

# MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Michigan Farm Bureau  
7373 West Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917

## **MEETING MINUTES October 15, 2019**

### PRESENT:

Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Creela Hamlin, Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Steven Hunt, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Shelly Hartmann, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC  
Cheryl Sullins, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Eric Jawor, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Dennis Vander Kooi, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Dr. Ron Bates, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Rex Schultz, Heritage Blueberries, LLC  
Rufus Isaacs, Michigan State University Extension  
Mark Longstroth, Michigan State University Extension  
Carlos Garcia, Michigan State University Extension  
Kenneth McFarlane, MDARD  
Matthew Smego, Michigan Farm Bureau  
John Kran, Michigan Farm Bureau  
Audrey Sebolt, Michigan Farm Bureau  
Al Ochoa, A&L Farms  
Dave Reenders, Crossroads Blueberry Farm  
Luke DeHaan, Crossroads Blueberry Farm  
Timothy Miles, Michigan State University Extension  
Marc Erffmeyer, Farm Bureau Insurance  
John Kinahan, Hanson Logistics  
Trey Malone, Michigan State University  
Ryan Fox, MFB  
Emilie Cole, MSU

### ABSENT:

James Sumners, Michigan Blueberry Commission

### **Call to Order**

Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:07am, performed a roll call, and verified the presence of a quorum.

## Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from April 16, 2019 (**ATTACHMENT A**).

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to approve the April 16, 2019 meeting minutes as written with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried by unanimous verbal consent.**

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

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda and rearranged to accommodate schedules of presenters.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to adopt the agenda with the requested revisions with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.**

## MDARD Update:

Ken McFarlane attended in Heather Throne's stead to provide an update from Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development which included a brief summary of the Michigan industrial hemp and medical cannabis harvest, labor and housing, PFAS, and MDARD's budget season outcome.

## MSU Update:

Dr. Ron Bates provided an update on Michigan State University which included changes being implemented by new president, budget updates, the loss of PROJECT GREEN, the loss of the work stress program, the need for increased capital to upgrade greenhouses on campus.

Dr. Rufus Isaacs commented that he is excited about the planting at Trevor Nichols Research Center; the bushes are looking good and he is looking forward to getting started with research. The spring pollination meeting was attended by 30-40 growers and well received. MSUE is looking for our priorities as they are in planning phase and thinking about Extension programming for next year. On the research side, they are working on SWD- monitoring lots of farms in north and south; lots going on. Tested skin thickening research trials; had results on less cracking damage in later varieties. Tested a program from Oregon State University that attracts the fly. Pollination research: followed up on May 2018 extreme heat effect on pollination and utilization of misting for mitigation of heat's negative effect. For Stem Gall Wasp- they did pesticide trials in the field with take home message being that nothing works as well as they want it to work but there are treatments that look promising. Results of research will be presented to the MBC at the Expo in December.

New planting at TNRC- MSUE funds the maintenance based on dollars derived from research fees at a per acre rate, but the planting won't be mature enough for research for 2 or 3 years. Since there won't be revenue on this planting for some time, they are asking MBC to consider mechanisms to support John Wise and MSUE staff to ensure pruning and inputs. Mark

Longstroth commented on how heavy the ground is at TNRC planting and the need to pay attention and monitor the water. May need guidance on getting the Elliott planting established. The researchers would value more interaction with MBC's research committee; Creela will set up a time to meet. Lantern Fly is not in any adjacent states to Michigan, but they are aware and on the alert for it.

Mark Longstroth updated MBC on the blueberry program he organized for the Great Lakes EXPO (**ATTACHMENT C**).

Carlos Garcia presented a short slide show on the current blueberry production challenges and statistics from the Michigan fruit inventory survey. Carlos also stated that when it comes to imports of blueberries and methyl bromide application (which is prohibited in the USA), the rule is that if there's no fruit in the domestic market, they can use the "critical use exception" to apply this product to imported blueberries. Discussion on country of origin labeling and import food safety standards.

Ron commented that Tim Miles will present research work from fungicide disease control funded by MBC at the EXPO. Tim also wanted MBC to know that he collected 400 islets from 35 blue crop fields and every one of them had anthracnose.

### **Farm Bureau Update**

John Kran spoke to the MBC about trade and labor. Matt Smegol updated MBC on the state's budget as well as the newly updated Michigan Farmer's Transportation Guidebook created in conjunction with Michigan State Police. Audrey Sebolt introduced herself to the MBC as the new Horticultural Specialist for Michigan Farm Bureau and spoke about the cherry industry's challenges with trade, imports, and dumping.

### **Ron Goldy, MSUE Blueberry Video**

Ron Goldy presented both the fresh and frozen blueberry production videos sponsored by the MBC that he created over the season. Discussion on concerns of logos and packaging to ensure it's not a commercial for any one particular entity and the focus is the consumer. Tabled further discussion to later in the meeting.

**BREAK 11:25am**

**RECONVENED 11:35am**

### **John Wise, MSU update**

John Wise updated the MBC about the blueberry planting at TNRC in Fennville. 2018 was spent amending the site/soil and land leveling/shaping. June and July were challenging due to rain. Bed mounding, fabric installation, irrigation & pump station was completed in July. Planting is complete except for some grass; plants look great. During the planting, they had to make a decision in regard to adding a second irrigation line and a VFD (Variable Frequency Drive). It wasn't in the budget, but the block sizes changed to optimize how many bushes could be planted per plot which caused additional expenses for irrigation. \$22,000 was budgeted and they came in at \$34,000. They are asking MBC to cover the additional expenses. MSU also

incurred an additional \$7,000 in unexpected expenses involving the lift station; they are reducing labor costs to help offset the additional expense.

**MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to cover the additional \$12,000 in irrigation expenses for the TNRC planting with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Kevin requested MSU/John Wise to come up with an approximate dollar amount it will take to cover the maintenance part of the TNRC planting until it can generate income from research and present it to the MBC at the December meeting for final discussion and decision.

MSUE's Bill Shane of SWMREC sent Kevin an update on current MSU blueberry planting resources (**ATTACHMENT D**).

Discussion was held on the 3 season barn proposal previously talked about in meetings. The Tree Fruit Commission has proposed that they, MBC, and MSU AgBio Research all contribute 1/3 of the cost of this barn to conduct research, store equipment, and use as general work stations. The cost of the barn is approximately \$100,000.

**MOTION: Eric Jawor moved that MBC contribute \$33,333.33 to partner with MSU and the Tree Fruit Commission to build a 3 season research barn at Trevor Nichols Research Center with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **MSU update (continued)**

Tim Miles updated the MBC on the generic fungicide research grant MBC supported; lots of good data. Generic fungicides seem to be just as affective as name brand. He will present further findings at the EXPO.

Over the summer, Dr. Miles came across some bushes with a virus which was thought to have been previously eradicated. He would like to bring it up at the EXPO to see what the industry consensus is on this subject as well as inform growers how to identify the virus.

**LUNCH BREAK: 12:06PM**

**RECONVENED: 12:38PM**

### **Specialty Crop Insurance update**

Marc Erffmeyer and Ryan Fox of Farm Bureau spoke about the 2018 Farm Bill and the affects thereof on crop insurance. CAT coverage is 50% coverage of approved yield history traditionally costing \$300 is now \$655 with no explanation as to why. May purchase buy-up option. The approved price is \$0.89 per pound of fresh or frozen intended blueberries.

## Reports of Committees or Officers

### Chairman's Report:

Chairman Creela Hamlin reported that she attended the field day at TNRC where the MBC planting was highlighted. The new planting looks nice as Remington did a good job. There are 1,105 Blue Ray, 1,000 Aurora, and 858 Elliott bushes planted. She will continue to check up on the planting. Creela suggests letters to Tony VanWoerkom (regional IR4 coordinator) who is in charge of section 18/special use labels for chemicals if needed as this will help to get different/modified/amended labeling for blueberries. Kevin is working on a project to attempt to get a special one-time application of Guthion approved post bloom. Discussion on Guthion.

### Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer Cheryl Sullins distributed the financials for the MBC since April (**ATTACHMENT E**). Current balance of checking is \$10,334.76. Savings balance is \$284,979.65. Cheryl purchased a laptop and QuickBooks subscription to help with financials. Cheryl has a few bills to pay but needs a motion: invoice from Hartmann's Plant Company in the amount of \$10,243 for plants at TNRC, \$50,000 to Farm Bureau for Executive Director services, and reimbursement to Jubilee Blueberry Farms for the purchase of the MBC laptop and Quickbooks for the amount of \$1,219.01.

**MOTION: Eric Jawor moved to allow Cheryl to pay \$10,243 to Hartmann's Plant Company, \$50,000 to Farm Bureau, and \$1,219.01 to Jubilee Blueberry Farms with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Discussion on the need for the MBC to have a credit card as not every vendor accepts checks and not every situation can allow time for board approval for an expense over \$250. Discussion on amending the financial policy for more flexibility.

**MOTION: Dennis Vander Kooi moved to amend the financial policy adopted 02/15/2018 (part 2, paragraph G) to state payments for purchases over \$2,500 need board approval; add credit card verbiage to financial policy; and issue a credit card to both the Executive Director and Treasurer with a per purchase limit of \$2500 with support from Shelly; motion carried unanimously.**

Maner Costerisan is working on setting up chart of accounts. Discussion on the need for echecks and a printer for the MBC's treasurer.

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

## Secretary's report:

Secretary Shelly Hartmann reported that she attended the USHBC/NABC fall meetings in Washington state. Great turn out; toured blueberry, hops, apple, and hemp plantings. New committee focusing on technology available to growers was formed. One of the highlights was the 2019 preliminary crop report; British Columbia came in at a record of 75 mil pounds of fresh and 115 mil pounds of process; California had a total of 73.1 mil pounds; Washington had a total of 140 mil pounds; Oregon had 140 mil pounds; Mexico had 107.5 mil pounds; total Western region was a record of 650.6 million pounds. NABC is reporting Michigan at 47.5 fresh and 44 process for a total of 91.5 million pounds; this will be confirmed once assessments are collected.

First Handler notices were sent in June and August; a third and final notice along with the grower report will be sent the last week of October. We have received 3 assessments to date, collecting on 371,460 pounds of fresh and 10,904,074 pounds of process fruit.

## Executive Director's Report:

Kevin reported that the researchers will present their findings at the next meeting. Kevin is on the search committee for Eric Hanson's position at MSU; there were 48 initial interested candidates. They hope to have it narrowed down and have the candidate start in August 2020. MBC has committed \$75,000 over 3 years to help offset the cost of the startup package to MSU for this position. Mark and Rufus are on the search committee as well. Kevin asked economist, Trey Malone to speak to the board. Trey passed out an invitation to a credit conference as well as a proposal for a survey to gain a better understanding of the end consumer (**ATTACHMENT F**).

Kevin reported the EPA decision maker's tour in July was successful. They were happy to see how blueberries are harvested by machine and loved the tour of the packing facility.

Kevin relayed that Great Lakes Expo will have a farm stress program as many growers are experiencing hardships and don't always like to ask for help.

Kevin will be sending out the call for RFPs (Request for Proposals) to the researchers. Needs to know if board ok with using the same process as last year- 3 grants at \$20,000 each.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to keep the Request for Proposal (RFP) process the same as last year- 3 at \$20,000 each with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

There are 3 seats on the MBC board due to expire on 12/31/19- Creela Hamlin, James Sumners, and Steve Hunt. The Governor gets to choose from 2 industry leaders' nominations; this year, MBG Marketing and the Hort Society submitted names (**ATTACHMENT G**). James Sumners has decided not to continue his service on the board; Creela and Steve have agreed.

**BREAK 2:35pm**

**RECONVENED 2:45pm**

Emilie Cole spoke to the MBC about the need for nematode research in blueberries as she has been contacted by growers for help with them. She was encouraged to submit an RFP.

### **Continuation of Blueberry Video conversation**

Further discussion on the blueberry videos presented earlier in the meeting and possible cost of additional editing.

**Public Comment:** John Kinahan suggested speeding up videos during sections where labels/logos are legible/visible.

**MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to have Michigan Farm Bureau's media resources explore editing options to limit exposure of specific brands during the videos under supervision of Kevin with support from Steve Hunt; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

Discussion on imports and the need to educate consumers and retailers on the state of the US blueberry market and the impact of imports on the US farmer during the domestic season.

### **Public Comments**

John Kinahan of Hanson Logistics stated he here to support the blueberry industry; Hanson receives and handles million pounds of process fruit. Hanson is committed to the industry and can offer solutions to the industry including dry storage, frozen room, CA room, setting up a tumbling line, etc.

Rex Schultz stated that a concern that needs to be explored is the pressure from abandoned farms as they are a breeding ground for pests like SWD.

### **Executive Director Contract Review with Farm Bureau**

Creela disseminated a letter (**ATTACHMENT H**) to Farm Bureau regarding Kevin's Executive Director services to be attached to his signed contract for another year.

Executive Director Kevin Robson left the room to allow Farm Bureau's Scott Piggott to discuss his performance with the board. Discussion on the Executive Director services contract.

The next meeting will be at 9:00 am on Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel located at 187 Monroe Ave NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

## **Adjournment**

**MOTION: Steve Hunt moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:25pm with support from Dennis Vander Kooi; motion carried unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hartmann/jls

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. 04/16/2019 MBC Meeting Minutes
- B. 10/15/19 MBC Meeting Agenda
- C. Great Lakes Expo Blueberry day agenda
- D. MSU current blueberry planting resources
- E. MBC Financials
- F. Invite to MI Agricultural Credit Conference & The Food Demand Survey
- G. Letters of nomination from Hort Society & MBG Marketing
- H. Letter to MFB re Executive Director
- I. Letters of support x2