MICHIGAN COMMISSION OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Constitution Hall – Atrium Level
Con-Con Conference Room
525 West Allegan Street
Lansing, Michigan

Option to Join via Remote Technology
Dial: 1-248-509-0316; Conf. ID: 493 475 543#

Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2025

PRESENT:
Kathrine Garthe, Chair, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development
David Williams, Vice Chair, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development.
Monica Wyant, Secretary, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development
Andy Chae, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development.
Dr. Felicia Wu, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dr. Tim Boring, Director, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Garthe called the meeting of the Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development to order at 10:30 a.m. on March 12, 2025. Chair Garthe called the roll with Commissioners Garthe, Williams, Wyant, Chae, Wu, and Director Boring present.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

COMMISSIONER WU MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 12, 2025, AGENDA. COMMISSIONER WYANT SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY 22, 2025, MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: COMMISSIONER CHAE MOVED TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 22, 2025, MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER WYANT SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Chair Garthe announced the next scheduled meeting will be Wednesday, May 14, 2025, in Constitution Hall.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND TRAVEL

Commissioner Wyant had an opportunity to visit North Bay, a berry farm near Traverse City, who supplies the produce department at Meijer with different varieties of berries throughout the summer.

Commissioner Williams recently traveled to the Commodity Classic in Denver, Colorado, where new technology and products are announced for the industry.

Commissioner Wu traveled to Melbourne Australia, for the Society for Risk Analyst, talking about climatic trends and how it could affect agriculture in Michigan and Australia. She also

traveled to Montara, California, for the Asilomar Biotechnology Meeting to discuss biotechnology in agriculture and food supplies.

Commissioner Chae was able to attend an MSU Extension Field Day for Pest Management in Southeast Michigan. He also recently traveled to Colorado to visit a solar facility that also does vegetable farming around the panels.

Chair Garthe attended the Horticulture Show in Northwest Michigan and traveled to California to visit a former organic professor from Michigan State, who started an organic program at Cal Poly University.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE COMMISSIONERS' TRAVEL TO TODAY'S MEETING. COMMISSIONER WYANT SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

COMMISSIONER ISSUES

Chair Garthe invited Dr. Kay Fritz and Brad Deacon, Director of Legal Affairs and Emergency Management, forward to recognize Dr. Fritz on her retirement. Mr. Deacon explained that Dr. Fritz was an important part of the agency's response to emergencies in the last twelve years. Dr. Fritz expressed gratitude to the department and Mr. Deacon on letting her do her "dream job."

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WU MOVED TO ADOPT THE RETIREMENT RESOLUTION FOR DR. KAY FRITZ. COMMISSIONER WYANT SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

Chair Garthe highlighted Daniel Dickinson's retirement resolution and his time at Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Chair Garthe thanked Mr. Dickinson for his service to the agency.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO ADOPT THE RETIREMENT RESOLUTION FOR DANIEL DICKINSON. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Boring that it is budget season in the state legislature and emphasized the governor's recommended budget that the commission would be hearing from Ms. Renteria, MDARD's Budget Director, in the upcoming agenda item.

The Director had recently testified before the Senate Agriculture Committee in Washington DC, on Specialty Crops in the future Farm Bill. The Director informed the commission that like many other departments, there is some uncertainty about federal funding and MDARD continues to keep a close eye on the availability of funding.

Director Boring gave an update on HPAI in the state of Michigan. He informed the commission that a few backyard flock detections had been found since the last meeting, however no large commercial impacts in the state. He let the commissioners know that Ohio and Indiana have been seeing huge impacts at the commercial facilities, which impacts egg prices around the nation. Michigan is in the fourth month of milk testing under USDA's milk surveillance plan and continue to learn more on the disease and rapid response on the issue.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

Elizabeth Brost, member of the Kent County Agricultural Preserve Board of Michigan, testified before the commission.

Becky Huttenga, member of the Ottawa County Agricultural Preserve Board, testified before the commission.

Dennis Heffron, a Kent County farmer, testified before the commission.

Tim Krewtoff, a Kent and Ottawa County farmer, testified before the commission.

Rob Stephans, a Kent and Ottawa County farmer, testified before the commission.

Barry Lonik, Treemore Ecology, testified before the commission.

BUDGET UPDATE

Sylvia Renteria, Director of Finance and Budget, gave an overview of Governor Whitmer's executive recommended budget for FY26. Ms. Renteria highlighted how the appropriated budget would be distributed throughout the department and the key investments for fiscal year 2026. These key investments include a safe food supply from animal disease, plant, soil and pest diagnostics, rural prosperity, and reauthorization of the freshwater protection fund. Director Boring expressed how this budget recommendation highlights the department's priorities for the people of the State of Michigan.

Commissioner Wu asked how Michigan will respond to the newly announced USDA announcement to HPAI. Director Boring explained that the new USDA plan increases biosecurity investments on farms, as well as possible vaccinations and egg imports. The Director said Michigan will continue to invest in biosecurity practices.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Mikaylah Heffernan, Legislative Liaison, gave an update to the legislators assigned to the committees that will see agriculture related legislation. Bills are being introduced and started through the committee process, currently MDARD is watching around 20 pieces of legislation. The next day, Director Boring and Commissioner Williams will be presenting at the Standing Committee on Agriculture in the House of Representatives.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INVESTMENT FUND REQUEST

Jamie Zmitko-Somers, Agriculture Development Bureau Director, introduced the grant for Cherry Republic in Empire Michigan, with the recommendation to award $150,000 for the expansion. Ms. Zmitko-Somers explained Cherry Republic's project will add 16,000 square feet and be a $2.8 million expansion, which will include dry and cold storage, two new loading docks, a generator, and solar power array, and will create 20 new jobs. Currently, Cherry Republic purchases around 3 million pounds of Michigan tart cherries, and this expansion will add 1 million pounds to their production. Ms. Zmitko-Somers introduced Todd Ciolek, CEO of Cherry Republic, Roni Hazelton, VP of Distribution and Manufacturing, and Julie Meredith, VP of Administration and Finance, from Cherry Republic to discuss their project.

Mr. Ciolek explained how Cherry Republic was founded in northern Michigan and now has six retail locations, a restaurant, wholesale and online sales. He explained the new expansion will include 500 solar panels, which will provide energy for their entire Empire, Michigan, campus. Roni Hazelton added that the company is excited to streamline the distribution and getting their product to the consumers. Ms. Meredith expressed excitement of the growth of the company and the community.

Commissioner Chae congratulated Cherry Republic on a fantastic grant proposal and their company's investment in more processing of cherries, but also renewable energy. Commissioner Williams asked what percentage of the company wholesale vs. retail and Mr. Ciolek is said Cherry Republic is currently 60% retail, 30% online, and less than 6% wholesale.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE A FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INVESTMENT FUND REQUEST FOR CHERRY REPUBLIC IN THE AMOUNT OF $150,000. COMMISSIONER WU SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED

PUBLIC COMMENT

Stacy Sheridan-Byers, from the Ingham County Farm and Open Space Preservation Board, testified before the commission.

ADJOURN

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:36 A.M.

Attachments:

A) Agenda
B) Agriculture and Rural Development Commission Meeting Minutes January 22, 2025
C) Retirement Resolution: Dr. Kay Fritz
D) Retirement Resolution: Daniel Dickinson
E) Budget Update, Sylvia Renteria.
F) Food and Agriculture Investment Request Memo, Cherry Republic
G) Public Testimony: Heart of the Lakes