Washington Asparagus Commission

Minutes – April 8, 2019

Asparagus Commission Office 1:00 pm

2621 Ringold Road, Eltopia, WA 99330

Chair Gary Larsen, Presiding

Chair Gary Larsen called the meeting to order at 1pm.

**Introduction**

Commissioners: Gary Larsen, Gary Johnson, Steve Thomas, Bryan Lynch, Zack Miller, Bill Middleton, Rebecca Weber and Norm Inaba.

Administrative staff: Alan Schreiber, Zuly Carrillo and Liesl Zappler

Guests: Scott Middleton, Jim Middleton

Approval of Minutes

Rebecca had some slight changes to the minutes.

*Bryan made a motion to approve the minutes. Bill seconded. The motion passed unanimously*

**Financial Report**

Alan gave a financial report as of the end of March. This included marketing and Evado PR, who have already been working on pre-season marketing efforts. Alan estimates 24 million pounds of asparagus will be produced this year. He estimated a season long weighted average of 90 cents estimated price per pound. There were some bank fees associated with the CDs. Alan reviewed the check detail. Asparagus was given out promote WA asparagus last year. Alan answered questions about the financial report.

*Gary made a motion to approve the financial report. Bryan seconded. The motion passed unanimously*

**Committee Reports**

**Marketing/Education**

Norm will be participating in the Spring wine tastings with paring asparagus. Three wineries are participating. A lot of planning has been going into the Asparagus Festival which is on May 11th. The projected attendance could be as high as 2,000 and already 350 tickets have been sold. Last year at this time there were 90 sold. They may cap attendance at 2500. The Commission is a sponsor and is donating $1200 in addition to T-shirt giveaways, setting up an asparagus education booth and providing volunteers. Pickled asparagus will also be donated. There are approximately 6 food vendors that will receive donated asparagus to cook.

**Evado report**

Alan showed a presentation by Evado on the current marketing program, which is focused on Seattle, Portland, Spokane, Cour d’laine, San Francisco and Boise. They’re doing restaurant promotions in Seattle, Portland and Spokane. San Francisco is also being explored. They are also partnering with numerous groceries for in-store signage and social media. The “Get Fresh With Us” slogan for the asparagus commission may be changed. Met Market has been promoting jumbo asparagus. The general consensus is that Evado is doing a good job on marketing. Jim suggested that more marketing on jumbos would be helpful.

The WAC website the main page asparagus picture should be replaced with WA asparagus. We need more info for growers and work on the growers page. Alan will offer Evado $1,000 out of the contingency fund to do an upgrade to the website.

**Local promotions**

**Field research**

In mid-May there will be a demo of a robotic weeder. Alan will demo it on other types of farms with different soil types, hills etc. This is the first demo in the PNW. Organic growers will have the first availability, and it will be in different farms for viewing and field days. There is another robotic weeder with a spot sprayer, but they are in larger acreage crops currently. Michigan has a disease and pest grant that Alan is working with them on, it may be a million dollars a year for 3 years. Maybe this could be a way to spend more on marketing and less on research. The asparagus variety trial for fusarium will be expanded based on a small additional grant from the Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association.

**Mechanical harvester**

The grower in Arizona who has the mechanical harvester had a frost so their harvest was delayed into April. She is a big promoter of the Geiger Lund harvester. There is interest in members going to view it, unfortunately the March trip had to be cancelled due to the freeze.

**Section 18 for Warrior**

Alan has submitted two months earlier than last year and should have it by July 1. There will be 1 or 2 other products registered that will work in its place so this may be the last year a Section 18 is necessary.

**Trade/Legislative**

There was a short and intense discussion about the request from the Peruvian Importers Association to form a national assessments to do marketing of asparagus. Alan talked about the request from the Peruvian asparagus importers association to start a national asparagus marketing order. Blueberries has an exemplary program for assessments and raspberries used this model, but it wasn’t successful. There was no interest in the board to work with the Peruvians on this topic.

*Norm made a motion to instruct the Executive Director to communicate the USDA and other that the Commission is not interested in a national marketing order for asparagus. Bryan Lynch seconded it. Passed unanimously.*

Beef Day is April 11th in Olympia. Ten people from the asparagus industry are going to be working it.

**Labor.** Most growers expect to have sufficient labor. A couple growers had concerns about whether they have enough. No one is for sure until harvest.

**Report on 2019 State Legislative/Executive Issues**

Charlie Brown gave an update on legislative and executive branch activities. There is a state fee being proposed for those who participate in H2A and he asked if asparagus growers were using H2A and had an opinion on the state fee for H2A. He was told that asparagus are not currently using H2A but also do not support the tax no H2A as we think it may something we can use in the future and do not want to pay the increased state costs.

**Report on California/Michigan/Mexican asparagus industry**

Alan gave a presentation prepared by Jim House of Gourmet Trading Company about asparagus production in Mexico, Peru, California, Washington and Michigan.

**Commissioner presentation on situation in their district.** Norm Inaba said several growers are taking asparagus out. The upper Yakima Valley will start harvest at the end of next week. Johnson’s will start mid next week. Jim Middleton will start the middle of next week. Middleton’s will cut starting the end of this week. There was note that the start of harvest for older Guelph Millennium is not as late as younger GM fields. Gourmet Trading will be cutting the first of next week.

**Other Business**

One board member stated that he received asparagus from Mexico, delivered for 72 cents a pound.

**Public Comment**

Scott Middleton made a suggestion for Evado PR to help with marketing asparagus.

 The meeting adjourned at 3:12 pm.