

MICHIGAN BLUEBERRY COMMISSION

Amway Grand Plaza, Heritage Room
187 Monroe Ave, Grand Rapids, MI 49053

MEETING MINUTES

December 04, 2023

PRESENT:

Nancy Nyquist, Executive Director, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Dennis Vander Kooi, Chair, 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
Dave Reenders, Michigan Blueberry Commission
Jennifer Spears, True Blue Farms/MBC Assistant Treasurer (Remote)
Shelly Hartmann, True Blue Farms/MBC Assistant Treasurer (Remote)
Cheyanne Sloan, MSU Extension
Heather Throne, MDARD
Carlos Garcia, MSU Extension
Rufus Isaacs, MSU(Remote)
Josh Vanderweide, MSU
Becky Hotovy, First Pick Farms
Ron Bates, MSU Extension
Chad Reenders, MBBAC (Remote)
Chris Bardenhagen, MSU Extension
Laura Miles, MSU (Remote)

ABSENT:

Call to Order

Chairman Dennis Vander Kooi called the meeting to order at 9 am, performed a roll call, and verified the presence of a quorum.

Adoption of Agenda

The Commission reviewed the proposed agenda (**ATTACHMENT A**). Denny Switched the location of the Secretary's Report and the Treasurers Report. Denny also added a discussion about the NABC hill climb in January.

MOTION: Rob moved to adopt the agenda as amended with support from Jason; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Meeting Minutes Approval

Michigan Blueberry Commission Meeting Minutes
December 04, 2023

The Commission reviewed the minutes from October 17, 2023 meeting (**ATTACHMENT B**).

MOTION: Eric moved to approve the October 17, 2023 meeting minutes as presented with support from Carly; motion carried with unanimous verbal consent.

Reports of Committee or Officers:

Chair's report:

1. Denny reports that we have had a very good fall. Most concern in the industry is current process market. From what he hears there is a mixed bag from farmers about the success from the crop.
2. He is glad that we successfully appointed a commissioner in anticipation of the January deadline. This is the first time he is aware that the process was completed by the deadline.

Secretary's Report:

The official submission window has closed on the 2023 Crop. Because I have not been to our mailbox for a few delays I am confident that this is not all the 2023 crop reporting. I plan to wait until the 15th of the month before we start following up with first handlers that we have not submitted a report. So far we have a reported crop of 54,802,087 lbs. (58% Fresh/ 42% Process). This represents a value of \$168,083.90. We have also received 10 requests (104,941lbs) requests for reimbursement at a cost of \$314.82. Compared to last year's crop I am estimating we are up 40%. Using that I would estimate the total crop to close at 80-85 million lbs. for a value of 240,000-255,000\$.

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

Treasurer's Report:

1. Carly presented current financial statements. (**ATTACHMENT C**)
2. Nancy has identified a Lawyer to work on the process of collecting past collections. The group discussed how we fill about pursuing a lawsuit against the individual who still owes us from the past few years.

MOTION: Eric moves that we retain the lawyer with the goal of complete compensation including interest with support from Jason; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.

Carly presented the current Profit and Loss statement. Rob recommended that we update the budget to better reflect the 2023 crop. We discussed amending the budget number from \$195,000 to \$240,000. Laura Miles reported that they are estimating the 2023 MSU Plant & Pest Diagnostics cost will be close to \$3000 (Compared to \$7500). The budget has been reduced to reflect this. Denny led a discussion about TNRC payment and lack of services

performed. The research committee will speak to TNRC staff to try and have the billing better reflect the services rendered.

Next MBC reviewed the 2024 Budget. We will budget based on an estimated 2024 crop of 75million lbs. (\$225,000). We are increasing the number of grants we are supporting from 5 to 7 (total of \$105,000). The FB Director contractor was increased back to \$50,000 (historical norm). Carly spoke about increasing the promotional budget \$2500 in other. Josh Vanderweide spoke about adding SWMREC crop maintenance as a requested expense. He had initially requested \$1,100 for 2024 maintenance; he estimates that will now be \$3,000. TNRC crop maintenance will be kept the same but may be updated at a later date.

MOTION: Eric moves that we approve the December 4, 2023 Treasurers report with support from Creela; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.

Research Committee Report

1. Creela mentioned having a spring pruning day at TNRC to talk to staff about how to properly prune a blueberry bush. Cheyenne asked about having it as a workshop because there is interest from local growers about learning how to prune.
2. TRNC Planting- Do we still want to treat the Elliott with sulfur? Or just remove it? If we remove it do we want to replace it or just leave it fallow?
3. Chlorothalonil (Bravo) had its registered rate use cut in half for the blueberry industry. The open comment period has been extended to middle of January. Tim is working with Alyssa from NABC to draft a letter of behalf of the Blueberry Industry. Tim said there is no data that cutting the rate in half is effective, it has never been tested at that rate. He is also will share the letter with us to submit on behalf of MBC.

NABC Hill Climb

Denny wanted to ask the group if anyone from MBC wants to attend the NABC Hill Climb that we would be open to supporting that individual on an educational basis. The hill climb will be Jan. 29- 31. The group decided to support Chad Reenders in conjunction with MBBAC (MBC agrees to half of the expense).

Appointments and Nominating Committee

1. Denny welcomed Becky Hotovy to the Commission and introduced her to the group.

2024 MBC Meeting Schedule

1. Proposed: ~~January 16~~ at TRNC, April 16 at SWMREC, October 15 in Lansing, December 09 in Grand Rapids
 - a. All meetings will be scheduled for 9:30 except for the December meeting (9am)
 - b. The January meeting was moved to January 9th at TNRC

MBBAC Update

1. Chad expressed appreciation in us assisting his trip to Washington DC this past year.
2. MBBAC is growing, they have 11 board members currently.
3. They completed a tour with USDA/RMA this past summer

4. They are working on updating the TAP Program, more time and money.

Executive Director Report

1. Nancy participated in an Ag Labor conference.
2. Call for research proposals went out November 10 and will be due December 18.
3. Project GREEN submissions are due in January. Nancy is an evaluator on that committee and many other grant programs.
4. Nancy has been working with other specialty crop commissions to help recommend to MDARD how they can assist specialty crop growers.
5. Website. We discussed multiple options or not having a website at all. A few people including Nancy voiced interest in having a well made but basic website to provide information to growers. MBBAC uses WIX and likes it.

MOTION: Eric moves that we create a website though WIX and pay Jennifer and Shelly to maintain. The website will be Michiganblueberrycommission.com. with support from Jason; motion carries with unanimous verbal consent.

MDARD Update

1. Heather Throne spoke about ongoing grant programs. New Grant management process.
 - a. Farm Innovation Grant- One time funding, Nancy helps reviews grants. 2 mill available with requests for 4 million.
 - b. Rural Development Grant- Very broad program. Based on county population. Currently open and closes January 9th.
 - c. SCBG open on December 12 and closed February 8th
 - d. Value Added Grants- Value Added processing equipment, dates not currently set.
 - e. Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure from USDA via MDARD. They are working out details. Will most likely mirror value added grants. (10 million available)
 - f. Wastewater Infrastructure fund. Assisting businesses come into compliance. (38 million available). Cost reimbursement structure with cost assistance up to ½ cost. First come first serve funding.

Break for lunch at 11:45 am – 12:30 pm.

After lunch, Nancy presented Denny with a gift to show our appreciation for his time and service.

MSU/MSUE Update

1. Ron Bates
 - a. Ron thanked Denny for his service.
 - b. MSU may have a new president by the end of the year. The main person of consideration is Kevin Guskiewicz from UNC- Chapel Hill and is in negotiating with the board.
 - c. MSU college enrollment is up
 - d. There are two extension positions open in regard to water management efficiency (one for specialty crops).

- e. Denny asked about Sushila's position being replaced. Ron has no update currently.

2. Cheyenne Sloan

- a. Blueberry Bites- the have about 100-150 reading the email blast during the season.
- b. 48 people attended the blueberry field day this year.
- c. Mi Fruit Cast podcast started. Michigan Fruit focused. Planning bimonthly
- d. Fruit school started in conjunction tree fruit. Feb 26-28 in Okemos, Michigan (near Lansing)
- e. March 26 season kickoff meeting. Online
- f. Blueberry field day September 04, hopefully at SWMREC or TNRC

3. Carlos Garcia-Salazar

- a. Chile is trying to get grapes out of the fumigation requirement for US import. This puts us at risk for a European Grape Mold. Once it gets in it is very difficult to get out. We may want to keep an eye on this via APHIS.
- b. Trichogrammatid research. Preliminary research looks good. They hope to continue this research next year.

MBC Sponsored Research

1. Rufus Isaacs

- a. Evaluation two new biological control agents for SWD in Michigan Blueberries
 - i. Samba wasp rearing practices improved
 - ii. Released 39,000 at 30 sites in 2023 (10x from previous year)
 - iii. Ronin wasp being discovered without field placement
- b. Evaluating strategies to improve blueberry pollination
 - i. Research stocking densities
 - ii. Updating Enviroweather bloom prediction model
 - iii. Apis Bloom

2. Tim Miles

- a. Second year of looking at Stem blights
 - i. Researching the main groups of blights, their strength of impact on the plant and what products have the best control.

3. Josh Vanderweide

- a. Enhancing Michigan blueberry yields using a cytokinin pgr
 - i. Accomplished product treatments during bloom
 - ii. There was a drought during bloom. More damage was presented with treated fruit compared to control.
 - iii. Due to loss of treated crop the experiment was not able to continue
 - iv. Josh recommends not continuing this project
- b. Investigation of Replanting issues.
 - i. Starting broad and whittle it down to largest factors of impact
- c. Hormone treatments impacting flavor, and flavor volatiles

4. Chris Bardenhagen

- a. Cost of production study
 - i. Farm business management educator
 - ii. Handful of growers with good records. Individual interviews with growers followed by focus group with more growers. Friday, February 23 at 10 am TRNC for focus group. Information will be compiled and presented in report form for use by industry and RMA.

5. Diagnostic Lab

- a. Second year of the collaboration between Plant pest diagnostics and MBC. 36 samples were covered by MBC for a total of \$3,000 (\$7,500 budgeted). Most samples were examining pathology. Statistically, most problems were Phomopsis dieback.

Public Comment:

None

Adjournment

MOTION: Eric moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:02 pm with support from Rob; motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Bodtke

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. 12/04/2023 MBC Meeting Agenda
- B. 10/17/2023 MBC Meeting Minutes
- C. MBC December 2023 Financial Packet