

# MICHIGAN COMMISSION OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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and

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## MEETING MINUTES July 21, 2021

### **PRESENT:**

Dru Montri, Chair, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Charlie Meintz, Vice Chair, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Tim Boring, Secretary, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Patricia Bergdahl, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Andy Chae, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Gary McDowell, Director, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Chairperson Montri called the meeting of the Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development to order at 9:03 a.m. on July 21, 2021. Commissioner Boring called the roll with Commissioners Bergdahl, Boring, Chae, Meintz, and Montri, and Director McDowell present.

Director McDowell introduced and welcomed Commissioner Chae, who was appointed by Governor Whitmer effective July 7, noting he is an urban farmer from Detroit. Commissioner Chae shared information on his background and his farming operation. Commissioner Montri added the Commission looks forward to working with him.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER BERGDAHL MOVED TO APPROVE THE MEETING AGENDA FOR JULY 21, 2021. SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER MEINTZ. MOTION CARRIED.**

### **APPROVAL OF MAY 12, 2021, MEETING MINUTES**

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER BORING MOVED TO APPROVE THE MAY 12, 2021, MEETING MINUTES. SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER BERGDAHL. MOTION CARRIED.**

## **NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

The next scheduled meeting is September 15, 2021.

## **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS, INTRODUCTIONS, AND TRAVEL**

Commissioners shared their background information and details on their current agriculture operations as way of introduction for Commissioner Chae. They also discussed significant quality concerns for Michigan's wheat crop, cropping system issues during extreme weather, the oversupply of dairy milk and its marketing system, and pesticide and crop disease issues.

Commissioner Montri encouraged Commissioners to take advantage of the opportunity to complete the State of Michigan Implicit Bias Training. The topic will be taken into consideration as the Commission undertakes the upcoming biennial review of their policies.

Commissioners Bergdahl, Boring, Chae, Meintz, and Montri, traveled to attend today's meeting. There was no other travel submitted for approval. Commissioner Montri thanked Commissioners Bergdahl and Meintz for having made the long trip from the UP during peak season to join today's meeting in person.

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER BERGDAHL MOVED TO APPROVE THE COMMISSIONERS' TRAVEL. SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER CHAE. MOTION CARRIED.**

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Director McDowell shared details of meetings in which he recently participated, including the dedication of the Senator Tom Casperson Escanaba River Bridge and virtual Midwest Association of State Departments of Agriculture meeting. He reported Laboratory employee Neil Jones celebrated 50 years with the department; the search to replace Environmental Policy Advisor Josh Neyhart is underway, and on July 1, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) launched a year-long celebration of its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He also provided updates on the grand opening of the Peterson Research Station, MDARD's return to the office efforts; Michigan Agriculture and Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) reauthorization; Migrant Worker Rule; Recruitment, Professional Development, and DEI Officer position; MDARD's response to recent flooding; Office of Rural Development; and the Horse Racing Advisory Commission.

In response to question from Commissioner Montri, the Director advised in their search for a new Environmental Policy Advisor, they are looking for someone experienced in agriculture, water quality, and climate change issues, as well as

the ability to work effectively with stakeholders. They hope to have the position filled during August.

In response to inquiry from Commissioner Meintz, the Director advised MDARD is working closely with the Governor's Office, legislators, MAEAP Advisory Council, and stakeholders to ensure the program continues toward improving water quality and the environment. He emphasized how critical it is to protect our precious water resources for the future of agriculture in Michigan.

### **COMMISSIONER ISSUES**

Commissioner Montri reviewed retirement resolutions before the Commission recognizing Gina Alessandri, who worked for the department for 34 years, and Chris Savona, who had been with MDARD for 23 years.

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER BERGDAHL MOVED THE RESOLUTIONS FOR GINA ALESSANDRI AND CHRIS SAVONA BE ADOPTED WITH BEST WISHES FOR THEIR LONG AND HEALTHY RETIREMENT. COMMISSIONER BORING SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT (AGENDA ITEMS ONLY)**

There was no public comment relative to agenda items.

### **MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM (MAEAP) INTRODUCTION OF 2022 STANDARDS: Jim Johnson, Division Director, and Joe Kelpinski, MAEAP Manager, Environmental Stewardship Division**

Mr. Johnson noted the Commission has the statutory responsibility to annually approve the MAEAP Standards. With no issues being identified this past year, there are no recommended changes for the 2022 standards. The Commission will have the next two months to review and formulate any questions for discussion during the September Commission meeting. Any questions in the meantime can be directed to Mr. Kelpinski.

Commissioner Montri requested if there are anticipated changes being considered for the 2023 standards, an introduction to those be presented during the September 2021 meeting.

Mr. Kelpinski advised the MAEAP Systems Committees continue working toward refinement of the standards, and database modifications are also being implemented. Due to maturity of the program, it will be consolidated into only two documents for review in the future to streamline the program for producers and technicians. In addition, the MAEAP Standards will be updated every other year; however, until legislation is changed as requested, the Commission will be required to approve them on an annual basis. The Commission expressed support for the consolidation efforts.

**GENERALLY ACCEPTED PROCESSING PRACTICES (GAPPS) INTRODUCTION OF PROPOSED REVISIONS: Jim Johnson, Division Director, Environmental Stewardship Division**

Mr. Johnson advised the Commission is statutorily required to annually approve the Generally Accepted Fruit, Vegetables, Dairy, Meat, and Grain Processing Practices for Noise and Odor (GAPP) as dictated by the Legislature in 1998. Practices were developed specifically around noise and odor related issues, and although the department continues to work with processors, the Right to Process Law has never been used. Processors have been able to handle issues themselves, making whatever changes are needed to address any complaints at the local level. As indicated in the materials provided to the Commission, there are no changes recommended for the 2022 practices. The Commission will have the next two months to review and formulate any questions, and they will be presented for approval during the September meeting.

Dru requested the GAPPs Committee be contacted, advised of the ongoing/current situation with the practices, and offer them the opportunity to make comment prior to the Commission's consideration of the GAPPs during the September meeting. Any comments received should be shared with Commissioners prior to their deliberation.

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INVESTMENT PROGRAM: Jamie Zmitko-Somers, Division Director, Agriculture Development Division**

Ms. Zmitko-Somers introduced one Food and Agriculture Investment Program project for Commission consideration today. The second project in the Commission materials will be brought forward at a future date.

Ms. Zmitko-Somers advised EDSPROP LLC, better known as Great Lakes Potato Chips, has experienced substantial growth, and is constructing a new processing and warehouse facility. MDARD is recommending a Food and Agriculture Investment Fund performance based grant of \$80,000 for EDSPROP LLC.

She introduced Edward Girrbach who shared details around their over \$2 million project, noting it will allow them to continue servicing the rapidly growing demand for product both inside and outside the Great Lakes region. Through current efforts, they should be able to source exclusively from Michigan growers. They also work in partnership with Michigan State University (MSU), as well as other universities, toward developing more healthy strains of potatoes.

In response to question from Commissioner Montri, Mr. Girrbach advised although they have had the opportunity to present to the Commission about their company in the past, this is the first grant request they have presented.

Due to her being employed by MSU, Commissioner Montri abstained from voting on the grant request.

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER MEINTZ MOVED TO APPROVE A FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INVESTMENT FUND PERFORMANCE BASED GRANT OF \$80,000 FOR EDSPROP LLC. COMMISSIONER BERGDAHL SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.**

### **RECESS AND RECONVENE**

Chairperson Montri recessed the meeting at 10:22 a.m. for a brief break. She reconvened the meeting at 10:38 a.m.

### **BUDGET UPDATE: Sylvia Renteria, Director of Finance and Budget**

Ms. Renteria noted the Legislature by statute is to present an appropriations bill to the Governor on or before July 1; however, we do not yet have an enacted budget. She reviewed the minor differences between the House version and the Executive proposal, as well as critical items in the Senate budget proposal, which are not in alignment with the House or Executive versions. The department will continue working to ensure a fiscally responsible budget for the department, hopefully before October 1.

She next reviewed and answered questions around departmental items for the current fiscal year. She also recognized Financial Specialist Cinda Karlik who had been with MDARD for 37 years and reported she has accepted a promotion with the Department of Technology, Management and Budget. A search for her replacement is in process.

In response to question from Commissioner Meintz, Ms. Renteria advised funding for the Farm Stress Program will provide behavioral health services, primarily in rural areas.

In response to inquiry from Commissioner Chae regarding funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, the Director advised in partnership with USDA, the program supports the vast variety of specialty crops grown in Michigan for several approved uses. Although program requirements have not changed, the special COVID-related funding recognizes the suffering experienced by specialty crop operations during the pandemic.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Ashley Steffen, Director of Policy Development and Legislative Affairs**

Ms. Steffen referred to the MDARD Legislative Update provided to the Commissioners and reviewed the current status and activity around bills of interest to the department.

She noted legislation recently signed by the Governor, including the Open Meetings Act relative to Agriculture Commodity Boards, Senate Bill 4517 clarifying definitions of industrial hemp and marijuana, and UIA legislation relative to manufacturing shutdowns. MDARD has been very busy working with the legislators and other affected agencies involved in the various bills introduced, with a focus on the budget.

In response to inquiry from Commissioner Montri, Ms. Steffen advised the Electric Vehicle Charging Station legislation is not being supported by MDARD due to inability to view the pricing of electricity on the actual device. This is because some providers base their price on mobile phone or vehicle applications, preventing inspections in the manner required by the bill.

Commissioner Meintz questioned if the department has devices to inspect Electric Vehicle charging stations. Ms. Steffen advised she would ask the Laboratory Division and provide information in that regard.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment on non-agenda items was requested.

Commissioner Montri announced the 2022 GAAMPs Public Comment meeting will be held on August 25 from 9:00-11:30 a.m. Any public wishing to provide comment are welcome to join that meeting.

### **ADJOURN**

**MOTION: COMMISSIONER MEINTZ MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER BORING SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

#### Attachments:

- A) *Agenda*
- B) *Agriculture and Rural Development Commission Meeting Minutes May 12, 2021*
- C) *Director July 2021 – Issues of Interest Report*
- D) *Retirement Resolutions Honoring Gina Alessandri and Chris Savona*
- E) *Generally Accepted Fruit, Vegetables, Dairy, Meat, and Grain Processing Practices for Noise and Odor*
- F) *Food and Agriculture Investment Program Grant Request for EDSPROP LLC*
- G) *Budget Update for Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development*
- H) *Legislative Status – July 2021*