**Washington Asparagus Commission**

**December 6, 2019**

**Gary Larsen, Chair, Presiding**

**Washington Asparagus Commission Office**

**Eltopia, WA**

**Minutes**

Chair Gary Larsen called the meeting to order at 12:59 pm

**Introduction**

Present: Chair Gary Larsen, Gary Johnson, Bryan Lynch, Jon Nishi, Bill Middleton, Steve Thomas and Rebecca Weber

Administrative staff present: Alan Schreiber and Liesl Zappler

Guests present: Matt, Scott and Jim Middleton, Phil Clouse and Doug Muse

**Approval of minutes- August 6th**

Jon’s name was added, as well as the date of the previous meeting’s minutes that were approved.

*Bill made the motion to approve the August 6th minutes with those two changes. Jon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously*

**Expired Terms**

The terms on the Commission for Bryan, Bill, Jon and Steve were renewed.

**Financial Report**

**Quarterly Report**

Alan reviewed the report. The budget is $243,053. Last year $5,000 was added to the reserve fund. The $40,000 for Evado from the SCBG is not included in the budget. Assessments for 2019 were $203,512 and will be lower next year. Gary had suggested that the budget may need to be reduced and more funds need to be put into the reserve fund.

Bill discussed the CDs. The total in CDs is $137,694.42 and money can be pulled out without a penalty. IR-4 costs were shared with the WA Blueberry Commission.

*Bryan made the motion to accept the financial report. Steve seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

**Assessments**

There were 22,548,650 pounds of asparagus for 2019, which is 8,000 lbs less than last year . Alan asked if he should report organic and conventional fresh, without the processed numbers. Gary Johnson separates this in his records. The season long price might be different if it were recorded this way.

**National issues**

The National Asparagus Council will have to end as currently structured as a result of the California Asparagus Commission’s demise.

**International Marketing**

Ken Wall called in regarding Peru pricing and the effort to conduct a national asparagus referendum. He went to the PMA and met with the Fresh Fruit Portal founder, who has a lot of connections. They can grow very cheaply in Peru, but Ken had been told the costs were higher, at $12 into Lima. The farmers need to keep their workers throughout our season. Everyone hates the Guanajuato quality, which is during our production season. It’s not as vibrant a growing region as Caborca. Ken was at the Dallas meeting and met with the importers; he and Mark made a lot of connections. They met with all the handlers and importers at PMA. They said they are bringing in Peruvian asparagus because they haven’t been able to get US asparagus. Peruvian growers don’t want to ship during our window anyway, but the importers are insisting they do because of their contracts. Everyone [importers] agreed a national marketing order would be nice, but this is mainly coming from Priscilla and possibly the growers in Peru. Mexico wants nothing to do with this. Gary L asked how much MI asparagus could go to importers. Ken thought quite a bit. The issue they face is using brokers and wholesalers that aren’t in the market year-round. If some MI and WA growers could coordinate, he’s confident they would drop Peruvian/ Mexican. Gourmet and Progressive stop using Mexican and Peruvian asparagus when WA asparagus is in. Alan asked about the price. There was $8-$10 asparagus in Florida for Peruvian asparagus and they wouldn’t buy at $14. Ken thinks if they had consistent quantity and volume, they would take WA, CA and MI asparagus, at non-Peruvian prices. He thinks the opportunity exists, and they could either supply part of the window or work with others for the whole year.

Anyone with H2A workers in MI will have to plow out the asparagus. Peru effects the East Coast and Mexico effects the West more. Some CA growers have moved to Mexico.

**Review of 2020 Budget**

Alan reviewed the proposed budget. They still have research and marketing costs, the only thing being done differently would be to add funds for the legislative tour. There will be legislative tour the first week of June and Alan volunteered to co run it with the wheat grower representatives to highlight asparagus. However, he then learned that for a stop on the tour it will be $2000. Alan and Gary reviewed the proposed budget. There’s $17,053 for special projects. They could reduce research or keep it the same and change it in January. The Nat’l Asparagus Council is reduced from $0 from $3000. Bill felt Charlie monitoring Olympia issues is an asset. Administrative, Operating and the Contingency fund could be reduced. Alan will speak with other commodity groups and get back to the Board with another proposal for the next meeting.

**Committee Reports**

**Marketing for the 2020 Season**

Alan put in a SCBG preproposal to renew the marketing effort for the next three years. He’s waiting to hear back to see if he’s invited to make a full submission and would then put in a bigger proposal. This would be a commitment of funds by the WAC. He has not committed any money for it yet. The Evado’s existing contract is over in 2020. The SCBG proposal that is being developed would allow it to continue for another three years.

Alan asked if they want a marketing program after 2020. Over 800 acres have been taken out of production. Alan estimates that 4 million pounds went away. Gary asked the Board if they wanted to continue the marketing program. Bryan thought the marketing program is a good thing, Gary J agreed that we should proceed with funding from the grant. Phil is in favor of it, Matt is in favor, Scott felt they needed to have a marketing program. Jim M thought that more should go to Charlie or some other representative regarding overtime and labor issues. Alan suggested having a marketing committee meeting with Evado. This could include the logo upgrade. The logo was designed in the 90’s and isn’t high enough quality for digital reproduction. The web site would be an increased cost. Bill supports marketing efforts that focus on grocery stores. Gary said the restaurants also encourage customer purchases after they’ve tried the demos. Steve supports marketing to bigger buyers of asparagus. Gary J and Bryan agreed with this. After Mother’s Day demand and price drop. Gary L said Caborca comes in 3 months prior, so perhaps asparagus isn’t as special.

**Research**

**Field Research**

The organic asparagus SCBG is in year one, there was aphid research and very good organic weed control studies. They couldn’t get the roboweeder but expect to have one next year. The Commission does a lot of research and should have a committee meeting to address projects. Alan would like to increase participation and have a meeting to discuss this. He’d also like someone to see the harvester in Arizona; Bill and his family will be down there in late March. Gary J talked to someone who ran the harvester in Oregon who thought it worked well, but still needed a bit of work. He suggested that they could buy out Bill Lund and finance finishing the harvester. Alan will contact the AZ farmer to make sure we could still see it this coming year.

**Trade/Legislative/Government**

**Seasonal produce restrictions on imports**

Alan said this is an increasing issue in a variety of commodities including blueberries and tomatoes. The Raspberry Commission just voted to increase assessments and spend $600,000 a year for 3 years on this issue. There is proposed federal legislation- HB101 Defending Domestic Produce Production Act and another bill that addresses dumping. It makes it easier to petition for anti-dumping. The Board proposes to fund Charlie Brown for legislative monitoring at $9,000 but Gary L. suggested putting funds with a group to represent the issues.

**State Issues**

The WAC will dedicate $2,000 from the Contingency fund for legislative issues.

**Overtime exemption lawsuit**

Mike Gempler called in regarding the farm worker overtime issue. The initial Supreme court ruling was for the plaintiffs (the labor) in a dairy lawsuit. The hearing was held recently with the basic argument that there’s harm against Latino workers, since they’re the majority of workers, and it’s a race discrimination case. When the law was put in place this wasn’t the case. They are awaiting the verdict, which is expected sometime in the spring, or possibly earlier, and would come on a Thursday. This would affect any hours over 40 per week. Potentially there could be a retroactive ruling. NYS passed a ruling for farm labor at 60 hours. Mike has not heard of any proposed legislation for WA, but with a farm labor friendly legislature it could be an issue. The Grower’s League is supporting legislation for an affordable, legal workforce.

Most asparagus growers have over 40 hours labor per week for workers. Bill said they have to make the wage better than H2A.

**Meeting dates- 2020**

The Board chose the following dates for 2020 meetings:

January 21th – Prosser

March 26th

July 9th

October 21st

Alan asked for feedback for the annual meeting. Bryan suggested someone from Superior Sales. Alan suggested that Don Hessle could talk about Mexico and Peruvian markets. Alan will do a presentation on research, including weed control. Bryan suggested a seed rep. Alan asked for a presentation on the asparagus festival from Scott and Matt.

**Other Business**

The asparagus festival will be on May 9th this year. They will keep it to one day and would like cooperation with the Board to make it successful. Hopefully the Pasco Chamber will still promote it. They’ll do more pre-event work. They may grill the asparagus themselves. The Board provided t-shirts, a display booth, asparagus and ice cream. Gourmet will hand out asparagus packages, Gary L will emcee the program and the WAC will provide asparagus. The tour is one of the most popular events. They may add 1-2 new wagons. Possibly the new wagons would have a recording and the presenters would stay in the field. There were 1500 at the festival last year. There may be more kid activities. They may start earlier but it’s hard to start earlier in the middle of asparagus harvest.

**Public Comment**

Jim Middleton has a daughter in Germany, they went on a tour that mentioned asparagus, and no other crops. He wished that Washington could consume asparagus like they do in Germany. Alan said they have the highest consumption of asparagus in that country of any place in the world. Germany controls imports, and they have a culture of eating asparagus. Alan suggested an asparagus tasting.

Rebecca went to a Cattlemen’s Association meeting and they spoke of how well they liked the Olympia partnership with the Asparagus Commission.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:30 pm