

MINUTES-Corrected and Approved
MICHIGAN ASPARGUS ADVISORY BOARD
March 8, 2022

West Central MI Hort Research Center
5185 N Oceana Dr
Hart, Michigan

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sarah Greiner, Kevin Burmeister John Williams, Dwight Fuehring, Jordon Walsworth, Kyle Weber, Bill Schwass

MEMBERS ABSENT: Nick Oomen and Scott Hassle

OTHERS PRESENT: Jamie Clover Adams – Executive Director, Joy McDevitt – Accountant/Office Manager Norm Myers-MACMA, Nick Nadai-MACMA, Jodi Gruner-MDARD, Bridget Silvernail-MI Farm Bureau, Alexis Bradow and guest – grower, Chris Ritchie – MI Freeze Pack, Caleb Coulter-grower

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman, Dwight Fuehring called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

Dwight turned the meeting over to Jamie to run the Officer elections and address appointments

2. ORGANIZATIONAL

a.) Election of Officers:

Jamie Clover Adams addressed the Election of Officers. Current officers are:

- Dwight Fuehring – Chairman
- Jordon Walsworth – Vice Chairman
- Sarah Greiner – Secretary/Treasurer

Motion No. 1 Motion by Sarah Greiner, supported by Bill Schwass to keep the current slate of officers the same. Voice vote conducted. Unanimous, motion carried.

b.) Check Signers:

It was noted there is no change in check signers; they remain: Sarah Greiner, Jamie Clover Adams and Dwight Fuehring.

c.) Committee Assignments:

Jamie explained that MAAB is still part of the National Asparagus Council (NAC). She has been in contact with the Washington Executive Director, Alan Schreiber, they have signed letters of support over the year on current topics. MAAB has 2 representatives to the NAC. In the past it has been John Bakker and Tom Oomen. She will take John's place and will need a replacement for Tom Oomen. The Board suggested Dwight Fuehring, since Tom was previously the MAAB chair and Dwight is the current chair.

3. MINUTES

The minutes from the last meeting of 12-6-2021 were sent to the Board for review prior to the meeting.

Motion Motion by Bill Schwass supported by Kyle Weber to accept the minutes as presented.
No. 2 All Ayes, motion passed.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT

Joy McDevitt reviewed the January 31, 2021, preliminary financial statements, reporting income currently at \$474,241.04 and expenses to date of \$296,010.05 resulting in a positive net margin of \$178,230.99 for the first seven months of the fiscal year. We are anticipating a loss for the year of \$33,100 as budgeted.

Motion Motion by Jordon Walsworth supported by Bill Schwass to accept the
No. 3 January 31, 2022, financial statements as reported. All ayes, motion passed.

Jamie addressed outstanding assessments. She reported there were 5 late assessments; most are delayed due to forgetting and they have sent their checks in quickly after a reminder; however, there is currently one habitually late grower she is following up on. She is asking the Board's approval to turn him over to MDARD. She believes he sells directly to grocery stores, since he doesn't come across on a processor or handler's list. It was noted he has received 2 certified letters.

She also brought up another potential collection. She had been approached by a small upscale grocery store chain interested in using our promotion information, but the grower they named isn't part of our collection. She is proposing sending letters to the local grocers to inform them of their responsibility as a "first processor" to remit MAAB assessments for both of these scenarios.

The Board agreed with turning the delinquent grower over to MDARD as well as letters to groceries.

5. PARTNER REPORTS

MSUE REPORT

Ben Werling was unable to attend today's meeting. We will see him later in the week at Oceana Asparagus Day.

MACMA ASPARAGUS REPORT

Norm Myers stated his plans for his "second" retirement effective 6-30-22 and Nick Nadai will be taking over his duties. He continued that MACMA has set the price, terms and grades for processed; he still has two more processors to sign.

Norm said he and Dawn Drake have been working on an USDA Bonus Buy and continued that there is also a Building Back Better program for USDA, which they have already been approved for. They have asked for \$5 million from each program and hope to know more by Oceana Asparagus Day. Norm reminded the Board the annual MACMA-asparagus meeting will follow Oceana Asparagus Day meeting for all MACMA (asparagus) growers and processors.

Norm reported that he and Jamie wrote a joint letter to Meijer frozen and canned food buyers. It was an outreach to let them know of our processed products in addition to the fresh Michigan product they carry. A similar letter will be sent to Spartan Nash.

Nick Nadai greeted the group, but stated he had nothing to add.

MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU

Bridget Silvernail, Manager over 6 counties, filled in for Theresa Sisung. She commented the latest State of Michigan budget has extra COVID money available for agriculture; \$30 million in grant money. She stated John Kran is currently in D.C. addressing border policy and the latest vaccination protocol. MFB is in favor of Senate bill 697 awaiting consideration at the whole Senate level, Beginning Farmer Tax Credit; as well as House Bill 5700 "Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act". Federal Immigration and labor, MFB is opposing

3 different proposals: proposal by OSHA to address heat related illness, an increase in H2A Visa fees, and the rule to use the gross average wage for field and livestock workers combined.

Jamie commented she was able to share information on the federal vaccine requirements for H2A workers with Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin and the fact that the ag workers coming from Mexico don't have a choice on which vaccine they receive and so could be vaccinated with one the U.S. doesn't accept which stops them from legally entering the country.

MDARD REPORT

Jodi Gruner filled in for Heather Throne. Jodi gave an update on grants.

Specialty Crop Block Grants – 2022 applications just closed, they received 45 applications requesting over \$4 million in funds. They anticipate approximately \$2.1 in traditional funds from the Farm Bill and approximately another \$1.2 million available from COVID funds. MDARD will be sending recommended grants to the USDA in May 2021.

Rural Development Grants – These awards were just announced; there was one awarded in Oceana County, Golden Stock Farms for an asparagus hydro cooler.

Value Added Grants – Applications are due March 24, 2022. These are available to both growers and processors as long as there is value added to the raw product. The max is \$125,000 with a 30% match.

Jodi stated the Governor recently established the Office of Rural Development within MDARD with a goal of focusing on rural communities, not just agricultural problems. The question came up as to who the head of this office will report to, Jodi replied "the Governor".

6. REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Grower survey update

57 surveys have been returned (37.5%). Jamie will mention the survey at Oceana Asparagus Day to see if we can collect more. The information obtained has been helpful in locating specific issues growers are dealing with as well as notifying at the last minute – as was the case when Steve Saunders was in town for the robotic harvesting presentation.

Processed Asparagus Promotion

We have two Influencers using processed asparagus to come up with new recipes. The first one used pickled asparagus to make the traditional ham/cream cheese/pickled asparagus with a new twist...using prosciutto and calling it Midwest Sushi. The next Influencer will be using frozen asparagus in a recipe. This is a chance to get people thinking of Michigan asparagus as well as to promote processed asparagus.

Full Tilt Marketing– 2022 Program

Full Tilt has begun work on the second year of the \$125,000 SCBG focused on marketing asparagus. They will continue using social media and the giveaways. They will be looking for a new retailer to promote during the two week period when supply is greatest.

Asparagus Buyer's Mission

Jamie is working with MDARD on a mini-grant for \$10,000 to host a buyer's event (plus the \$2,500 already in the budget). This would entail inviting 10-20 buyers (hoping to get at least 10) from retail stores to come to Michigan; take them to the Hart area to observe picking, a packing shed in action and then a tour of a processor. Then at the end of the day have a "Michigan made" meal prepared for them by a chef, using Michigan asparagus, cooked multiple ways, as well as other Michigan produce/food items if we can get cooperation from other commodity groups – potato, pork etc. This is slated to be the week before Memorial Day weekend. She will need the Board's help identifying the contacts.

FY 22 SCBG

There are two grants that have been submitted for the 2022 year:

- Asparagus Promotion – focusing on online purchases as data shows online purchase levels remain steady as COVID recedes.
- Zsofia Szendrei – further work on asparagus beetle, their overwintering, and how to reduce their numbers.

Jamie pointed out that as part of the survey we asked if they sold directly to the public; she is proposing to offer a recipe card with MAAB information and a QR code to access additional recipes. Printing/design would be about \$300 for 2,000.

7. ASPARAGUS FARM REPORT

John gave some history as to the origins of the research farm and his role; starting in 1980 when he was a crop consultant and a group of growers bought 4 acres to begin a research farm. In 1983 he became the farm manager, paid as an independent contractor and has done it ever since. In 2002, he became the Executive Director of the MAAB and still managed the Research farm. When the tree fruit growers bought land next to the Asparagus Research Farm and he retired from MAAB, he became the hired Interim Manager of the West Michigan Research Station (WMRS). With his retirement as MAAB Executive Director in 2021, he has gone back to solely being the Farm Manager on a contract basis, along with sales of asparagus seed. He anticipates ending his employment in 2022 as WMRS Interim Farm Manager but to be available thru 2023 for transitioning. His MSU employment ends Feb 2023. As part of this transition, MSU is posting this position, (WMRS Manager) to start around October 1, 2022. His plan would be to stay at the Asparagus Research Farm thru 2023 to help transition for a harvest season.

He updated on the sorting machine, which was purchased in August 2019, with a MDARD Rural Development Grant. The intent was to be up and running for 2020 harvest season, until COVID hit – which kept the engineer from the Netherlands from coming here to fine tune it. John feels it's working well but could use some improvement in the camera area; he is hoping someone will come from the Netherlands this spring.

John stated he planted a new variety trial in 2021. John explained that the University of Guelph (the origin of Millenium and Eclipse) have spun off the seed business to Fox Seeds. Fox has hired a plant breeder to continue the development of future varieties.

8. EMERGING ISSUES

At the December meeting Jamie discussed the possibility of having Michigan asparagus identified in some way to set it apart from the competition. MSU bid \$55,000 to conduct nutrient testing which is cost prohibitive. She had further discussions with the researcher on conducting a screen to see what can be learned for about \$2000. Norm Myers mentioned that Ontario had done something like this before. Jamie continued, if something came out of this screening, there is leftover MDARD grant money to further develop this idea.

Jamie shared that she has had discussions with MSU about updating the 2016 Asparagus Cost of Production Bulletin from 2022 season data. She will bring a budget item to the July meeting.

Jamie recommended that MAAB join the National Council of Ag Employers for \$1,825 per year; this is the only national group whose focus is on agriculture labor from the grower perspective. The Board was in favor of trying it for a year.

9. SET 2021 ASSESSMENT RATE

After discussion from the Board regarding budget and reserve funds being at 94% of the annual expense, it was determined to keep the rate the same as last year.

Motion No. 4 Motion by Sarah Greiner supported by Bill Schwass to keep the assessment rate at .015/lb. No further discussion, All Ayes, motion carried.

10. CONSIDER MAAB FY 21-22 BUDGET AMENDMENTS (IF NEEDED)

No budget amendments necessary at this time.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

Jamie stated she had sent out a request for information to a group of growers and board members to gather pertinent information such as how wide the rows are, how many crowns, etc. for Robotics Plus. Coincidentally, at the Ontario Asparagus growers meeting on March 11, 2022, the day after the Oceana Asparagus Day meeting, there will be a presentation by another company developing a mechanical asparagus harvester.

Joy McDevitt reminded the Board to make their reservations for the 2022 Great Lakes Expo. There is a sheet in the packet with information and rates. Also, a reminder that your room reimbursement will be based on the Amway show rate since it is the headquarter hotel.

Other miscellaneous comments

- The Buyer's mission is a great idea.
- Board appreciates Jamies communication updates and good ideas to them.
- Chris Ritchie commented on the USDA updated specifications on the Bonus Buy. Norm pointed out that these are not permanent changes and that each year we will need to request these changes.
- Alexis Bradow commented on how people ask for information on how to freeze and can asparagus. Jamie shared that MSU has a website that addresses this; she will try to put this together.

Chairman Dwight Fuehring asked if there was any further business, hearing none:

Motion Motion made by Sarah Greiner supported by Kyle Weber
No. 5 to adjourn the meeting. All Ayes, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Clover Adams
Executive Director