

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Michigan Farm Bureau
7373 W. Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48909

MEETING MINUTES May 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
Dr. Doug Buhler, Michigan State University
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC

ABSENT:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 8:37am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum.

Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from March 20, 2018 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

MOTION: Jacob Clemons moved to approve the March 20, 2018 meeting minutes as written, seconded by Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Adoption of Agenda (ATTACHMENT B):

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adopt the agenda, supported by Steve Hunt; motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Committees or Officers

Chairman's report:

Chairman Hamlin reported that she was approached by a blueberry grower requesting the Commission consider research on post-harvest durability (SO2 pads to increase shelf life). Creela is requesting that we host a "Think Tank" for blueberry growers to voice their research requests to the board.

Kevin Robson agrees that a listening "Think Tank" for blueberry growers is a great idea as it lets growers know that the board is listening to their needs.

It was discussed that the Think Tank should be held immediately following the growing season so the season's concerns are fresh in everyone's minds.

Kevin asked the board how the crop is looking; each Commission member reported their opinion. The overall consensus was that the crop is looking great, feeling cautiously optimistic; labor could be an issue and there is a little winter damage and bud mite damage noted.

Chairman Hamlin mentioned that Dennis Vander Kooi spoke at a grower meeting about the Michigan Blueberry Commission last week utilizing the MBC Talking Points and praised him for doing a great job.

Vice-Chairman's report:

Nothing to report

Treasurers Report:

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins distributed an updated balance sheet/financial/budget (**ATTACHMENT C**). Cheryl reported that she paid \$93.48 for the website domain, \$450 to support Dr. Carlos Garcia's SWD training in conjunction with Michigan State Horticultural Society, and \$63.17 for the external hard drive to hold MBC's electronic files. A motion to pay Farm Bureau for the contracted Executive Director fee was requested.

MOTION: Jacob Clemons moved to pay the \$50,000.00 contracted Executive Director fee to Farm Bureau Insurance with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Discussion on when the 2 Project GREEN grants will be due to pay; \$5,000 for Dr. Rufus Isaacs' research on pollinators and \$20,000 for Stem Gall Wasp research. Dr. Ron Bates noted that the funds will be available to the researchers by July 1st. Dr. Isaacs will send detailed invoices likely before we have the next meeting.

MOTION: James Sumners moved to approve the Treasurer to pay the invoices from Dr. Rufus Isaacs as they come due for the pollinator (\$5,000) and Stem Gall Wasp (\$20,000) research projects with support from Shelly Hartmann. Motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Balance on checking account is \$73,199.11 and Savings/Money Market is \$179,142.52.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to approve the Treasurer's Report with support from Dennis Vander Kooi. Motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Secretary's report:

Shelly Hartmann reported that the annual Guesstimate is still in limbo. The Guesstimate is tentatively set for June 21st, 2018 at the DoubleTree in Grand Rapids. The Michigan Frozen Food Packers Association is meeting soon to discuss the future of this year's Guesstimate in light of recent developments with the Cherry Board; it is usually held in conjunction with their annual meeting which has been pushed into July. The "blueberry guesstimate" will still take place.

Shelly noted that travel planning has begun for the USHBC fall meetings in New Orleans and is requesting a motion to send Kevin Robson on behalf of the Michigan Blueberry Commission.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to send Kevin Robson to the October USHBC meetings in New Orleans and cover expenses for that the trip with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Shelly volunteered to assist in making the arrangements for his attendance.

Shelly acknowledged that the first First Handler Notice will go out June 15th, the second notice will go out approximately August 15th. The Grower report will go out shortly after assessments start coming in.

Research Committee's report:

The Research Committee had planned to meet today at Trevor Nichols but has rescheduled due to change of Commission meeting venue. The TNRC farm manager is taking a proactive approach to the 5-acre planting research project and is anxious to begin the work as they have a lot of projects going on. Kevin Robson leery of spending anything until signed agreement is in hand. Personnel changes at MDARD are slowing process down a bit. As soon as the agreement is received, Kevin will visit John Wise to get project going. Kevin reminded all that this is a 2-year grant and the majority of the work will take place in fiscal year 2019; 2018 will be planning and prepping. Any concerns regarding the timing of this project should be directed to Kevin.

Chairman Hamlin asked Kevin if MSU will be the clearinghouse for grant proposals. Kevin reported that he visited with Jackie DeSander of MSU who facilitates Project GREEN grants and confirmed they will. Kevin asked Policy & Procedure Committee to create a policy for IDC (Indirect Costs) to ensure that the grant money we give to researchers is spent on research and not utility bills, etc. October will be opening call for proposals from researchers and will have a deadline to submit to Jackie. Jackie will then send the proposals to Kevin and the Commission. There will be about a month for the Commission to review and the February Commission meeting will be spent deciding which research projects to fund with assessments as well as the funding limit. Kevin feels MBC should fund 1-2 a year to start since there are big projects going on. MSU does not charge an administrative fee for being the clearinghouse.

Kevin stated that one way the Commission can utilize the assessment funds will be to mirror what the tree fruit commissions do with much success and support a portion of a position, startup costs for a position, or an assistant to a researcher, etc. who MBC could also direct along with MSU (share costs). Kevin feels the position partnership will be mutually beneficial perhaps long into the future.

Public Comment- Dr. Doug Buehler commented on the jointly funded research position which began about 20 years ago with sugar beet advancement; When Project GREEN started, integrators successful with the 50/50. The positions they hire for the joint positions are not tenured so annually renewable. If the person in the position is not meeting goals of Commission, MBC has right to pull the funds. The joint position researcher has 50% Extension expectations and 50% applied research. They work directly with industry. Believes 50/50 partnership model is the future. Shelly asked for a ballpark figure- Dr. Buehler stated it's generally split \$50,000 each annually for salary/fringes/operating; willing to talk/workout any type of model (interns \$7k-\$10k/graduate students are about \$40k).

Policy/Procedure Development Committee Report:

Cheryl Sullins reported that the Committee met a couple times and are working on some items but have nothing to report this meeting.

RECESSED: 9:40am

RECONVENED: 9:45am

New Business:

- a.) SCBG for Stem Gall Wasp – Dr. Rufus Isaacs was successful in obtaining a Specialty Crop Block Grant in the amount of \$100,000 for research on Stem Gall Wasp. This grant does not require matching funds.
- b.) Website Update- Kevin met with Ash Harris of Akea Web Solutions for updates on website (michiganblueberrycommission.org). He presented a printout of the first draft of the website (**ATTACHMENT D**). Kevin's contact information will be in the Contact section of the website. Discussion on the aesthetics and content of the website such as an anonymous comment/research suggestion section/calendar of events). Jacob Clemons requested bios from Commission members to publish on website. A motion was requested to pay the second installment payment to Akea for the website development. Aiming for website to go live in July. Shelly suggested we have the First Handler forms/Grower Reports, etc. as fillable pdfs on the website in the event someone loses their mailings. Discussion on how the website will be promoted.

MOTION: Jacob Clemons moved to pay the second installment for website development to Akea Web Solutions with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

- c.) IPM Alliance EPA tour- Tour is set for August 22-24 (home based in Lansing) with a potato focus. Multiple commodities are part of the Alliance. This year is a vegetable focus; next year will be fruit. There will be an opportunity for IPM Alliance partners to have time in front of the EPA. Kevin will attend and represent the Michigan blueberry industry.

d.) Insurance Quote- Kevin reported that the updated quote (**ATTACHMENT E**) is \$900 less than the previous. Premium covers entire board and director (D&O – Directors & Officers).

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to purchase Traveler’s D&O Insurance for the MBC board with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

e.) Embroidered shirts for Commission members- Kevin distributed shirts embroidered with the MBC logo to the Commission board and requested that they don them to meetings where they are representing the Commission.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to reimburse Kevin Robson for the cost of the shirts with support from Jacob Clemons; motion carried unanimously.

f.) Letter of support for Dr. Rufus Isaacs- Kevin Robson was approached by Dr. Isaacs requesting a letter of support for additional funding on research that is in line with the Commission’s priorities; Kevin will send the letter to the Commission once it is written.

g.) Commodity Execs Meeting- Kevin Robson reported that he attended the commodity executives meeting on 4/16/18 in DeWitt.

h.) Meeting with Elaine Bristol of Michigan Ag Council- At the commodity executives meeting on 4/16/18, Kevin met with Elaine Bristol and let her know that the Commission will reevaluate the partnership level after this year.

i.) Blueberry interview- Kevin Robson disseminated, via email to the Commission, a radio interview he did on behalf of the blueberry industry and reiterated that he is happy to do things like that on the Commission’s behalf.

MDARD Update:

Heather Throne reviewed grant process. MDARD is preparing a state plan that is due to the USDA in a couple weeks who will review over the summer months and may come back with questions specific to the projects. Heather will forward questions to Kevin for answers and expects a formal USDA agreement in September 2018 to sign and will work with Commission to start October 1, 2018. The grant is awarded but still a process to follow.

MDARD a little behind getting Rural Development grant agreements in place due to personnel shortages but work can begin on the project as of May 1st. Estimates having the agreement to Commission by June 1st. They are starting planning process for next year’s grants and have decided to change order up to be more conducive to processing/farming/harvest timelines. They will begin with Rural Development proposals which will be due in September and awarded in January. SCBG proposals will be due in January and awarded in April/May as long as nothing changes in the Farm Bill. Value added grants (equipment based) announcement in spring and awarded in July. MDARD always open to comments/suggestions on how to improve grant process. Comment period open now for Rural Development.

Michigan State Horticultural Society Update:

Ben Smith could not make it the meeting but let Kevin know that he is thankful for Commission’s support and help with Dr. Carlos Garcia’s SWD training.

MSU Update

Dr. Ron Bates welcomed the Commission to Lansing.

He emphasized that MSU makes the safety of students and staff a priority and is working hard to ensure that something like the Nassar case never happens again. MSU is looking forward to the large, diverse class enrolled for this fall (largest in history). Dr. Bates is hoping to have the new Dean attend a Commission meeting. He is also hoping to once again host the Commission for its October meeting and would like to know if we would like to tour something other than the labs. Tim Miles will start his position on July 1st and his spouse will be working in the diagnostic lab. MSU is updating procedures pertaining to working with commodity groups and will give to Kevin when complete.

Dr. Bates reminded everyone of the free event, Ag Innovation Day, on June 28, 2018. The new MDARD director, Gordon Wenk, will be attending and speaking about check off programs.

MSU is working on outreach for education and training on the WPS (Worker Protection Standard) since there is so much confusion surrounding the rules. Dennis Vander Kooi suggested that someone come talk about WPS at the upcoming pre-harvest blueberry meeting.

Dr. Doug Buehler invited the Commission to Project GREEN's 20th anniversary party on September 19th at the Lansing Center.

Dennis Vander Kooi suggested that the Commission make the March meeting at Michigan Farm Bureau and October meeting on MSU campus annual events.

Public Comments

None

The next meeting will be at 9:30 am on Tuesday, September 25th, 2018 at the Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville.

James Sumners will not be able to attend. Chairman Hamlin suggested having he blueberry grower "Think Tank" around the same time. This was tentatively scheduled for September 26th at 12pm at TNRC in Fennville. October meeting will be at MSU but unknown date at this time. Scheduled November's meeting for November 6, 2018, 9:30am, at TNRC in Fennville.

Jacob Clemons brought up South Haven's National Blueberry Festival held in August. Discussion on sponsorship of event by Michigan Blueberry Commission.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to sponsor the National Blueberry Festival at the maximum level of \$1,000 under the discretion of Kevin Robson that will give the Commission the best exposure supported by Jacob Clemons; motion carried with a 6-1 vote.

Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 am.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 03/20/18 Meeting Minutes**
- B. 05/15/18 Meeting Agenda**
- C. P&L/ Financials from Treasurer's Report**
- D. Screenshot of MBC website development progress**
- E. Updated D&O insurance quote from Traveler's Insurance**