

MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS ADVISORY BOARD
August 6, 2025

Muskegon Innovation Hub
200 Viridian Drive, Muskegon, MI

Members Present: Sarah Greiner, Jordon Walsworth, Bill Schwass, Gerrit Herrygers, Steve Riley

Members Absent: Nick Oomen, Kevin Burmeister, Jeremy Shank, Scott Hassle

Staff Present: Jamie Clover Adams, Executive Director; Joy McDevitt, Accountant & Office Administrator

See Exhibit A for additional attendees.

Call to Order

Chair Sarah Greiner called the meeting to order at 1:08 PM.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the March 11, 2025 meeting were reviewed.

Motion: Motion by Bill Schwass, supported by Jordon Walsworth, to approve the March 11, 2025 meeting minutes.

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Financial Report

Joy McDevitt presented the unaudited financial report. Total revenue year-to-date was \$596,152, with total expenses at \$493,606, resulting in a net income of \$102,546. Key items discussed included:

- Grants: Specialty Crop Block Grants for research (\$90,950) and marketing (\$53,539) matched related expenditures.
- Expenses: Total expenses were \$493,606. Key contract service expenses included MAA services, the Michigan Carrot Committee, and CIAB support (which ended in February).
- Net Income: Net income stands at \$102,546.
- Administrative Adjustments: Joy's hours were reduced to 30/week. Transition-related costs and rent savings were noted and documented.
- Cash Management: The current cash balance is \$643,591, with most funds held in MMAX accounts to remain under FDIC insurance thresholds.

Motion: Motion by Gerrit Herrygers, supported by Steve Riley, to accept the unaudited financial report as presented.

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Marketing Update

Sabrina Wilson from Full Tilt presented a comprehensive overview of MAAB's 2025 marketing activities funded by a Specialty Crop Block Grant:

- Retail Promotions: Conducted retail promotion with Roundy's (149 stores in Wisconsin and Illinois). Roundy's purchased 17% more Michigan asparagus year over year, demonstrating buyer commitment to local sourcing.
- Farm Tour with Influencer Zoe Kent: Content featuring Zoe generated over 6.5 million views and significantly grew the Michigan asparagus Facebook following from ~6,000 to 13,000. Zoe created organic, unpaid content—seven videos across YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.
- Digital Outreach: Three key buyer newsletters had a 28% open rate—a 9.25% increase from 2024.
- Media Coverage & Advertising: MAAB had 213 media placements with a calculated ROI of 113:1.
- Recipe Development: Recipes developed by Ashley Wecker had strong social media engagement; top post was the Summer Veggie Flatbread with 737 engagements.
- Influencer Collaborations: Collaborations with influencers like Blake Martin of @WhiskeyBeartheLab and Ayat Sleymann of @Momnutritionist which promoted Michigan asparagus recipes and garnered more than 5000 total engagements.

The Board discussed the effectiveness of influencer campaigns and expressed satisfaction with the reach and impact of this year's promotions.

Partner Reports

MACMA Asparagus – Nick Nadai

Nick reported positive demand for processing asparagus. USDA reported 8.2 million pounds for Michigan, though he estimates actual tonnage closer to 8.5 million. Highlights:

- All processors met their contract obligations, with late-season coordination needed to fulfill Honee Bear's USDA order.
- USDA Spec Update: MACMA proposed a headcount specification revision from 18 to 15, with subsample thresholds changing from 10% to 8%. USDA consideration is moving forward.
- Inspection Issues: USDA is reviewing MACMA's request to shift point-of-inspection protocols to avoid misrepresentative sampling.

MSU Extension Report – Ben Werling

Ben Werling shared several research and outreach updates via email:

- A "Farming for the Future" Field Day will be held on August 21 at the Research Farm. There will be presentations on asparagus storage research, progress on mechanical harvester research, and results from irrigation trials.
- The Oceana Research Tour is scheduled for September 5 and will include a lunch with the new weed specialist, pending visa clearance. Josh, originally from Oregon, has relocated to Michigan and is expected to begin soon.
- Dr. Zofia Szendrei is seeking asparagus fields with heavy beetle infestations to test a new pest management product.
- The 2026 International Asparagus Symposium will be held in South Korea.

MDARD – Jodi Gruner

Jodi provided updates on funding and grant programs:

- Specialty Crop Block Grant: State plan was submitted July 7.
- RFSI Grant: 19 equipment grants were resubmitted after USDA questions; still in review.
- Value-Added Grants: Under review; awards expected in September.
- Wastewater Infrastructure Fund: 23 companies approved, including Arbore Farms. Permit delays continue due to regulatory challenges.
- Future Grants: Rural Development Fund grants will reopen in late September or early October.

Executive Director's Report – Jamie Clover Adams

Jamie provided updates on multiple initiatives.

Market Feasibility Study Update

Jamie updated the Board on the \$66,000 SCBG-funded feasibility study conducted by Circana. The study identified top market opportunities for asparagus in categories such as dog food, supplements, and ready-to-eat refrigerated foods. Jamie proposed:

- Hosting a virtual meeting on September 24 at 8:00 AM to review Circana's findings.
- Developing an RFP process to offer funds to companies interested in R&D/product development using asparagus.

Board members Steve Riley and Jordon Walsworth expressed support for Circana's out-of-the-box thinking and extensive market research.

Research Farm Engagement

Jamie discussed the need for more active MAAB board participation on the asparagus research farm board to help surface and prioritize grower-driven research needs. She proposed:

- Expanding the research farm board temporarily.
- Coordinating the farm board meeting with the MAAB March meeting.

Steve Riley noted interest in research around secondary stand die-off and the need for easier access to MSU experts when field issues arise.

Project GREEN Priorities

The Board reviewed and reaffirmed existing Project GREEN research priorities. Additional input was provided on:

- Including new chemistry evaluations for weed control.
- Exploring long-term stand health and replant disease issues.

Continuing MOU with Michigan Carrot Committee

Jamie requested Board approval to continue MAAB's services to the Michigan Carrot Committee under the existing \$7,500 MOU.

Motion: Motion by Bill Schwass, supported by Steve Riley, to approve continuation of the MOU with the Michigan Carrot Committee for \$7,500.

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Asparagus Buyer Education Video

In response to Board input during the March meeting, Jamie proposed creating a short video to educate retail and processed product buyers about asparagus supply chain realities. With AI and existing assets, she estimates it can be produced for ~\$250. The Board voiced support for moving forward with development.

Protect Our Produce Coalition Update

Jamie highlighted continued AEWR-related work:

- Biweekly calls with coalition members.
- Social media content and digital storytelling.
- Collaboration with MSU and Dr. Blake Brown to model AEWR's economic impacts.
- Additional grower interviews and Farm Bureau videos to humanize the data.

Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Sarah Greiner adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Clover Adams
Executive Director

Exhibit A - Attendees

Nick Nadai	MACMA
Jodi Gruner	MDARD
Rachel Poulin	New Era's American Asparagus