

MINUTES

MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS ADVISORY BOARD February 24, 2026 West Central Michigan Research Station Hart, Michigan

Members Present

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

Members Absent

None

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 1:00 pm.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the December 8, 2025 meeting were reviewed.

Motion: To approve the minutes as presented.

Moved by: Gerrit Herrygers

Supported by: Bill Schwass

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

Financial Report

Financial statements through January 31, 2026 were reviewed.

- Assessment collections are substantially complete for the fiscal year.
- Revenues total \$583,520, with \$339,065 in expenses to date.
- Net income currently stands at \$244,455, still projecting an annual loss of (\$89,665), consistent with the approved budget.
- Cash balances are currently near the annual high following assessment collections and are expected to decline as seasonal expenses are incurred.
- Administrative expenses remain below budget due to timing of payroll processing and insurance transitions.
- Audit expenses have been paid, and future accounting support will include additional bookkeeping services beginning later in the fiscal year.

No additional questions were raised by the Board.

Partner Reports

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

Mr. Haarer provided updates on MDARD activities affecting commodity groups.

- MDARD continues working with the Michigan wine grape industry on possible formation of a new commodity program.
- Commodity program oversight reviews are nearing completion for the year.
- Recent FOIA requests appear to be automated requests for purchase order information; MDARD encouraged boards to notify the department if similar requests are received.
- The Governor's office is working to process upcoming commodity board appointments.
- A recent bovine tuberculosis case was reported in Charlevoix County and remains under investigation.

Budget and grant updates included:

- Agriculture Development Fund grant applications are currently under review with announcements expected in April.
 - The Specialty Crop Block Grant application review process is underway.
 - The Underserved, Value-Added, Food Systems, and Supply Chain Fund will open February 26 with applications due April 16.
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Executive Director's Report – Jamie Clover Adams

Retail Promotion

Discussions continue with several retailers regarding promotion of Michigan asparagus during the upcoming season. Conversations include both Michigan retailers and potential Southeast market partners capable of handling larger volumes.

Staffing Update

The Executive Director reported on recruitment for the Program and Communications Coordinator position.

- More than 90 applications were received.
- Thirteen candidates were interviewed in the first round.
- Four candidates were invited for second-round interviews, with three completing in-person interviews.

Candidates completed writing exercises including briefing documents, social media posts, and grower communications. Final hiring timing may depend on candidate availability.

National Restaurant Association Show

MAAB will again participate in the National Restaurant Association Show May 16-19 in Chicago as part of the Michigan Pavilion. Samples will highlight Michigan asparagus and provide information to chefs and restaurant buyers regarding distributor availability.

Celebrating Michigan Agriculture

MAAB will participate in the Celebrate Michigan Agriculture Day at the Capitol on March 17 with an informational display and participation in a panel discussion highlighting Michigan agriculture and its role in the State's culture and economy.

National Council of Agricultural Employers Conference

Jamie and Jordon Walsworth attended the NCAE conference where discussion focused on the H-2A program and recent AEWR rule changes. Early data presented by the U.S. Department of Labor suggests the new wage calculation has reduced average wages by approximately \$2 per hour nationally. Participants reported that employers are generally using the new rate as a floor and using the flexibility in the rule to set wage rates at levels that fit their farming operations. Additional discussion addressed visa processing delays, increased scrutiny of worker petitions, and pending litigation challenging the rule change.

Emerging Issues and Initiatives

2026 Assessment Rate

The Board reviewed the 10-year financial forecast and reserve balances. Discussion focused on maintaining adequate reserves while continuing investments in promotion, research, and market development.

Motion: To maintain the current assessment rate of \$.015 per pound.

Moved by: Scott Hassle

Supported by: Bill Schwass

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Budget Amendment

The Executive Director presented a minor budget amendment reflecting employer payroll taxes that had not previously been billed by the payroll provider. The adjustment increases payroll expenses by \$10,000.

Motion: To approve the budget amendment as presented.

Moved by: Jordon Walsworth

Supported by: Gerrit Herrygers

Vote: All ayes, motion carried.

Board Discussion

Robotic Harvesting Research

The Board discussed ongoing Michigan State University research into robotic asparagus harvesting. Current work focuses on development of vision systems to identify spears and integration with mechanical cutting and collection systems. The research team has applied for additional USDA NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture) funding to continue development.

Members discussed monitoring other international research efforts and inviting researchers to observe Michigan harvest conditions.

New Product Development

The Executive Director reported continued outreach to companies exploring value-added asparagus products. Efforts include working with food developers and chefs to test ingredients such as asparagus powder in new food applications.

Other Business

Board members were reminded that hotel reservations are now available for the 2026 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market Expo at the Amway Grand Plaza conference rate.

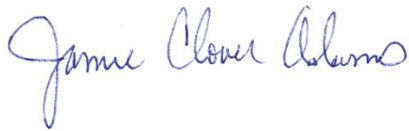
Public Comment

No additional public comments were offered.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Jamie Clover Adams
Executive Director

Exhibit A - Attendees

Name	Representing
Jeff Haarer	MDARD