

# MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Trevor Nichols Research Center  
6237 124<sup>th</sup> Ave, Fennville, Mi 49408

## MEETING MINUTES

January 09, 2024

### PRESENT:

Nancy Nyquist, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Creela Hamlin, Vice Chair, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Carly Parsley, Treasurer, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Rob Bodtke, Secretary, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Eric Jawor, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Jason Thomas, Michigan Blueberry Commission (Remote)  
Dave Reenders, Michigan Blueberry Commission (Remote)  
Becky Hotovy, Michigan Blueberry Commission  
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms/MBC Assistant Treasurer (Remote)  
Shelly Hartmann, True Blue Farms/MBC Assistant Treasurer (Remote)  
Matt Smego, Michigan Farm Bureau (remote)  
Cheyanne Sloan, MSU Extension  
Carlos Garcia, MSU Extension  
Ron Bates, MSU Extension (Remote)  
James Avril, MSU Extension (Remote)  
Eliza Spitzer, MBG  
Brody Schropp, MBG

### ABSENT:

### Call to Order

Vice Chairman Creela Hamlin called the meeting to order at 9:38 am, performed a roll call, and verified the presence of a quorum.

### Adoption of Agenda

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda (**ATTACHMENT A**).

**MOTION: Eric moved to adopt the agenda as amended with support from Carly; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### Election of Officers and Committee Assignments

1. The recommended slate is: Chair- Rob Bodtke, Vice Chair- Creela Hamlin, Treasurer- Carly Parsley, and Secretary- Becky Hotovy

**MOTION: Eric moved to have Rob Bodtke serve as chair, Creela Hamlin as Vice-Chair, Carly Parsley as Treasurer, and Becky Hotovy as Secretary with support from Carly; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **Meeting Minutes Approval**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from December 04, 2023 meeting (**ATTACHMENT B**). There was discussion about the 2023 budget amendment in regards to the reception of 2023 crop income. It was settled that it was discussed but not amended, the minutes have been adjusted to reflect this.

**MOTION: Creela moved to approve the December 04, 2023 meeting minutes as amended with support from Becky ; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **Reports of Committee or Officers:**

#### **Chair's report:**

1. Rob thanked everyone for the opportunity to lead this group. He is concerned about the upcoming "Polar Vortex" coming over the next few weeks and how similar historical events have negatively impacted the crops. Rob reports that he was encouraged by the research proposals that we received. I think with the monetary reserves that we have we need to look into more/alternative ways to benefit the Michigan Blueberry Industry.

#### **Treasurer's Report:**

1. Carly presented current financial statements. (**ATTACHMENT C**) The group covered the current balance sheet, 2023 Profit and Loss Statement, 2024 Profit and Loss Statement, and the 2024 Budget.

**MOTION: Eric moves that we approve the 2024 Budget as presented with support from Creela; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.**

**MOTION: Eric moves that we approve the January 09, 2024 Treasurers report with support from Creela; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.**

#### **Secretary's Report:**

We have received most of the 2023 first handler reports with two large operations still outstanding. Nancy is working to get them to report and pay. We currently have a reported 2023 crop of 73,214,064 lbs (54% fresh/46% process). We have collected \$218,882.54 and have requests for \$624.35 in reimbursements. There were 7 growers removed this year from our list, it was a mix of consolidation of businesses, sale of farms, and removal of plants. I am still estimating a crop between 78-80 million based on remaining first handlers.

**MOTION: Creela moves that we approve the secretaries report with support from Carly; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **Research Committee Report**

1. Creela spoke about their recent meeting at TNRC.
  - a. After Eric and Creela met with Kyle who is responsible for horticultural management of the TNRC blueberry plot. They have established a field management plan for the upcoming season. Cheyenne will also be involved in making sure the plan is followed for the season.
2. Tim and Rufus gave the research committee an update on current chemistries in question for safety
  - a. Ziram
    - i. Comment period opens in March
    - ii. They are considering removing its registration?
  - b. Bravo
    - i. Comment period is currently open. Tim is working with different groups assisting with the formation of their comments.
    - ii. The EPA is recommending the application be reduced to a half rate.
  - c. Upcoming reviews will include Malathion and Imidan
3. Since we have not researched Gall Wasps in a few years and did not have any projects again this year Creela will work with Rufus to try and create an alternative project to be completed this year. The goal is to have a recommended spray program to target Gall Wasp and create data on new varieties and their susceptibility.

**Break at 11am for 10 minutes**

### **Michigan Farm Bureau Contract Review- Matt Smego**

1. Nancy stepped out of the meeting for the group to discuss her performance and position as Director of MBC with Matt Smego, the representative of Michigan Farm Bureau.
2. Matt spoke on behalf of MFB and appreciates our relationship and looks forward to continuing it.

**MOTION: Eric moves that we approve the 2024 MBC/MFB Executive Director contract as presented with support from Becky. Motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

### **MBBAC Update**

1. Jennifer informed the group of the upcoming meeting on January 24<sup>th</sup> via Zoom.

### **MDARD Update**

1. No one in attendance from MDARD

## **MSU/MSUE Update**

- 1. Ron Bates (due to time constraints moved after approval of previous minutes)**
  - a. With John Wise retiring, Dr. Mary Hosebeak will be transitioning into his leadership position on IR4 with assistance from Rufus and Dr. Julia Wilson.
  - b. MSU has a new President starting in the next few months: Kevin Guskiewicz from UNC Chapel Hill.
  - c. Introduced us to Dr. James Avril
- 2. Dr James Avril (After Ron Bates)**
  - a. Assistant Director of Ag Bio Research
    - i. All the research farms are his responsibility
  - b. TNRC and SWMREC
    - i. They are currently evaluating the Faculty and Center management
    - ii. They are currently working on finding Faculty Coordinator replacement for both facilities and hope to have them filled by the end of the year.
- 3. Cheyenne Sloan (After MBBAC Update)**
  - a. 2024 Blueberry Events scheduled
    - i. Season Kickoff including pruning workshop, March 6 at TNRC; Pollination workshop at Brookside farms, Beginning of April; Irrigation workshop, Beginning of May; Preharvest meeting, June 5<sup>th</sup>; Blueberry field day Location TBD, September 4<sup>th</sup>
  - b. Southwest Hort days coming up on February 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>
    - i. Blueberries are on the 8<sup>th</sup>
  - c. Cheyenne has been selected to join the Climate Analogs Academy
    - i. Goal is to study how specialty crops in Michigan will be impacted by climate in the next 30 years and prepare information for farmers to assist their farms in the transition.
- 4. Carlos Garcia-Salazar**
  - a. Continuation of Trichogramma research
  - b. Training for Spanish speaking pesticide applicators in March
  - c. Upcoming trainings for application of Trichogramma and BT are currently in development

**Break for lunch at 11:40 am until 12:30 pm**

## **Executive Director Report**

1. Working with Lawyer to collect on past assessments
2. Writing letters of support for Project GREEN projects
3. Nancy will be an SCRI grant reviewer this year
4. SEEDS grant process is currently open
5. IPM Alliance will be meeting to schedule 2024 tour
6. Nancy is heading to Salt Lake City, UT for AFB meetings
7. She will be attending USHBC meetings in Arizona at the end of February.

8. Engaging Zach Rutledge, labor economist at MSU to evaluate the NASS Farm Labor Survey to see if we can figure out why the AEWL started increasing at a substantially higher rate than wages in the rest of the economy in about 2016-17. Also, have him provide ideas on how to fix it and if there is another data set to establish the AEWL. We allude to this problem quite a bit, but we don't have any specific analysis to back up our observations/hunches. My request to Zach is attached. The cost is \$15,000. I'm looking for \$1700 per organization
  - a. There was discussion of who else is requested to fund this project.

**MOTION: Creela moves that we support the Rutledge AEWL study with \$1,700 with support from Becky; Motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

9. Letter petitioning US DOL to reexamine the way the AEWL is established given the current challenges our growers face. This is filled under 5 USC 553 which is the general statute on federal rulemaking. The National Council of Ag Employers has also filed a petition as well as other NCAE members. I think it will send a strong message for Michigan. I want to include names along with the organization like we did on the press release in November. The draft letter is attached for your review.
  - a. There was discussion about if we are even allowed to support this. The group as individuals supports this but we are unsure if MBC can. Nancy will look into this.
10. Join with the North Carolina Chamber on an economic study to be conducted by Professor Emeritus Blake Brown (retired ag economist) to look at AEWL job descriptions and worker classifications and then compare that to how farms really work. He will also look at what happens to the economy when farms go out of business. Ray Starling, former Chief of Staff to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue and Special Assistant to the President for Ag & Ag Trade is heading up this effort. Northwest Hort is also considering joining. If Michigan were to join, it would give the report a more national flavor. We could use this with Congress and the Administration in our efforts to push for changes in the H-2A program to help our growers. Michigan's participation would be \$10,000. I'm looking for \$1500 per organization.

**MOTION: Eric moves that we support the Brown AEWL/labor classification study with \$1,500 with support from Carly; Motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

#### **MBC Research Proposal Review & Discussion (Attachment D)**

1. There were 5 requests for 15K each, totaling 75k\$. We budgeted \$105k.

**MOTION: Eric moved that we sponsor all 5 projects for a total of \$75k with support from Creela; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.**

#### **Public Comment:**

Carlos encouraged us to continue to speak with the EPA about banning and reducing different chemistries and how that impacts us as farmers.

#### **Adjournment**

**MOTION: Eric moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:18 pm with support from Becky ; motion carried unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Bodtke

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. 01/09/2024 MBC Meeting Agenda
- B. 12/04/2023 MBC Meeting Minutes
- C. MBC January 09 Financial Packet
- D. Proposed Research Projects