

**WASHINGTON ASPARAGUS COMMISSION**

**Asparagus Commission Office**

**Eltopia, WA 99330**

**March 30, 2017**

**Gary Larsen, Chair, Presiding.**

Chair Gary Larsen called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

**Introduction**

Present: Rebecca Weber, Jeff Muse, Gary Larsen, Keith Middleton, Gary Johnson,

Norm Inaba, and Bryan Lynch.

Not Present: Steve Thomas and Jon Nishi.

Administration Staff Present: Alan Schreiber, Lori Anderson and Tiffani Deal.

Guests present: Mike Roskamp, Phil Clouse, Jim Christopherson, Zach Miller and Jim Middleton

**Approval of Minutes**

Rebecca had a question about the minutes regarding who made the motion to approve the budget, but then we adapted the motion at the end. At the last meeting we went over the budget, improving it, and then a motion was made, but the board held off approving the budget until we got through the committee reports. Do we resend the motion, or strike the motion? It was not acted on because further discussion was needed before voting approve from the January meeting.

On Page 4 in the second to last motion Rebecca recommend we change the verbiage to:

Bryan made the motion to approve the contract with Cascade Government Affairs.

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| *Norm made the motion to approve the amended minutes, Keith seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. The minutes are from January 12, 2017.* |

**Financial Report**

Alan went over the financial report with the Commissioners.

The amount of $45,607.48 has been spent at this time, no assessments received at this time. Gary Johnson asked about the interest on the CD’s. The commission would like Alan to take action with the CDs at Columbia Bank, do we move it or do we ask for more interest. The Commission would like to find out if we can receive a higher rate of interest, or if we need to move the CDs to a different bank. Alan needs a recommendation from the board to instruct him to investigate this issue. Alan will talk to the bank, find out about any penalties and if the CD has matured.

The Chair asked for a motion.

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| *Jeff made the motion to give Alan the recommendation to move the CD if necessary. Norm seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously*. |

**Check Detail**

Alan went over every check written up to this point.

Alan made a projection and price regarding the asparagus production for the 2017 growing season. How much are we going to produce this year? Alan believes it will be 23 million pounds, Phil believes that Gourmet will be up 20%, Gary Larsen also believes the weather will make a difference. Alan thinks we will have a million more pounds this year with an average of .90 cents a pound. Norm also thinks the weather will have a significant impact on the production for the upcoming year. Besides Gourmet, are there 200 new acres coming in? Alan feels we are going to have a typical season, with the price being better than last year. Chair Gary believes that the Mexico asparagus production is down at this time with the price also being lower.

Alan would like to talk about designating some reserved funds going into the budget, should we stay where we are right now, and later this year the Commission can change the budget to start putting monies into a reserve fund.

The Chair brought up the Beef Day costing extra money, but Alan felt that this would not be a big financial outlay. Norm thinks funding for this should come out of the Marketing Funds. Alan agreed.

Chair Gary asked for a motion to approve the Finance Report.

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| *Norm Inaba moves to approve the Finance Report. Gary Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.* |

**State Auditor**

Alan told the Commission that we have a finding, we had 5 credit card reports that we could not produce out of 36. This was before the current bookkeeper came took over the office management. Under current office management we have had no findings. Alan mention that out accountant Baker & Giles did not have the same problem when they reviewed our books for the same time interval. We cannot dispute the Auditor’s finding and from this point forward we have the proper office procedures in place. The call with the Auditor will be tomorrow at 10:00 am on Friday the 31st of March.

**Committee Reports**

Alan asked who is the Chair of the Marketing Committee; the board has really improved their marketing efforts Alan has applied for a grant for marketing from the SCBG to expand Washington Asparagus promotions from the I-5 corridor to throughout the PNW . This is a two-step grant that is in the amount of $120,000. After this year we will have a total amount of $70,000 for the next 3 years to expand the market in the Seattle, Portland, Spokane and Boise areas. Alan explains the goal is to convince one person out of 7 to buy an extra pound per year and this will make the promotion successful. Bryan thinks this is a great idea, Make Washington Asparagus Great Again, buy American.

Tiffani goes over the Marketing Committee meetings, focusing on these three events.

1. Beef Day on the Hill, at the State Capital in Olympia.
2. Spring Barrel Tasting, between Touchet and Prosser.
3. The Asparagus Festival will be sponsored by the WAC, to be held at Middleton Farms.

Chair Gary explained that the Asparagus Festival will be similar to last year, hours will be from 5 to10 pm, on May 6. There will be an increase in food trucks. The Commission is sponsoring the event with $1200, along with t-shirts that will be handed out as gifts. The Committee would like to see an increase in attendance from last year, at least 200 more people is the goal.

**Research**

Not a lot to talk about in terms of research. Most projects are about to get underway with no problems at this time. ADG is doing a fertility trial by variety. With the German program’s not having a recommended variety trial, Alan feels that this is a necessary project. Section 18 for Warrior, hopefully there will be a little easier to obtain this upcoming year from the EPA. Alan tells the Commission about an email he received regarding FDA surveying asparagus for pesticides. He recommends that we don’t use pesticides off label.

**Mechanization**

Keith went over recent changes to The Haws Harvester, which is supposed to be running by now. Norm would like the Commissioners to Google a U Tube video that shows the updated version.

The machine has a bigger motor, bigger tires and the installed a cage over it.

**Promotions**

Evado PR called in to discuss the asparagus promotional program. The goal is to put Washington asparagus in front of everyone, this includes different outreach programs. They are working with local chefs to get different recipes out to the public from Seattle to Portland. The project timeline was discussed, including when we should start seeing Washington asparagus in grocery stores. Alan asked the Commission this question, they are thinking between the 15th and 20th of April. What does Evado PR want from asparagus growers that will help with this promotion? Would the growers be interested in more focus in the grocery stores or on the asparagus crop itself? Jeff asked if there is a reporting mechanism anywhere, yes there will be and they will send the Commissioners that information when this happens. Alan tells the Evado team about a proposal that he is putting together asking for more money from WSDA. If we continue with this type of promotions the Commission would like to keep them on. Lori is to send Evado the email addresses of Commissioners.

**California, Michigan and Mexico**

Zach Miller gave a brief overview of Mexico asparagus production so far. The cold weather and no advertisement, has resulted in a large amount of asparagus in their warehouses. Hopefully this information means there will be more movement with the Washington asparagus. Gary Larsen asked Gary Johnson if there is any Mexican asparagus at the Johnson plant at this time. They are only storing frozen at this time.

Michigan reported 20 million pounds of production last year, so this makes Washington the number one state of the production of asparagus. Michigan will have millions of pounds mowed off, they believe they aren’t going to start harvest until the beginning of May.

California does not have much harvest at this time.

**State Legislative Update**

Alan asked Charlie about a legislative update, the budget is going through changes due to public education. The State is looking at a property tax to generate money to put into education. The house came out with new tax revenue, increase a new tax on Capital gains, a B&O increase of 20%, and establish a three tier increase on reality sales. At this time they have to have a budget before the house that will increase the taxes. They are supposed to be done by April 23, but Charlie feels they will be in session until late June or July.

The Herst water lawsuit means the state is not allowing new water withdrawals from wells unless you can show drilling a well will not negative impact ground water, unless you have an existing water right. This is causing problems across the state with housing and agriculture businesses getting hit the hardest.

Norm would like Charlie to look up bill number 1508. Small farm and direct marketing, along with training on the Gap Program, have been cut from the Department of Agriculture’s budget. Norm would like to see if Charlie can advocate for more funds in this area. Norm would like the ag industry to support a breakfast program called After the Bell. This bill is on the Ways and Means Senate Committee, the vote was strong, but was amended on the way to the Education Committee and then was passed. It has not been scheduled for a date at this time. Alan asked Charlie if there are any other issues that the Asparagus Commission needs to know at this time. All the issues have been covered, and he will let the Commission know if anything else comes up and needs to be addressed.

**Commissioner Presentation**

Keith he is the distributor for the Canadian asparagus carts and he has purchased 14 one man carts that will be in the fields. Norm also bought one; there have several improvements. Bigger tires, a seat that is adjustable, and the steering have improved drastically. Keith has the new style Version 6, Norm and Gary Larsen also have one and will report back to the Commission at the next meeting.

**Lawsuit**

Kristen and Sierra called in at 3:00 pm from the Attorney General’s Office. Sierra gave us a status report on the lawsuit against the WAC for a supposed violation of a public records request act. Mr. Whitman needs to file a notice of commitment to continue with his lawsuit. He has asked for a settlement of $500.00. Do we take that offer, a lower amount or another option? Chair Gary askes how long can it be in limbo: up to one year with no activity and then we can file a motion to get it cleared. Chair Gary asked the Commission what we should do. Rebecca asked about the time frame, this September would put an end to it. Alan asked about the Alfalfa Seed Commission, without going into much detail, Kristen tells us they are in the same situation as the Asparagus Commission. Sierra tells us we have three options, and then at the end of the time period get rid of the suit. Rebecca asked where would the court day be located: Franklin County. Gary feels we should just ride it out until September, if they move then we can counter offer. We will say no thank you, the Commission will not accept the last settlement offer. The Commission has an invoice for $200 from the AG’s office for the costs at this time.

**Federal Issues**

Alan told the Commission that the EPA is not going to cancel Lorsban, because of Scott Pruitt who overruled the decision. EPA is trying to get put heavy restrictions on Warrior, Alan is going to but hope it will not happen.

**Labor**

The Commissioners feel good about the amount of workers they will have this year. Packing sheds don’t know yet.

Commissioners Report from their districts

Bryan Lynch. Harvest is delayed a few days, this is later than a normal season. .

Jeff Muse. The soil is still too cold for any growth, some spears are up, but not enough for production.

Norm Inaba. Harvest will start closer to the 15th of April, and might start cutting organic on the 10th.

Keith feels that they will start later this week or early next week.

Gary Larsen. Our fields have nothing coming up, the ground is ready to go, but still too cold.

Gary Johnson. His company has had to turn down people at the packing shed.

**Other Business**

Keith explains to the Commission about a new program that will connect the growers to the workers, in an app for your smart phone. The app is a program that will send out texts to their workers if there was a delay in starting work that day. Another item the person wants to develop is a classified ads to send out to farms and labors who may be compatible. EZ Texting is also another app with a great way to send out to all the crew at the same time. This is a pay as you go program, or you can pay $50.00 per month. Keith would be willing to help everyone with this.

**Public Comment**

Alan tells the Commission about the increase of work from the Department of Enterprise Services for the administrative team. Rebecca tells the Commission that DES provides oversight for the policies because of the consolidation of the staffing at WSDA, the training has increased significantly. Alan is a small packer but sees other packer’s assessments due to his administrative responsibilities for the Commission, and has a concern that this is a conflict of interest. He would like the Commission to give him advice on this. Gary Larsen feels that since he does not see the prices until after the fact so there is no problem. The Commission concluded this is a non issue. Gary asked Rebecca about the planning schedule for the rebidding of the Administrator with the Department of Ag, since this is the 5th year. Rebecca responds that we will go over the process at the October meeting. Norm, Jeff and Rebecca will be on the committee to make this happen.

Chair Gary asked for an adjournment of the meeting.

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| *Jeff made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Keith seconded.* |

Meeting Adjourned at 3:50 pm.