

# MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Heritage Hill Room  
187 Monroe Ave NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

## MEETING MINUTES

**December 03, 2018**

### PRESENT:

Creela Hamlin, Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Steven Hunt, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Shelly Hartmann, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Cheryl Sullins, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Dennis Vander Kooi, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC  
Heather Throne, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Mark Longstroth, Michigan State University Extension  
Dr. Carlos Garcia, Michigan State University Extension  
Dr. Rufus Isaacs, Michigan State University Extension  
Jackie Albert, Michigan State University  
Dr. John Wise, Michigan State University  
Dr. Timothy Miles, Michigan State University  
Dave Reenders, Crossroads Blueberry Farms  
Marc Erffmeyer, Farm Bureau Insurance  
Jasper Cunningham, MI Farm Bureau  
Russell Sullins, Jubilee Blueberry Farms, LLC  
Rex Schultz, Heritage Blueberries, LLC

### ABSENT:

James Sumners, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Jacob Clemons, Michigan Blueberry Commission

### **Call to Order**

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:37 am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum.

### **Meeting Minutes Approval**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from October 11, 2018 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

**MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to approve the October 11, 2018 meeting minutes as written with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.**

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

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda. Mark Longstroth stated he will give an MSU update in Dr. Ron Bates' absence.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adopt the agenda with the addition of Mark Longstroth, supported by Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.**

## **Reports of Committees or Officers**

### **Policy/Procedure Committee:**

Steve Hunt and Cheryl Sullins reported they will be meeting soon to finish the by-laws and make amendments to some procedures.

### **Chairman's report:**

Since deciding to move forward with another year of Executive Director services with Farm Bureau and Kevin Robson, the agreement (**ATTACHMENT C**) has been signed and delivered to Farm Bureau along with a letter for Kevin's personnel file to serve as an informal review (Chairman read the letter aloud). Scott Piggott has countersigned the agreement. Kevin stated the only changes to the agreement was the service dates. Kevin Robson clarified that we may sign annual agreements, or in November 2019, we may sign an agreement that will carry through the remainder of the 5-year referendum. Kevin reported that his position with Farm Bureau may change in January but he is wholeheartedly committed to the Commission and was given assurances from Farm Bureau that he can continue his service.

Chairman Hamlin reported that she attended a workshop in November for leadership and conducting efficient meetings and found it to be useful.

Shelly Hartmann stated that although she and Jennifer were unable to attend due to weather, she did get in touch with the group (MSU Extension/Great Lakes Leadership Academy) who presented that workshop and they are willing to host one in the South Haven area; more information to come.

### **Vice-Chairman's report:**

Steve Hunt reported that he is moderating the afternoon session of the blueberry program at the Great Lakes Fruit & Vegetable Expo on Wednesday and will utilize the newly revised MBC Talking Points (**ATTACHMENT D**) to educate the growers in attendance on the work we are doing. Steve asked if there is any additional information he should mention. Mark Longstroth suggested he reiterate to the audience the importance of completing the surveys on the program. Chairman Hamlin asked that he highlight the matching fund grants.

### **Treasurer's Report:**

Kevin Robson stated he and Cheryl will be meeting on Friday 12/7 with, and the financial audit will be performed by, Maner Costerisan (CPAs who handle several commodity group audits). Joel Korson will be our contact. The goal is to complete the audit by the end of January; should be a simple audit.

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins distributed a summary of September and October financials as well as a detail of financials (**ATTACHMENT E**). We received the reimbursement check from MDARD for the website grant. To date, we have received approximately \$156,000 in assessments. Sending the grower reports was well worth the effort as we have collected on pounds that we may not have otherwise. Reimbursement forms are also coming in; Cheryl is requesting a modification of the form once we are done with this year. Discussion on a financial policy for how to handle reimbursements of small checks (send check back to grower or cash and reimburse).

Cheryl reported that she spoke with a bank officer about obtaining a charge card for the Executive Director. Kevin is need of a card for expenses incurred on behalf of the Commission (e.g. to book the room we are meeting in today). A charge card has more protections than a debit card and is a good way to keep it separate.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to approve a credit card for the Executive Director to use for MBC expenses pending a credit card financial policy to be established at the January meeting with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Cheryl addressed Dennis Vander Kooi's previous request for a proforma; she is working on it and hopes to have something soon.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to approve the Treasurer's report with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

#### **MSU Update:**

John Wise was moved up on agenda due to time. John gave an update and presentation on the grant project titled "Blueberry Research Infrastructure for Addressing Critical Pest Control Needs" that is being done at Trevor Nichols. With the budget of \$130,000, most of the work will be done in 2019. They are getting quotes for 3-year-old plants to get a jump on growth. Discussion on requesting donations for plants and recognition of any nursery who donates. John and his team met many times with the Research Committee; Kevin thanked them for their work on the project. Discussion on budget for establishment costs for plantings.

\*Public Comment: Russell Sullins, Jr. said if MBC does a breeding program, it should be favorable to the farmer and MBC should retain the intellectual property.

**BREAK: 10:46am**

**RECONVENED: 10:55am**

#### **Secretary's report:**

Secretary Shelly Hartmann reported that as of 11/30, of the 38 First Handlers, 19 have submitted payment, 4 are handlers we added due to grower reports, 6 did not handle in 2017 or 2018. We have collected on approximately 51,884,464 pounds to date with an estimated break down of 53% fresh and 47% process. We are seeing a need to modify the grower report to better capture the fresh vs process breakdown. We need to look at reimbursement procedures for 2018 & moving forward. Some scenarios for the board to think about- a grower selling fruit on the bush to a handler, the handler paying the assessment, and the grower requesting reimbursement of an assessment they did not pay. Also, some growers may have multiple companies/farm

names that produce less than 50,000 pounds individually and despite common control, may report no assessment due on each separately.

Shelly reported that she met with Laura Hayward of DeBoer, Baumann, and Co. out of South Haven. They have offered 3<sup>rd</sup> party help with budgeting, audits, and reporting free of charge for 2 hours per month with standard rate billing beyond that. Shelly read email stating the same.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to pursue talks with Laura Hayward of DeBoer, Baumann, & Co. for an official proposal to present to the board at the January meeting for approval with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.**

### **Executive Director's Report:**

Kevin reported that as of today, the MBC website ([www.michiganblueberrycommission.org](http://www.michiganblueberrycommission.org)) is live. All of the meeting minutes are uploaded on the site. Some handouts had to be omitted to comply with accessibility rules for screen readers per the ADA (American with Disabilities Act). For a full copy of any minutes or handouts, requests may be made to Kevin.

\*Public Comments- Carlos Garcia suggested that we make a description for any image on any handout to make it easier for screen readers. Rex Schultz inquired about how growers will learn about the site to which Kevin replied that it is up to the board to get the word out.

Kevin stated the RFP (Request for Proposals) was finalized (**ATTACHMENT F**) and went out to researchers along with the cherry board and Hort Society's. Jackie and Kevin will collect by 12/31 and get them to the board to review at the January meeting. Kevin emphasized he will continue to pursue all grant opportunities.

The following 2019 meeting dates were discussed and agreed upon:

- January 8, 2019, 9am, Trevor Nichols Research Center, Fennville
- April 16, 2019, 9am, Southwest Michigan Research & Extension Center, Benton Harbor
- October 15, 2019, 9am, Michigan Farm Bureau, Lansing
- December 02, 2019, 9am, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Grand Rapids

Kevin read an email update from a lobbyist on the Farm Bill; Senator Stabenow is working to ensure Michigan growers are getting what they need. Farm Bill may be signed by January 1.

**BREAK: 11:55am**

**RECONVENED: 12:32pm**

### **Crop Insurance Update:**

Marc Erffmeyer gave brief presentation on crop insurance and passed out a pamphlet with his business card (**ATTACHMENT G**).

It was asked if he believes Michigan may qualify for federal aid due to the 2018 crop to which he suggested signing up for Farm Bureau's farm connect text function and to reach out to Senator Debbie Stabenow with concerns.

\*Public Comment- Russell Sullins, Jr. stated that farmers can't pay their bills this year.

Discussion on sending a letter from MBC to Senator Stabenow and Congressman Upton. Shelly and Kevin will work on that.

### **MSU Update:**

Mark Longstroth distributed a report to the Commission from MSU (**ATTACHMENT H**). The blueberry team met last week; they are interviewing for a Specialty Crop IPM Educator position at SW station. MSU plans to host prebloom and preharvest meetings in Ottawa and Van Buren counties in 2019. They are also planning a "Blueberry School" for 2019 or 2020. Mark suggested the Commission come visit the plantings at the SWMREC.

\*Public Comment- Russell Sullins, Jr. asked if any upcoming private pesticide training; Mark Longstroth stated there are 2, one in February and one in March.

Dr. Rufus Isaacs presented a slideshow of their research to the Commission on Stem Gall Wasp and Pollinators both done with matching funds and Project GREEN grants. The presentations are not quite finalized but will be by Wednesday, 12/5, when presented to growers. They are working on other grant opportunities.

### **MDARD Update:**

Heather Throne brought Michigan's Deputy Director of Ag, James Averill to introduce to the Commission. Deputy Director Averill informed the Commission that Director Wenk will retire at the end of December after 40 years of service. They are preparing for a new director and the new administration coming in January. Deputy Director Averill is looking forward to working with the commodity groups. Heather informed the Commission that the Rural Development grants closed in mid-November and are now in the review process. They anticipate announcing awards in February and will do a press release. Specialty Crop Block Grants are open for public comment; if Commission wishes to comment on any changes they'd like to see, must do so by mid-December. MDARD will announce grant cycle the first part of January; look for a press release as they will be due end of February/beginning of March. Has not heard USDA's timeline yet but anticipating it will be same as last year.

### **MSU Update (continued):**

Dr. Carlos Garcia gave a presentation on his outreach to growers and the feedback he receives. He is working on a training program for 2019-2020 using a systems approach to SWD Management based on research done by MSU. A grant proposal will be submitted to MBC on training he is proposing for growers that will include financial and risk management and management of production risks for climate change.

Dr. Tim Miles will be submitting proposals to Project GREEN. He would like the ability to inoculate. Working on anthracnose trial this year. He would like to establish mummy berry at Trevor Nichols Research Center and is looking for mummy berry sites from growers.

Discussion on Dr. Ron Goldy's Consumer-Oriented Blueberry Video budget estimate and proposal (ATTACHMENT I).

**MOTION: Cheryl Sullins moved to move forward the Consumer-Oriented Blueberry Video with all 3 proposed endings (fresh, process, u-pick) with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **Public Comments**

No public comment during public comment period; Kevin thanked the growers in attendance.

**The next meeting will be at 9:00 am on Tuesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at Trevor Nichols Research Center in Fennville, MI.**

### **Adjournment**

**MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adjourn the meeting with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:58pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. 10/11/18 MBC Meeting Minutes
- B. 12/03/18 Meeting Agenda
- C. Executive Director Services Agreement, executed
- D. 2019 Michigan Blueberry Commission Talking Points
- E. Financial Summary for September/October and Detail
- F. MBC Call for Research Proposals (RFP)
- G. Farm Bureau Crop Insurance pamphlet & Marc Erffmeyer business card
- H. MSU Update
- I. Consumer-Oriented Blueberry Video budget estimate
- J. MBC Support letters sent by Executive Director