MICHIGAN COMMISSION OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

VFW National Home
Education & Training Center
3573 S Waverly Rd, Eaton Rapids, MI 48827

Option to Join via Remote Technology
Dial: 1-248-509-0316; Conf. ID 415 978 460#

Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2025

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Garthe called the meeting of the Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development to order at 10:23 a.m. on September 24, 2025. Chair Garthe called the roll with the following Commissioners present:

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

ABSENT/EXCUSED:
Dr. Felicia Wu, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development
Monica Wyant, Secretary, Michigan Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 24,2025 AGENDA. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

APPROVAL OF JULY 23, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE JULY 23, 2025, MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Chair Garthe announced the next scheduled meeting will be Wednesday, November 5, 2025, in the Douglas Houghton Conference Room at the Deborah A. Stabenow Building.

COMMISSIONER ISSUES

Chair Garthe recognized Amy Bearss for her service to MDARD since 1998, where she focused on the specialty crop block grant program. The chair thanked Amy for her service to the state and the department.

Chair Garthe highlighted Marty Saffell's 40 years of service to MDARD noting his important work in Statistical Data Projects and The Equine Survey. Chair Garthe thanked him for his service to the state.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER CHAE MOVED TO ADOPT THE RETIREMENT RESOLUTIONS FOR AMY BEARSS AND MARTY SAFFELL. COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND TRAVEL

Commissioner Chae is approaching fall season on his farm and currently pulling out summer crops. He expressed that overall restaurant sales this season seem to be slower than prior years, noting he has the same customers, but orders have been smaller.

Commissioner Williams went to Washington DC for Soy Connects where international customers attend from around the world to promote the use of US soybeans. Soybean harvest has not yet started on his farm.

Chair Garthe's farm has been harvesting apples. The crop was having a difficult time getting sizing at first, but the wet warm weather is helping. The cherry harvest ended light this year down about a third for the tart crop and down 50% for sweet cherries.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS AND TRAVEL FOR TODAY'S MEETING. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Boring was pleased to hold today's meeting at VFW National Home, highlighting the work the department has accomplished with the team at the VFW and expressed excitement about what work is planned to continue building regenerative agriculture opportunities.

The Director informed the commission that the department continues to be involved in resolving the budget by the October 1st deadline.

Director Boring continues to be engaged with the agricultural community concerning how we can improve rural prosperity in agriculture. MDARD has issued a response to the recent executive order addressing the impacts of tariffs on agriculture. The department continues to amplify how the significant increase in tariffs is impacting Michigan producers.

The Director testified in front of the United States House Committee on Agriculture last week on behalf of the specialty crop industry. The Director's testimony included the importance of continuing investments in research, including specialty crop grants. The Director amplified the issues Michigan is seeing on an agricultural level including labor availability, market access, and trade.

Director Boring will be attending the Great Lakes and St. Lawerence Seaway's Governors and Premiers Leadership Summit. Sustainable agriculture is going to be one of the four pillar areas highlighted by the conference. This is the first time agriculture has been on the agenda and is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the important work that agriculture is contributing to a greater quality of life in Michigan.

Commissioner Williams asked the Director about the labor market, concerning farm workers with H2S visas. Director Boring stated there seems to be a lot of uncertainty, but the department is aware that it is a significant issue and are working on a way to engage and build labor forces here in Michigan.

Commissioner Garthe wondered if there is any work being done by linking older farmers with the next generation of farmers. The Director explained that with current challenges there are areas that the department is working on within the agency to make sure beginning farmers are linked with seasoned farmers and that they have technical resources and are given opportunities to be engaged in agriculture.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:

None

ADOPTION OF COMMISSION POLICIES REVISIONS:

Brad Deacon, Director of Legal Affairs and Emergency Management, and the commission completed a comprehensive review of the commission policies and revisions were completed.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE ADOPTION OF THE COMMISSION POLICY REVISIONS. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM (MAEAP) STANDARDS – ADOPTION OF 2026 STANDARDS:

Michael Philip, Bureau of Environment and Sustainability Director, introduced Shelby Burlew, acting program manager, and Josh Appleby, MAEAP Specialist, from the Conservation Stewardship Division. Both addressed questions after the review of the proposed updates to the Farm and Forest Wetland and Habitat MAEAP programs standards, that were presented in July.

Commissioner Garthe asked if there are plans to promote the MAEAP program, as well as the GAAMPS. Shelby explained that there are multiple platforms to promote MAEAP, but it is a goal to have MDARDs conservation technicians within the conservation districts promote and educate farmers on the program standards when visiting farms.

Commissioner Garthe inquired as to how MDARD finds knowledgeable advisory people for the program. Josh Appleby explained that it is from ~~25~~ years of partnership building and inviting meaningful input.

MOTION: COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE ADOPTION OF THE MAEAP 2026 STANDARDS. COMMISSIONER CHAE SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED.

GENERALLY ACCEPTED AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (GAAMPS) and GENERALLY ACCEPTED PROCESSING PRACTICES (GAPPS) – PROCESS AND INTRODUCTION OF DRAFT 2026 GAAMPS AND GAPPS:

Michael Philip, Bureau of Environment and Sustainability Director introduced Kyle McCarty, the newly appointed GAAMPs and GAPPs Specialist, who introduced the proposed changes made to the GAMMPs and GAPPs, which will be brought to the commission again in November. The GAAMPS for Pest Utilization and Pest Control Farm Market, Irrigation Water Use, and Cranberry Production GAAMPS had no changes. Kyle reminded the commissioners that the advisory committee chairs will attend November's commission meeting and will be available for questions.

Commissioner Garthe suggested clarification in the appropriate Manure GAAMPs to state that if there is direct discharge or potential discharge it would not meet the GAAMPs, and at that time EGLE would be notified per MDARD's memo of understanding (MOU) with their department. Commissioner Garthe also recommended a reorganization of information regarding water and discharge in the GAAMPs and GAPPs. Kyle replied that he is happy to work with the commission to begin the reorganization process.

Mr. McCarty discussed the only change to the GAPPs for 2026 is updating the year. A committee led by a newly appointed chair for the GAPPs selected by the Dean of College of Agricultural Resources, Molly Woods, is currently reviewing and evaluating the current GAPPs.

GREENHOUSE GAAMPS STATUS UPDATE:

Kyle McCarty, GAAMPs and GAPPs Specialist introduced Dr. Erik Runkle, MSU Professor & Floriculture Extension Specialist and the Chair of the newly formed (in December of last year) Greenhouse and Indoor Growing Facilities GAAMPs Committee. They have identified 5 priority topics: Sighting, blight or refuse, sound, water management, and light. A full draft was created in June, but they will not be ready to submit a final draft to the commission until next year. Erik explained that cannabis production will not be included in the greenhouse GAAMPs, only fruit, vegetable and ornamental production.

Commissioner Garthe asked how a greenhouse is going to be defined and if the committee is reaching out to experts in Michigan as a resource concerning the best use of lighting, to avoid light trespass that effects animals, birds, etc. Erik explained they will have a definition section in the draft, which will include criteria such as being a covered structure, and a minimum size requirement.

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PROGRAM UPDATE:

Michael Philip, Bureau of Environment and Sustainability Director introduced Megan DeLeeuw, Soil, Water and Climate, Section Manager, and Erik Palm, the Regenerative Agriculture Program Manager, Megan started the update with an explanation multiple projects within the Regenerative Agriculture Market Development Project.

Megan explained the Greenhouse Gas Accounting and Regenerative Science Based Initiatives Project, which will establish a baseline understanding of where buyers and suppliers are, to increase regenerative agriculture market opportunities within Michigan. This will also provide a recognized framework that will eventually help to design a system to match those growers and buyers.

Megan shared the Grant for Understanding Ag Training, farmer led group of consultants and experts that talk about building soil health and economic resilience. Leading Seminars to increase understanding of soil function and regenerative agriculture.

Erik Palm presented on staffing and their roles within the program. He introduced Will Jaquinde to the commission, who is currently leading the demonstration farm at the VFW Home in Eaton Rapids, that the commission would be touring after the meeting. Mr. Jaquinde will also be overseeing the development of The Regenerative Farm Network Grant Program that will support farmer collaboration, increase adoption of regenerative practices, encourage and test innovative regenerative agriculture, derisk transition, increase awareness and confidence of regenerative practices.

Commissioner Williams asked how Regenerative Agriculture can fit into production agriculture. Erik explained that the more acres producers have the more benefits you have. Over time with the increase in soil health, the less pesticides and other products are needed. Megan pointed out that the program is not scale specific.

Commissioner Chae asked if there were any plans to release soil health score cards in the future. Megan explained there are no plans to do so at this time but noted it could be a possible future endeavor.

Commissioner Garthe wondered if there are other states that are further along in terms of scaling this to larger agriculture. Megan and Erik explained that Michigan is leading in supporting farmers one-on-one to promote regenerative agriculture.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Megan Tinsley, Water Policy Director for the Michigan Environmental Council, and a member of the Site Selection Manure Management GAAMPs committees, testified before the commission.

Beatrice Friedlander, on behalf of Attorneys for Animals a Michigan nonprofit and the State Bars Animal Law Section, 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 11:57 A.M.

Attachments:

A) *Agenda*
B) *Agriculture and Rural Development Commission Meeting Minutes July 23, 2025*
C) *Retirement Resolution: Amy Bearss*
D) *Retirement Resolution: Marty Saffell*
E) *Revised Commission Policies*
F) *2026 MAEAP Standards Draft*
G) *2026 GAAMPs Drafts*
H) *GAPPs Draft*
I) *Regenerative Agriculture Program Update Presentation*