

**WASHINGTON ASPARAGUS COMMISSION**

**Asparagus Commission Office**

**Sunnyside, WA**

**July 7, 2016**

**Gary Larsen, Chair, Presiding.**

Chair Gary Larsen called the meeting to order at 11:10 am

**Introduction**

Present: Rebecca Weber, Steve Thomas, Jeff Muse, Norm Inaba, Jeff Muse, Jon Nishi, Gary Johnson, Keith Middleton, Rebecca Weber, Jon Nishi and Gary Johnson

Administration Staff Present: Alan Schreiber, Lori Anderson.

Guests present: Brad Dodson, Jim Middleton and Ann Morrell.

**Approval of Minutes**

Chair Gary asked for approval of meeting minutes.

*Keith Middleton would like to pass with the two corrections, Steve seconded the motion. Motion to approve previous meeting minutes passed with the two corrections.*

**Financial Report**

Asparagus Research: The Commission has spent $53,000 of the $65,000 budget for 2016.

Mechanization: We budgeted $15,000 and have spent $2500.00 at this time. The $2,500 was carry over from last year and was to cover last year’s incurred costs.

Cost to run Commission comes out of administrative fees, we have spent $25,000 and are half way through the year. We are in the process of collecting assessments, at this time Alan believes the assessments will be lower than last year since the price of asparagus was down unless production is up. Alan went through the check detail and asked anyone if they had any questions.

**Promotions Budget**

Alan went over the Promotional Budget that included the costs of the Asparagus Festival, Sponsorship for Food Truck Friday, T-shirts, banners and the Asparagus tasting demos. Total incomes from these events were $4,373.00; expenses came to a total of $3,775.54. Ending with a net income of $597.46

Jeff asked about the $2500.00 that was paid toward mechanization, Alan explained that Keith was doing research on this subject and that the check has already been cut.

Rebecca wanted to clarify that the Asparagus Commission only paid $1,200.00 for the festival. The Commission supported the event with that amount of funds.

Chair Gary asked for approval of the Financials.

*Norm made a motion to approve the financial reports. Keith seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.*

**WAC Assessments**

Alan explained the assessment collection process including how much money we have collected in assessments and poundage so far in comparison with the past four years. We have a bigger production this year compared to last year, with 13.7 million pounds. The average price this year is .89 cents.

**PMA**

Orlando Convention Center. All-inclusive pass $1495.00 for a nonmember, we normally do the trade show only. Alan asked the commissioners if we are going to support anyone going or are we still interested in sending someone from the commission. Gary stated that he learned a lot from last year, he took that knowledge and used it when promoting Washington Asparagus this year. Alan believes we should send a few people, Jon Nishi said he would be interested, Keith was asked if he would be interested. Alan told the group that Gourmet Trading generously gave us the trade show passes last year. Alan asked if they would be interested in donating again. Brad will check into it and get back to Alan as soon as possible. Alan would like to see someone go to PMA that has not been before.

**Promotion**

Chair Gary talks about the asparagus promotions. We also have a growing connection with our Facebook page. Gary also brought up that he would like to see the WAC website completely updated. Norm would like to do a different type of promotion, as in bringing asparagus into a cooking school.

Alan would like to see something comparable to the marketing of the Hermiston Melons that go to Portland. They do a meet and greet with the mayor of Portland who does a watermelon promotion. Alan would like to see something like that for asparagus and Seattle. Keith thought it was a huge success compared to how little time there was to complete the project. Keith would like to see it starting a little later next year. Alan led field tours with the attendees, it was a huge educational experience. Keith would also like to see two more wagon rides added to the tour, the band was great, the food was wonderful.

Norm would like to see if anyone could contact Seattle for their calendar of events, so that when we start harvesting in the spring we may have a place for a promotion on the west side also.

Gary told Norm to go ahead since he was a commissioner so he can start looking into this idea.

Rebeca asks about the food trucks, and how they did: everything they cooked was sold out.

Gary was disappointed about not having deep fried asparagus, but Keith is already working on that for next year. Norm asked about the number of food trucks, what winery was used, and the beer vendor, all local he was told.

Alan feels that the committee did a good job. Jim explained that the festival created a feel good product, but they are not affecting the overall market on the scale he would like to see.

Gary would like everyone to put some thought into the committee and bring it to the next meeting.

Where is the asparagus costume?

**Research update:**

Alan has three topics. The trials that he is working on at this time include three different variety trials for 2016. The white asparagus trial, along with the extra cost of labor is doable for the Washington asparagus industry. It packs and ships fine. Gary wants to know how this works for the grower. Alan does not really know about the economic part but he would like the growers to think about producing white asparagus.

Discovering whether glyphosate is damaging the asparagus is important. Alan is using three use patterns to see if glyphosate is hurting asparagus, half the cost of this trial went to lab costs. Chair Gary was happy with the outcome of this trial.

**Asparagus Field Day**

Alan would like to know who would like to come and what day works for everyone. We need to get research information out so we need to have a field day. Third week in August, Keith would like to wait till September. Gary thinks September may be too late, maybe the week after Fair?

**Mechanized Harvester**

Keith Middleton gave the commissioners information regarding how they changed the machine to match their rows. After two weeks of his crew working with the machines, no one liked them. If the crew leader is not on board then it becomes difficult to get any crew member to try it. Carts may make it a little more appealing to get workers out of the field, and a bucket off their hip. Keith is still working this out, with many bumps to overcome. Ken Wall is doing a lot of adjustments and changes to the cart. Ken Gardner and Nick Anderson are also working on this in Mattawa. Alan tells the commission about Jeff Muse’s visitors from the Netherlands and how they offered to ship out two asparagus harvesting carts. Keith did a test where he took two pickers, one handpicking, the other picking from the cart. It was a tie but it was for one row only. The guy cutting by hand had someone helping him and he could not have kept up for more than one row, it showed Alan that the cart does have a future,

Chair Gary asked Keith if he could keep everyone informed as how this project is doing throughout the year and the type of field the cart that would work best in our area.

Jeff explains there has been an update on the steering on the Dutch cart, they have stabilized this issue. The seat is adjustable so it works for a variety of people. Chair Gary thinks there is a possibility for the one man cart to be useful to the industry. Gary Johnson also agreed with Gary regarding the possibility of it someday working.

**Trade and Legislature**

Alan stated that the USDA is planning on removing fumigation restrictions on asparagus coming in from Peru. The Peruvians are paying for the research that will allow this to happen. Norm and Gary asked Alan to look into this issue and figure out what other states and importers are doing. Norm believes that this could be a serious pest risk, Gary Johnson agreed

**State Issues**

Minimum wage will be going up with in the next four years. Norm believes it will be going up for the Asparagus growers before then thus creating an adverse wage effect. Alan believes there should be a national minim wage, if there was an Ag coalition this could happen.

**Scholarship Planning**

The Asparagus Commission had talked about putting together a scholarship but Rebeca stated that we cannot have one. Alan thinks there is a way we there is a way to do it, that is by reactivation of the Washington Asparagus Council, which can take donations. Alan and Gary Larson believe that this is a great way of putting a positive footprint in the industry instead of asking for money, we are giving money. Alan states that there will different chairs on that board than the WAC, maybe past Commissioners. The council should engage in more than one activity. Gary asked Jon how he feels about being on this board, Jon likes the idea. Gary then asked Brad about how he feels about being president. Jim asks about getting donations from packers, but it has to be separate from the Commission.

Steve, Gary and Norm all think this is a good idea. Jeff abstains from commenting, Rebecca thinks it is a great idea. We just have to go about it the correct way, just a matter of finding the right people to run the Council

**Labor Supply**

Brad was able to get cutters, staffing levels changed by the day but in general was okay, Steve Thomas had plenty to start with, but less productive fields there was no labor. Keith thinks the whole season was pretty good. Norm says they started off well, then it was the shortest labor supply they have ever had; ten to twenty percent short on labor. Gary Larsen was good, Jeff was good, paying higher wage than other places. Jim, just barely enough on the cutting side, he did try a labor contractor but it did not turn out well for him, in the packing shed he kept a good crew. Jon had a good crew, Gary Johnson did better this year than last year. With all the hops going in, it was very hard getting a night crew this year.WAFLA and the Department of Labor’s inspections and how it will affect the Asparagus growers regarding the rules, including, do we have to pay for rest breaks? Jim would like to put this information on the website. We should, as a commission and get the information about education, done by the end of this year. January 1, 2017.

Chair Gary believes that there needs to be a grower section on the website, every form on the website that a grower needs.

Chair Gary asks if there are any other questions that the commissioners would like to ask.

Alan introduces Dr. Ann Morell to the commissioners, talking about H2A

**Price**

Alan was taken aback by the price of asparagus this year at 75 cents per pound. Steve says they were trying to push the price up, but we got so busy and everyone had all you could want to sell. He believes it was a perfect season for growing. Gary feels the same as Steve, Alan stated that April brought in more than double the usual amount. Gary would like to see a little more planning on marketing when we get this weather, but he understands that it is hard to do.

Norm stated that the brokers were selling against each other and the growers did not know that was happening, so the growers lost out.

Chair Gary was wondering if the high price at the beginning of harvest created this problem or the price dropping out towards the middle contributed more.

Alan asks Jim regarding promotion of asparagus, Jim feels we need to be at least two months ahead, and it is hard to figure out where the price will start. Is it appropriate to moderate a peak in a season? Alan feels that now is the time to talk about promotions, and what type of promotions will work to the Asparagus’s Commission’s advantage. Alan brings up a Seattle PR company regarding any ideas he may have for the WAC. They feel that bringing the east side asparagus to Seattle would be a very good way to start.

**Acres in, Acres Out**

Acres out:

George Johnson Farms, 33 acres out.

Kinsey Farms, 46 acres out.

Keith Middleton took 8 acres out.

Lupe took out 10 acres.

Acres planted;

Phil Sealock, 40 acres planted.

Keith has nursery asparagus with Jeff Muse.

**Other Business**

Washington State Commission on Pesticide Registration Tour is in July and will feature asparagus, WAC puts in $500 every other year. Alan explains who is coming this year and why they are important to our industry. This is a three day tour, staring on July 27, there will be a hog roast on Wednesday at Alan’s place. Members of the asparagus industry are encouraged to come to dinner.

Jim has a questions regarding rust prevention on Millennium. Alan has never seen rust at his farm and had to ship in inoculum with it after not finding any in this state. Newer products are very effective, with most research on asparagus disease being carried out in Michigan. Jim was telling the Commission about purple spot developing on asparagus. Gary Johnson and L&F tried pickling and it worked, the lesions went away when it is processed. It impacted the handlers as well as the growers. The spores are in our ground, we do not see it in the fern stage, and mainly comes about when it is humid, cool, and wet.

Chairman Larsen asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

*Norm Inaba moved to adjourn the meeting. Keith Middleton seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.*

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