

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

7373 W. Saginaw Hwy, Lansing, MI 48917 / Virtual – Microsoft TEAMS

MEETING MINUTES

March 26, 2021

PRESENT:

Kevin Robson, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dennis Vander Kooi, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Creela Hamlin, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Shelly Hartmann, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms, LLC/Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee
Cheryl Sullins, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Carly Parsley, Vice-Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Rob Bodtke, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Eric Jawor, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Rex Schultz, President, Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee
Dr. John Wise, Michigan State University Extension
Heather Throne, MDARD
Ben Smith, Michigan State Horticultural Society
Emily Fritz, MBG Marketing
Heather Thallison, Michigan Farm Bureau
Jonathan Reed, Red Pearl Sorters
Jonathan Ringlein, Maner & Costerisan

ABSENT:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Dennis Vander Kooi called the meeting to order at 9:04 am, performed a roll call, and verified the presence of a quorum.

Adoption of Agenda:

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda (**ATTACHMENT A**).

MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to adopt the agenda with a change to replace a presentation from Mindy Wise with an Executive Director report with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Meeting Minutes Approval

The Commission reviewed the minutes from January 20, 2021 (**ATTACHMENT B**).

MOTION: Eric Jawor moved to approve the January 20, 2021 meeting minutes as written with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Chair's report:

No report.

Treasurer's Report:

Shelly Hartmann gave an update on the financials (**ATTACHMENT C**).

Current balances are \$32,355.09 in our checking account and \$442,315.85 in the savings/money market account where we earn interest.

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

Secretary's Report

Rob Bodtke has assumed the Secretary position. Rob reported the Commission has collected \$203,139.34 in 2020 crop assessments representing approximately 67,976,766 pounds of blueberries. There are still 2 assessments to collect from First Handlers that we estimate to be between 6 and 8 million pounds. USHBC collected on 72 million pounds in Michigan for 2020.

MSU Positions

Kevin Robson reported he's on the search committee to find a small fruit horticulturist to replace Eric Hanson at MSU. The position is slated to start in January of 2022. They would focus on 50% research, 35% extension, and 15% teaching one class. Discussion on funding a position with MSU.

MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to approve supporting \$75,000 of the MSU horticulturist position over 3 years at \$25,000 per year with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Discussion took place on Mark Longstroth's small fruit educator position at MSU and the Hort Society's proposal of sharing the cost of the position. The position's salary is \$50,000 per

year. The Hort Society has voted to fund \$10,000 per year for 3 years. It was proposed that MBC help fund the remaining \$40,000.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to fund up to \$40,000 per year over the next 3 years for a partner funded MSU extension educator position with \$10,000 support from the Hort Society with support from Cheryl Sullins; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

BREAK: 9:52 AM

RECONVENED: 10:02 AM

Jonathan Reed, Red Pearl Sorters

Jonathan Reed of Red Pearl Sorters gave a presentation to the Commission on Red Pearl Sorters' expansion and rebranding with the addition of a fresh blueberry sorter to their repertoire of products.

Dr. John Wise, Environmental Chamber at TNRC

Dr. Wise reported he is excited about the TNRC blueberry planting and is looking forward to the growing season. He also noted the 3 season barn construction is now underway. Dr. Wise informed the Commission that the environmental growth chamber at TNRC is failing due to age and use. He secured some bids to replace it as well as refurbish; replacing seems to be the best option for longevity and economics. The Tree Fruit Commission has agreed to support some of the cost but is asking MBC to contribute as well.

MOTION: Shelly Hartmann moved to support the replacement of the environmental growth chamber at TNRC in the amount of \$10,000 with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Policies and Procedures Committee

Cheryl discussed the MBC Bylaws the Committee presented to the board at the last meeting.

MOTION: Cheryl Sullins moved to adopt the MBC Bylaws with support from Rob Bodtke; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

MDARD Update

Heather Throne reported they received 50 application for the Specialty Crop Block Grants and is awaiting funding allocation from USDA. Heather also reported additional funds from the farm bill and USDA are in the works. Heather reported they received 118 applications for Value Added grants representing \$9million in asks with only \$1million in available funds. The proposals will be discussed in May and announced in June.

Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee (MBBAC) Update

MBBAC President, Rex Schultz, provided an update on the 201 investigation results noting that we have yet to receive the final report from the ITC to understand their decision.

Rex also reported the American Blueberry Growers Alliance (ABGA) is currently being formed to advocate for the domestic growers.

Rex announced he spoke with USHBC president Kasey Cronquist who is planning a visit to Michigan to host town hall meetings with growers to review the USHBC program and its upcoming referendum.

Discussion on the roles of the USHBC/NABC/MBC/MBBAC. Rex and Jennifer put together a flyer explaining the difference between Michigan's blueberry programs (**ATTACHMENT D**). During the discussion, it was agreed upon that MBC would help the MBBAC host the grower educational town hall meetings with USHBC in lieu of penning a support letter.

Rex suggested the Commission look at the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021.

BREAK: 12:05 PM

RECONVENED: 12:45 PM

Audit Presentation, Jonathan Ringlein, Maner & Costerisan

Jonathan Ringlein of Maner & Costerisan reviewed the MBC's audit letters- a governance letter (**ATTACHMENT E**) and a management letter (**ATTACHMENT F**). One recommendation he gave was to have a checklist of transactions initialed by Executive Director and emailed monthly. Jonathan also reviewed the Audit Final Report (**ATTACHMENT G**) where he gave the Commission the highest opinion he could.

MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to accept the audit as presented with support from Eric Jawor; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Executive Director Update

Kevin Robson reported that the website company has made improvements to our website, but they are not complete yet. Kevin announced that the EPA Decision Makers Tour

will be in the thumb area of Michigan with a focus on row crops. Kevin informed the MBC that the Commission was highlighted during Ag Day in Lansing. Kevin reported that he has worked on a Specialty Crop Block Grant for \$100,000 with Rufus Isaacs regarding MRLs; won't hear until May if we are awarded the grant.

Discussion on the 2021 crop yield projections; MBBAC is facilitating the annual guesstimate for the 2021 crop.

Public Comments

Rex Schultz extended an invitation to the MBC to attend the MBBAC's monthly meetings.

Next meeting will be October 27th, 2021 at 9:00 am, currently scheduled to held at SWMREC 1791 Hillandale Rd, Benton Harbor, MI 49022.

Adjournment

MOTION: Creela Hamlin moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:20pm with support from Shelly Hartmann; motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Bodtke/jls

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 03/26/2021 MBC Meeting Agenda**
- B. 01/20/2021 MBC Meeting Minutes**
- C. MBC Financials**
- D. Flyer explaining Michigan's Blueberry Programs**
- E. Audit Governance Letter**
- F. Audit Management Letter**
- G. Audit Final Report**