

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (SWMREC)
1791 Hillandale Rd, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

MEETING MINUTES

April 16, 2019

PRESENT:

Creela Hamlin, Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Steven Hunt, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Shelly Hartmann, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Cheryl Sullins, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission
James Sumners, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Eric Jawor, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dennis Vander Kooi, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dr. Ron Bates, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC
Rex Schultz, Heritage Blueberries, LLC
Emily Helson, MBG Marketing
Joel Korson, Maner Costerisan Certified Public Accountants
Philip Fanning, Michigan State University Extension
Timothy Miles, Michigan State University Extension
Michael Reinke, Michigan State University Extension
Kristin Esch, MDARD
Brent Kreiger, MDARD
Heather Throne, MDARD

ABSENT:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:06 am; performed a roll call and verified the presence of a quorum. Chairman Hamlin welcomed Eric Jawor to the board and introductions were made around the room.

Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from January 08, 2019 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to approve the January 08, 2019 meeting minutes as written with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.

Adoption of Agenda (ATTACHMENT B):

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda. Due to traveling time of guests, the need to move the Maner & Costerisan Audit Report presentation (item VII) was suggested. Mark Longstroth asked for time to review a civil rights relationship agreement from MSU. Steve Hunt requested time to talk about the Hort Society and his observations from the Blueberry Kickoff meeting.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to adopt the agenda with the requested revisions/additions with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried unanimously.

Maner & Costerisan Audit Report presentation:

Joel Korson of the accounting firm Maner & Costerisan came to provide a review of the audit (ATTACHMENT C) his firm conducted on the Commission for 2018. He began by thanking Kevin, Cheryl, Shelly, and Jennifer for providing the necessary information. Joel stated the audit went smoothly and reviewed the report with the Commission. Joel also presented 2 letters, one being recommendations for improvement (ATTACHMENT D) and the other explaining the scope of the audit and findings (ATTACHMENT E).

Kevin reiterated from the January meeting that future Commission financials will be prepared by Maner & Costerisan.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to approve the audit report with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Produce Safety Rule Update:

Kristin Esch of MDARD spoke to the Commission about the Produce Safety Rule. FDA has never regulated produce farms in this way; it is a proactive approach focusing on education. FDA working well with National Association of State Departments of Agriculture. Michigan is only state with Produce Safety Technicians; there are 6 in the state who provide free, confidential produce safety risk assessments. MDARD was able to provide, through FDA funding, a large grant to MSU Extension to help with education and outreach. Both MDARD produce safety technicians and MSUE can provide “on farm readiness reviews/OFRRs” (also free and confidential) or risk assessments. Smaller and beginning farms are serviced through the produce safety risk assessment to help them get up to speed with food safety in general. Larger, established farms are serviced through the OFRR program as it is a comprehensive look at your facility to get you ready for an inspection, but is not a records review. OFRR needs to be done during harvest. Scheduling the risk assessment or Readiness Review (OFRR) must be done through MSU Extension; call or email for an appointment. FDA has required MDARD to gather a Farm Inventory; they are accomplishing this through a voluntary online survey. This will help keep farmers up to date on the latest information.

Michigan.gov/producesafety contains a map with coverage areas of the produce safety technicians as well as the farm inventory survey.

Farms with annual sales over \$500,000 will be subject to inspection beginning this year. Brent Kreiger of MDARD stated that inspections will be scheduled but needs current contact information to help schedule to avoid an unannounced inspection. Unannounced inspections are likely if contact information is bad, he does not receive a response to his inquiry, or if there is a complaint or recall event. Frequency of inspections are likely to be every 3 to 5 years but could do "routine" inspections annually. Brent is only full-time inspector for the state with 2 part time inspectors as well. The survey will help determine who will be subject to inspection. Brent recommends treating the inspector as a visitor and require same protocol for them as a visitor as you would anyone else.

If you have several locations, may not be able to inspect each one but they will all be documented and inspected the next time. Inspection reports will be typed up and sent to the owner of the farm. Growing, harvesting, packing, and holding will be included in the inspection. MDARD is developing YouTube videos of what to expect during an inspection. There is no fee for the inspection. They are not looking to fine anyone but will rely on the food code and take action if there is an egregious violation.

MSUE SWMREC Update

Bill Shane of MSU Extension's Southwest Michigan Research & Extension Center spoke to the Commission about the state of SWMREC's blueberry planting- it is 1.4 acres and about 20 years old. It needs to be replaced as there is not enough space to do the work they need to do. There is land adjacent to current planting available for new planting. Bill is asking the Commission for consideration of updating the planting for research via a letter (**ATTACHMENT F**). Discussion on possible varieties to plant as well as pros/cons of planting there.

MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to have MSUE to do their due diligence in exploring the cost of planting new varieties of blueberries at SWMREC and present their findings at the October 2019 MBC meeting with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Heather Throne suggested the possibility of exploring Specialty Crop Block Grant options for funding the SWMREC planting. There is another round of grant funding announcing in January 2020 for funds to be spent by October 2020.

BREAK at 10:27am

RECONVENED at 10:34am

Reports of Committees or Officers

Chairman's Report:

Chairman Creela Hamlin reported that she attended the Tree Fruit Commission meeting held at Trevor Nichols Research Center. John Wise requested funding to help build a 3 season research

barn (no usage during winter to save heating costs) that will contain safety showers and specialized research equipment. This will help with a crowding problem for the researchers and the flow of research. Creela noted the research at TNRC has shifted more towards cherries and blueberries instead of apples due to SWD.

Tim Miles received funding from Project GREEN for fungicide resistance in blueberries for anthracnose research.

Kyle Meade of the NRCS emailed her with an opportunity to recycle large tractor tires on June 15th in Paw Paw; contact Kyle for more information.

Vice-Chairman's Report

Vice- Chairman Steve Hunt reported he was asked by Ben Smith of the Horticultural Society to give a brief update that the Hort Society is funded for research for this year. Steve sits on Trust Committee for them; they have, over the years, given almost 2 million dollars in grant money, has been given donations in the amount of 2 million dollars and still has 2 million in their funds. They have been authorized to give \$122,000 in matching funds. There is a project they funded for SWD. Steve will make recommendations to the board to fund more blueberry projects. Steve attended the Blueberry Kick Off meeting and felt that he came away from the meeting with more knowledge on Stem Gall Wasp than all other meetings he's attended in the last 6 months. He appreciated MSUE's efforts in putting on a good informational meeting. Steve spoke about the MBC and encouraged grower participation; suggests more outreach to growers to encourage attendance to MBC meetings. Shelly suggests having a sign in sheet at all industry meetings to gather contact information for those interested in being on the MBC email list. At the Kick Off meeting, a survey was done to find that 86% of growers in attendance use Enviroweather but there is no station in Holland; perhaps MBC can help sponsor a station there in the future.

Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins distributed a proposed amended budget (**ATTACHMENT G**) along with a summary of November, December, January, and February financials as well as a detail of financials (**ATTACHMENT H**). The primary changes to the budget are an additional assessment received late increased the income, the \$30K grant expense was added, and the addition of Michigan Ag Alliance dues for \$1,000.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to adopt the budget as amended with support Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Cheryl reported that she has not had the time to purchase a computer and Quickbooks subscription but will by the next meeting. Kevin stated that we will be joined by Rene from Maner Costerisan to present financials to the board beginning in October. The added cost for Rene's service is not in the budget but we do have \$2,000 set aside for accounting.

Cheryl brought the grant checks to present to Tim Miles and Phil Fanning of MSU for their research approved at January meeting.

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

Secretary's report:

Secretary Shelly Hartmann reported we have collected \$207,722.44 representing 69,243,689.84 pounds of blueberries with approximately 53% going fresh (36,461,290.07 #) and 47% going process (32,782,399.78 #). We are still awaiting 3 handler payments for 2018- one might not understand that organic is not exempt in Michigan. Kevin is following up with them for status update.

The NABC crop final crop report for 2018 came out- Michigan came in at 69.5 million pounds with 36.5 going fresh and 33 to process. The report is available online for NABC members along with the cold storage report.

USHBC spring meeting went great. Mark Villetta is retiring; they have narrowed down his replacement to 3 candidates, but they have yet to announce them. It is the MBC's responsibility to present names to USHBC for interested parties in serving on the USHBC; discussion on the same.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to appoint George Fritz, Jr. as Michigan's Member representative with Bob Carini as the Alternate with back up of Rex Schultz and Matthew Hamlin. Steve Hunt supported; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Shelly will communicate the board's choices to USHBC immediately as they allowed us one extra day due to the scheduling of our meeting.

MDARD Update:

Heather Throne reported that Value Added grants used for processing lines, etc. are due May 8 (**ATTACHMENT I**). These require a 30% match but are usually one to one. The maximum amount is \$125,000. There are MDARD people available to walk through the grant process and happy to work with anyone interested. Feedback is given whether the requested grant is awarded or not.

MDARD puts out a MI Ag Facts and Figures booklet every 2 years. MBG has historically provided the funds and information; now that MBC has formed, it is recommended that responsibility to now fall on them. The cost of supporting the booklet is \$500 which includes copies of the booklet.

MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to support the Michigan Ag Facts & Figures booklet with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

MSU Update:

Dr. Ron Bates reported that MSUE now has a new IPM educator, Mike Reinke, who will be based at SWMREC. Bernie Sanstra's position will soon be advertised due to his retirement. Eric Hanson's position is a high priority but will not be advertised until this fall. Budget issues may affect this position. Grain houses on campus need to be updated; they are requesting funding from the state. Fruit and Vegetable labs on campus as well as 3 mobile labs are being refurbished and established for use in Michigan Ag education.

Viticulturist Specialist interviews are happening at SWMREC now.

Ag Innovation Day is July 26 on campus with a row crop focus this year.

MSU is currently looking for a new president from a strong slate of candidates; an announcement may come in the next 30 days.

Mark Longstroth disseminated an EEO/Affirmative Action document (**ATTACHMENT J**) required by MSU of their partners to ensure civil rights are not infringed upon. Kevin Robson signed the document on behalf of the Commission.

Carlos Garcia distributed a fact sheet on USDA Farm Service Agency's Tree Assistance Program (**ATTACHMENT K**). This program may help growers affected by the winter polar vortex. He also passed out a printing of USDA's publication, 'The 2018 Farm Bill – What Is New and What Has Changed' (**ATTACHMENT L**) as well as 'Operational guidelines for the export of fresh blueberry fruit to Vietnam under a systems approach protocol' (**ATTACHMENT M**).

BREAK FOR LUNCH: 11:51pm

RECONVENED: 12:10pm

Executive Director's Report:

Kevin Robson reported that he will be visiting farms during season.

a.) NABC reached out to Kevin inquiring about MBC becoming an Associate member but needs clarification.

b.) Mi Ag Council – if MBC would like to continue support at same level as last year, they need to know. Elaine Bristol is no longer there but they are trying to fill her position.

MOTION: Cheryl Sullins moved to renew Mi Ag Council membership for another year at the \$1,000 level with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

c.) EPA Decision Maker's Tour is July 22 – 24 at South Haven's Conference Center. Kevin, Dawn Drake, Ben Smith, and Emily Helson are the planning committee. This tour will have a blueberry, apple, and grape focus. The tour now includes stops at TNRC & SWMREC.

d.) As Chairman Hamlin mentioned, TNRC is looking for help with funding for a research barn to help with overcrowding, safety updates/upgrades, chemical mixing, etc. It's an opportunity to partner with the Tree Fruit Commission (who has carried the weight of helping fund TNRC research for years in the absence of a blueberry commission) and Ag Bio Research to split the cost of the research barn 3 ways. It would be utilized by Dr. Rufus Isaacs and his team. There is no timeline for completion yet but if the Commission wishes, Kevin will continue talks with

Doug Buehler, Phil Korson, etc. Treasurer Cheryl Sullins stated we have the money in the budget and is supportive of the idea.

MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to allow Kevin to gather the information for MBC to contribute 1/3 of the cost of the TNRC research barn funding with support from Denny Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.

e.) Letters of support penned by Kevin Robson are in the packet distributed to the Commission (**ATTACHMENT N**). Kevin always ensures the support letters are provided to those with whom MBC's priorities align.

f.) Michigan's National Blueberry Festival- The festival occurs the second week of August. Kevin was approached to have MBC sponsor the pie social and toast to the harvest for \$1,000. Kevin will have the opportunity to speak to the audience of consumers. Discussion on the pros and cons of supporting the festival.

MOTION: Denny Vander Kooi moved to support the National Blueberry Festival at the \$1,000 level with support from Eric Jawor with an added stipulation that only MICHIGAN blueberries are used for that event; motion carried with 6-1 vote.

g.) Website update- Kevin met with Ash Harris of Akea Web Solutions to upload the meeting minutes. Kevin and Ash will assure upcoming meetings are updated on the site so everyone knows meeting dates.

No update on the blueberry video just yet but Mike Reinke stated the process has started.

Public Comments

Rex Schultz informed the room about the American Heart Association's partnership with USHBC to allow their heart check logo to be put on blueberry packaging.

The next meeting will be at 9:00 am on Tuesday, October 15th, 2019 at Michigan Farm Bureau, 7373 West Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917.

Adjournment

MOTION: Jim Sumners moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:59pm with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:59pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann/jls

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 01/08/2019 MBC Meeting Minutes
- B. 04/16/19 MBC Meeting Agenda
- C. Maner & Costerisan Audit Report
- D. Maner & Costerisan Audit Letter with recommendations
- E. Maner & Costerisan Audit Letter to the Board
- F. Request letter from Bill Shane of MSUE
- G. MBC 2019 Budget - Amended
- H. MBC Financial Summaries Nov/Dec/Jan/Feb and Detail
- I. MDARD Value Added Grants Fact Sheet
- J. MSU Non-discrimination agreement
- K. USDA Tree Assistance Program Fact Sheet
- L. USDA- 2018 Farm Bill – What is New and What has Changed
- M. Operational guidelines for export to Vietnam
- N. MBC letters of support (4)
- O. MBC application for Specialty Crop Block Grant
- P. MBC letter to growers who paid assessments but produced less than 50k lbs