

MINUTES  
MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS ADVISORY BOARD  
March 11, 2025

Oceana County Services Offices  
844 S. Griswold Street  
Hart, Michigan

Members Present: Sarah Greiner, Jordon Walsworth, Nick Oomen, Bill Schwass, Steve Riley,  
Scott Hassle

Members Absent: Kyle Weber and Kevin Burmeister

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

See Exhibit A for additional attendees.

**Call to Order**

Chair Sarah Greiner called the meeting to order at 10:16 AM.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the December 9, 2024, meeting were reviewed.

**Motion:** Motion by Bill Schwass, supported by Nick Oomen, to approve December 9, 2024,  
meeting minutes.

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

**Election of Officers**

Due to delays in appointments from the Governor's office, the election of officers was postponed from the December meeting. Executive Director Jamie Clover Adams provided an update on the nomination process and suggested retaining the current Officers -- Sarah Greiner as Chair, Jordon Walsworth as Vice Chair, Nick Oomen as Secretary/ Treasurer -- until appointments are finalized.

**Motion:** Motion by Scott Hassle, supported by Bill Schwass, to retain the current officers.

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

It was noted that check signers will be Jamie Clover Adams, Sarah Greiner and Nick Oomen.

**Financial Report**

Joy McDevitt reviewed the financial statements through February 28, 2025. Key highlights included:

- Assessments totaled \$413,078.79. Total revenue is \$515,414.52.
- Interest income remains strong despite declining rates, and financial accounts are being actively managed to maximize earnings.
- Total expenses are currently \$273,605.81 but will increase with seasonal promotion activities and end of year billing.
- Expenses for office relocation were within budget, and it was noted that our ongoing monthly expenses will be less than our previous rental arrangement.

**Motion:** Motion by Scott Hassle, supported by Bill Schwass, to accept the financial report as presented.

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

## **Partner Reports**

### **MACMA Asparagus – Nick Nadai**

Nick Nadai provided an update on the USDA Section 32 purchase request:

- A \$5 million request was submitted for frozen and canned asparagus, an increase from last year's \$4 million request.
- The request included revised delivery timelines to better align with industry needs.
- Challenges with USDA processing specifications were addressed, including head count and cutting standards.
- A letter was submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture to expedite the request process.
- The USDA approval process remains slow, causing concerns because of the perishable nature of asparagus.

### **Michigan Farm Bureau – Theresa Sisung**

Theresa Sisung summarized legislative and policy updates:

- The state budget process is ongoing, with potential impacts on agricultural programs.
- Key Farm Bureau priorities include:
  - Ag Climate Resiliency Program
  - Pesticide and fertilizer fee reauthorization
  - Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding
  - Cottage food law updates
  - Alternative energy zoning legislation
- Changes to the Earned Sick Time law were outlined, including compliance deadlines and exemptions for small businesses.
- Farm labor remains a top priority, with ongoing efforts to address H-2A wage rate increases.

### **MDARD – Jeff Haarer**

Jeff Haarer reported on grant funding challenges and state-level budget uncertainties:

- Specialty Crop Block Grant funds remain in flux due to federal funding concerns.
- Alternative funding sources are being explored to mitigate potential shortfalls.
- Updates were provided on Rural Development Fund grants and Specialty Crop Block Grants.
- Board appointments remain under review, with no immediate resolution.
- Board training is being planned for later in the year, covering Open Meetings Act, FOIA, and grant management.

### **Executive Director's Report – Jamie Clover Adams**

Jamie provided updates on multiple initiatives:

1. **Promotional Grant Program**
  - Two grant applications were received and will be evaluated by marketing consultant Full Tilt.
  - The Board agreed to delegate evaluation authority to Full Tilt.
2. **Marketing & Communications Strategy**

- Jamie proposed a \$10,000 professional development initiative with consultant Nate Birt to enhance industry storytelling, media outreach, and use of AI-powered tools.
- Funds were reallocated within the budget to accommodate this expenditure.
- 3. **National Restaurant Association Show**
  - Jamie will represent Michigan Asparagus at the show, featuring fresh asparagus samples.
  - Plans include improving attendee tracking and leveraging chef demonstrations.
- 4. **Trade & Policy Advocacy**
  - Comments are being submitted to the U.S. Trade Representative regarding the impact of Peruvian imports on the U.S. asparagus industry.
  - The University of Georgia's import impact study data were incorporated into the submission to underscore the negative impact on the industry.
- 5. **Record Retention Policy Update**
  - Updates were made to ensure long-term retention of critical financial and operational documents.

**Motion:** Motion by Jordon Walsworth, supported by Nick Oomen, to approve the updated Record Retention Policy.

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

### **Board Discussion**

The Board engaged in a discussion regarding potential restructuring of industry organizations, including:

- Improve alignment between research and industry needs by increasing the involvement of MAAB board members with the priority setting of the Michigan Asparagus Research Farm.
- Streamlining board responsibilities to reduce redundancy while ensuring stakeholder representation.
- Encouraging increased grower engagement in research priority-setting.

No formal action was taken, but the Board agreed to revisit the topic in the August meeting.

### **Assessment Rate for 2025**

**Motion:** Motion by Jordon Walsworth, supported by Bill Schwass, to maintain the 2025 assessment rate at \$0.015 per pound.

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

### **Budget Amendments**

Jamie presented budget amendments to:

- Reallocate discretionary funds and payroll savings.
- Increase fresh promotion funding by \$30,000.

**Motion:** Motion by Steve Riley, supported by Scott Hassle, to approve the budget amendments as presented, including the additional \$30,000 for asparagus new market grants. Expenses will total \$564,112 and net loss will be \$(79,565.)

**Vote:** All ayes, motion carried.

### **Board Discussion – New Product Development & Processor Challenges**

The Board engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the challenges facing Michigan's asparagus processors and the opportunities in new product development. Key points included:

- **Market Differentiation & Product Innovation:** Steve Riley emphasized the need to explore new products beyond traditional fresh and frozen asparagus to better position the industry in the marketplace. He suggested looking at innovative asparagus-based products such as snack items or pre-prepared asparagus-based dishes to drive consumer interest.
- **Shifting Market Dynamics:** Jordon Walsworth noted that while fresh Michigan asparagus initially stood out, it is increasingly blending into the broader commodity market. He raised concerns about the industry's ability to maintain premium pricing and differentiation. He suggested identifying a segment of the crop that could be uniquely marketed to retain higher value.
- **Processing and Storage Challenges:** Nick Oomen highlighted the difficulties in keeping up with evolving processing trends. He noted that frozen and canned asparagus have faced shifting consumer preferences and that industry players need to remain ahead of these changes. He pointed out that major frozen food companies are sourcing asparagus from Mexico and Peru, which complicates efforts to grow domestic market share.
- **Retail & Buyer Education:** The Board discussed ongoing struggles in ensuring consistent buyer education. There are frequent turnover and knowledge gaps among frozen and canned product buyers, leading to under-ordering and supply chain disruptions. Nick Oomen shared an example of frozen asparagus being out of stock at retailers due to a miscalculation by a new buyer who underestimated demand.
- **Expanding Storage & Distribution Capacity:** The discussion also touched on the feasibility of increasing storage capacity to reduce reliance on immediate fresh sales. Steve Riley suggested that a storable asparagus product could help manage seasonal fluctuations and provide greater stability to processors and growers.
- **Tariff & Import Competition:** The potential impact of tariffs on imported asparagus was discussed, with the possibility of trade policy shifts that could influence domestic market opportunities. While higher tariffs on Peruvian and Mexican asparagus could boost domestic processing, the unpredictability of such measures makes long-term planning difficult.

The Board concluded that further investigation is needed into potential new product development, including seeking insights from marketing firms like Full Tilt and exploring new product options.

### **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Chair Sarah Greiner adjourned the meeting at 11:49 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Clover Adams  
Executive Director

Exhibit A - Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Nick Nadai – via phone	MACMA
Theresa Sisung	Michigan Farm Bureau
Jeff Haarer	MDARD
Alexis Bradow	LaBranz Asparagus Farms
Jim Adams	LaBranz Asparagus Farms
Rachel Poulin	New Era's American Asparagus
Jeremy Shank	Central Produce Sales