materials, etc.) (**ATTACHMENT L**). They are reaching out to other commodity groups as well. Kevin has attended this event and sees the value as it moves around the state every year and gets the best info out to that specific region's industries where the event is hosted.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi motioned that MBC sponsor Ag Innovation Day at the \$2,500 commodity group level with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Dr. Bates announced that Project GREEN proposals are in and the final decisions will be out next week where he expects blueberry projects to be approved.

Public Comments

None

Dennis Vander Kooi noted that he has reached out to Ottawa County regarding their request for support for their ag event and awaiting response.

Kevin Robson requested that any agenda items anyone would like to see discussed at next meeting be sent to him. He is trying to keep the printing of materials cost effective.

The next meeting will be at 9:00 am on Tuesday, May 15th, 2018 at the Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville.

Adjournment

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to adjourn meeting with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 02/15/18 Meeting Minutes**
- B. 03/20/18 Meeting Agenda**
- C. 2017 Highlights of Michigan Ag Council**
- D. Financial/Balance Sheet & examples of potential financial reporting formats**
- E. Financial Policy**
- F. Recordkeeping Procedures**
- G. Conflict of Interest Statement**
- H. Freedom of Information Act Policy**
- I. Akea Web Solutions updated proposal**
- J. Updated MBC Talking Points**
- K. Dr. Carlos Garcia's request for training funds – MSHS**
- L. MSU Ag Innovation Day support request handout**