

MINUTES

MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS ADVISORY BOARD

December 8, 2025

Amway Grand Plaza – Pearl Room

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Members Present

Sarah Greiner, Jordon Walsworth, Nick Oomen, Bill Schwass, Jeremy Shank, Scott Hassle, Gerrit Herrygers, and Steve Riley

Members Absent

Kevin Burmeister

Staff Present

Jamie Clover Adams, Executive Director

Joy McDevitt, Accountant & Office Administrator

See **Exhibit A** for additional attendees.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Sarah Greiner at 1:30 p.m..

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the August 6, 2025 and September 24, 2025 meetings were reviewed.

Motion: To approve the minutes as presented.

Moved by: Bill Schwass

Supported by: Scott Hassle

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Partner Reports

Fox Seeds / Ontario Asparagus Farmers – Brandon Yott

- Mr. Yott reported that the 2024 Ontario asparagus season was strong, characterized by an early harvest, favorable growing conditions, and steady retail demand.

- Grower sentiment has improved, with renewed interest in replanting acreage looking ahead to the 2026 season.
- Fox Seeds continues to advance new asparagus hybrids with a focus on improved genetics, disease resistance, heat tolerance, grade distribution, and overall grower return on investment.
- Development work is underway on tools to better evaluate grower ROI, including digital decision-support applications.

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) – Jeff Harrer

- Commodity program updates and audit compliance were reviewed.
- MAAB completed their audit with MDARD with a clean report.
- Board training opportunities and FOIA-related trends were discussed.
- Specialty Crop Block Grant funding updates were provided, including future RFP timelines.
- MAAB received a \$100,000 grant on Promoting Climate Resilience by Zack Hayden.

MSU Extension – Ben Werling / Justin Adams

- MSU Extension reported that planning for the upcoming Asparagus Day (March 6, 2026) will begin following the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market Expo.
- New MSU weed scientist, Josh Miranda, has started.
- The Board was informed of ongoing collaboration with seed companies and research partners, including a recent visit to Fox Seeds asparagus research operations.
- Upcoming MSU outreach events and opportunities for grower engagement were highlighted.

MACMA – Nick Nadai

- Processor demand remains strong, with increased domestic utilization.
- USDA inspection and grading challenges were discussed, including head count and shatter issues.
- An update was provided on efforts to amend USDA frozen asparagus standards.

Michigan Farm Bureau – Teresa Sisung

- No substantive policy changes were adopted at the annual meeting; environmental policies were reorganized for clarity.
- Staffing and internal role adjustments were reviewed, including reassignment of specialty crop responsibilities.
- USDA's Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (Stage 2) remains open through April 30 and covers losses not addressed under Stage 1. Final Stage 1 payments will be issued following closure of Stage 2.
- The Board discussed agricultural impacts associated with Michigan's deer population. Current Farm Bureau policy supports broad population management measures. Ongoing challenges include declining hunter participation and processing costs.

Audit Report – Maner Costerisan

- The Board received an unmodified audit opinion, the best we can receive.
- Page 10, financial highlights, included cash balance of \$643,591, revenues, expenditures, and fund balance increase of \$117,139.
- New accounting standards related to leases and GASB updates were discussed.
- Page 18 reflects the summary of Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) that were active in this past year.
- Page 21, Budgetary Comparison Schedule, reflects a positive variance of \$82,982.

Motion: To approve the audit as presented.

Moved by: Gerrit Herrygers

Supported by: Steve Riley

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Research Update – Robotic Asparagus Harvesting (MSU)

- The Board received an update from Dr. Yuzhen Lu from Michigan State University on progress toward development of a robotic asparagus harvesting system.
 - Project focus has shifted from primarily vision system development to integration of harvesting mechanisms, including cutting and spear collection.
 - Field and laboratory testing has demonstrated promising cutting speed and accuracy, while additional work is needed on spear capture and conveyance.
 - The research team is pursuing additional external funding to support continued development and future field testing.
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Election of Officers

- Current officers expressed willingness to continue serving.

Motion: To cast a unanimous ballot to retain the current officers.

Moved by: Gerrit Herrygers

Supported by: Steve Riley

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Officers are: Chair – Sarah Greiner; Vice-Chair – Jordon Walsworth; Secretary/Treasurer - Nick Oomen

Board Committee Appointments – MARI (Michigan Asparagus Research, Inc): Nick Oomen is willing to continue to serve.

2026 Meeting Dates

The following tentative dates were determined for the 2026 meetings:

- Tuesday, February 24 – Oceana Research Station
 - Monday, August 3 – Muskegon
 - Monday, December 7 – Grand Rapids at the Great Lakes Expo
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Financial Report

- Financial statements through November 30, 2025 were reviewed.
- Assessments, all but a couple have been collected for crop year 2025, revenues totaled \$574,831, expenses totaled \$296,150 and investment balances were discussed.
- Discussion of possible audit fee increase.

Motion: To approve the financial report as presented.

Moved by: Nick Oomen

Supported by: Bill Schwass

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Executive Director's Report – Jamie Clover Adams

- Jamie reported that USDA has notified the Board that asparagus will be included in an upcoming Pesticide Data Program (PDP) sampling cycle. Retail asparagus will be purchased and tested in the first quarter, and results are expected to provide useful insight into residue findings for imported product.
- An update was provided on the Protect Our Produce educational coalition, which continues to focus on the H-2A program. In January, coalition partners will be asked to prioritize the top three to five issues for coordinated education efforts.
- Jamie reported on ongoing new market development efforts stemming from the market feasibility study completed in August 2025 aimed at identifying additional uses and product formats for Michigan asparagus beyond traditional fresh and processed markets. Outreach to food service, private label, and consumer packaged goods contacts is ongoing, with plans to develop a more detailed work plan prior to the 2026 harvest season.

Promotion and Marketing

- The Board reviewed a summary of promotion spending over the past three seasons, noting limited activity in 2023, expanded retailer-focused promotion in 2024, and primarily grant-funded promotion in 2025.
- Discussion focused on whether to continue a grant-only approach or to supplement SCBG funds with Board-funded promotion to support key retail partners.
- Members discussed the value of maintaining a strong relationship with Michigan-based retailers, while also exploring opportunities in out-of-state markets with high-volume potential.
- Cost-sharing opportunities with retailers were discussed as a strategy to stretch limited promotion dollars and ensure retailer commitment.
- While members acknowledged that promotion return on investment can be difficult to quantify, there was consensus on the importance of consistent visibility for Michigan asparagus in the marketplace.

Motion: To authorize **\$20,000** in board-funded fresh market promotion to be used in conjunction with SCBG funds and potential retailer cost-sharing with execution by FullTilt Marketing.

Moved by: Jordon Walsworth

Supported by: Gerrit Herrygers

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

MDARD Board Training

- Jordon Walsworth reported on the MDARD board training.

Staffing and Organizational Updates

- Announcement of upcoming retirement and proposed staffing transition plan.

Motion: To approve the staffing plan and associated budget adjustments.

Moved by: Gerrit Herrygers

Supported by: Scott Hassle

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Budget Amendments

- The Executive Director presented updated budget amendments reflecting staffing changes, revised assessment revenue projections, and technology-related costs.

- Adjustments were made to align budgeted revenues and expenses with actual collections and operational needs, including contracted accounting services and additional travel and related expenses.
- The Board reviewed the amended budget and discussed short-term impacts on reserves and longer-term financial sustainability.

Motion: To approve the budget amendments as presented -- revenue of \$691,920, expenses of \$781,585, resulting in a new budgeted loss of \$89,565.

Moved by: Steve Riley

Supported by: Jordon Walsworth

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Board Discussion

- The Board engaged in additional discussion regarding long-term industry sustainability, including assessment levels, reserve balances, and the balance between promotion, research, and market development investments.
 - Members emphasized the importance of maintaining financial flexibility while continuing to invest strategically in initiatives that support grower profitability and market access.
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Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:48 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Clover Adams

Executive Director

Exhibit A – Attendees

Nick Nadai	MACMA
Jeff Haarer	MDARD
Ben Werling	MSU Extension
Theresa Sisung	Michigan Farm Bureau
Yuzhen Lu	Assistant Professor, Biosystems & Agricultural Engineering
Brandon Yott	Fox Seeds
Sarah Coulter	New Era American Asparagus
Roni Schwass	Springdale Farms
Justin Adams	West MI Research Station