

**WASHINGTON ASPARAGUS COMMISSION**

**Asparagus Commission Office**

**Eltopia, WA 99330**

**November 7, 2016**

**Gary Larsen, Chair, Presiding.**

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

**Introduction**

Present: Rebecca Weber, Steve Thomas, Jeff Muse, Bryan Lynch, Gary Larsen, Keith Middleton, Rebecca Weber, Jon Nishi,

Administration Staff Present: Alan Schreiber, Lori Anderson. Wasn’t Tiffani there as well.

Guests present: Gary Middleton, Jim Middleton and Phil Clouse .

Teleconference: Kristen Mitchell and Charlie Brown.

**Approval of Minutes**

Chair Gary asked for approval of meeting minutes. As amended the Wall Harvester and the Five Man Harvester will be specify in the last quarterly meeting of the Washington Asparagus Meeting. This sentence does not make sense. Wall does not have a harvester, but rather has a cart….Need to clarify what this is. I think you mean the five man cart, not five man harvester. Rebecca would like us to put the date of the previous minutes when referring to each meeting.

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*Bryan Lynch would like to pass with the two corrections, Keith Middleton seconded the motion. Motion to approve previous meeting minutes passed with the two corrections. Minutes from November 7, 2016.*

**Term Limits**

Jon Nishi, Bryan Lynch and Jeff Muse are eligible for another term. Teresa Norman from the Department of Agriculture gave Alan the information that Gary Johnson (processor rep) and Steve Thomas (fresh handler rep) can serve another three year term. Chair Gary Larson asked for a motion to retain Gary Johnson, he would be the processor handler representative and Steve Thomas would be the fresh handler representative for the Washington Asparagus Commission.

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| *Chair Gary moved to nominated All in favor all said I, no opposition.* |

**Financial Report:**

Alan went over the budget, explaining where Commission funds have been spent.. Keith will be giving the Commission an invoice soon for the mechanization. We will be taking money out of operating funds for the audit, which may be around $3000.00.

Check detail and saving accounts along with CD amounts were stated to the Commission by Alan. This sentence is awkward and needs to be rewritten.

The Commission will have significant funds to carry over from 2016 into the 2017 year.

Chair Gary asks if there are any questions regarding the Financial Report and approval to pass the Financial Report.

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| *Keith Middleton would like to pass the Financial Report. Steve Thomas seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed.* |

Alan went over how collecting assessments was very straight forward and the differences from last year. There was no problem collecting assessments.

We are going through the proposed budget, the historical, and the new budget for 2017. What is the difference between the proposed budget and the new budget in 2017.

As the asparagus industry declined the Asparagus Commission have had a history of reducing programs but with the extra funds due to increased production in 2016 we can implement new programs. In January we will have a meeting and we can see exactly what are carry over money will be and will set the final budget.

**Audit**

We are in the process of our Performance Audit, this is an audit that happens every three years.

The budget was not been given to the Department of Ag last year, but we have submitted it. Alan went over the audit process and how it is coming and we will have more information at the January meeting.

**Lawsuit**

Chair Gary would like to fill everyone in on the lawsuit of the Washington Asparagus Commission. Alan goes over the basic history of the lawsuit with the Commission before Kristen Mitchell from the Attorney General’s office calls in. An email that requested public records from the Asparagus Commission went to a wrong email address. Therefore we did not receive the request for public disclosure, so we did not know to respond. He is now suing the Commission, along with another Commission. Alan read the letter that was sent back to the individual in response to his claims. Alan would like the Commission to respond after listening to what Kristen has to say.

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**Conference Call**

This includes Kristen Mitchell and Sierra (no last name) from the Attorney General’s Office and Charlie Brown, our legislative and administrative liaison. Alan made introductions within the Commission, and then explained to Kristen that he gave the Commissioners the short story regarding the lawsuit. Since this is not a confidential meeting this information is not confidential. This is a response to a public records request which was not addressed because we never received the email. No notifications would have been sent to either party since it was a wrong address. The bottom line is that there are very few cases out there involving this same issue. The AG’s office will argue that the Commission does not owe any fine.

The Alfalfa Seed Commission refused a settlement offer of $3,000.00. They have not heard anything back from him at this time. The AG stated the board could decide to follow the Alfalfa Seed Commission and reject a settlement offer or make a settlement offer to avoid larger losses.

Kristen would like the Commission to discuss this and come up with a few ideas. If we say no then the ball is back in the plantiffs corner. He may go away, or he may get serious and carry on with the lawsuit. The Commission would then have to have a judge decide the outcome. Attorney costs will vary depending how what the plantiff and the board decides what to do: the AG’s office have spent $300 to $400 dollars at this point. Since the AG’s office has combined our lawsuit with the Alfalfa Commission our costs are reduced. Kristen went over the options we have.

Kristen stated that if we do go down that path, we are going to incur some expenses. The Commissioners asked how much would that cost. Kristen stated $3000 to $5000 could be our total amount, right now we are in the $400 range. Alan wants to know what feedback she wants from the Asparagus Commission. We do not have to answer today. Chair Gary would like to know why the case was not dismissed right from the start.

If he takes it we are done, and if he doesn’t accept we wait until he comes back with a counter offer. How long do we have before we have to answer him, Chair Gary asked or are we going to watch the Alfalfa Seed Commission? Kristen responds, one year is the internal clock, and then the suit may be dismissed. The Commissioners feel that Mr. Whitman will counter with a higher amount.

Gary did a quick vote and told Kristen that the Commission will not offer Mr. Whitman anything at this time. Alan asked if we need a formal motion, Kristen says no. Commission declines the $3800 settlement agreement and will wait to hear Mr. Whitman’s response. Kristen will send us a copy of the letter that is sent to Mr. Whitman and will let us know what the response is. The Commission would rather pay the attorneys than Mr. Whitman.

Alan askes the Commission if there are any more questions, at this time there are none. Alan thanked Kristen and Sierra and asked them to keep the Commission informed on this project.

**Charlie Brown**

Charlie feels we did the right thing on the lawsuit. Alan asks Charlie about future programming efforts in 2017, what does he have to tell us, where might we need to be touching. His opinion is that the senate will be maintained by Republicans. The state house will remain Democratic, and there are no really contested seats. If the polls are on target, what that means for January is we are going to have a divided legislature. Education is also an issue that will cause extra monies to go there. Revenue will be up 1.5 to 3 billion dollars. He does not see sales tax increase but with the tax exemption from the past may change. Budget and taxation are the two biggest areas of concern for our population. Pesticide application arena should be something we are concerned about, organic arena seems to be growing. Another area is the Commission of public land, there is a willingness from either candidate to modify trade out lands from conservation lands to get more farming lands. This might be a better way of use of our big lands to generate revenue by leasing to Ag based business. Minimum wage will pass, what initiative will the Commission take up this year?

**Marketing**

What do we want to do next year in the marketing and promotions, are we sponsoring the Asparagus Festival, Chair Gary asks if the Commission wants to do the same as last year, or does Keith want to run it by himself. Keith would like to keep it the same as last year. Alan would like to know if Keith is going to change anything from last year, only the time of day he responds. We will be having a family time included this year. Rebecca thinks that is a great idea.

Alan wants to know if we want to do something on the west side, such as we do with the Blueberry Commission using Pete Delauney. This would be a promotion of fresh product. Rebecca would like to see something at Pikes Place Market. Gary asked if we are are too late in the year to plan for next year. Alan says no. Bryan and Gary would like to make sure the public knows when the asparagus season starts. The customer needs to understand the time frame when Washington Asparagus is fresh and when they are buying Mexican asparagus. Alan would like to run this past a few groups for ideas to bring up in our next meeting. Come up with a dollar amount, guidelines and send it out to the Asparagus grower, this should give the Commission an idea. How can we spread this information and get our product out to other agencies?

**Web Site**

Tiffani and Chair Gary have made some changes, and they would like to bring it up to date with Facebook. Gary would like to post a special growers section where they could all the information a grower needs to start the growing season. WFLA has a lot of information and many of those topics could be posted to the website. If growers, buyers, and consumers could find it all on our website of Washington Asparagus then the goal would be accomplished. Rebecca just typed in Washington Asparagus without the commission and it came up at the bottom of the sites listed. Bryan would like to know if there will be an additional cost to this expansion.

Chair Gary would like to know if we continue to use Tiffani or pay someone to expand the site. Alan would like the Commission to come up with a choice. Chair Gary is asking if we need to update the website, do we pay Alan extra administrative fees or hire it out. Alan suggests we have Tiffani work on it for a set amount of time, the end of November, and then if the Commission wants more the Commission can hire a professional. The Commissioners are wondering if there should be a password for growers to access special links. Tiffani wanted to know if the Commission wants to update the logo, the Commissioners will keep the current logo.

**Marketing Committee**

The committee consists of Gary Larsen, Keith Middleton, Tiffani Deal, Jeff Muse, Norm Inaba and Lori Anderson. Gary would like to have a meeting next week, Tuesday at 5:00 pm, send a reminder note out. Alan asked Lori to send out a reminder for the meeting.

**Mechanization**

Haws harvester is on schedule for producing a machine for 2017 according to Joe what is last name, per Keith. Keith has been in contact with Ken Wall, he did get some preliminary information regarding their cart. They are going to make 300 carts this year. 200 are going to the Ontario, Canada region, 100 to Wisconsin and Michigan. They are all using them, with the price set at $6,000 American dollars per cart.

They are going to install taller tires, so the carts can go over the wheel tracks and hills a little easier. Keith will be the sales agent in this area for the time being.

Alan asked if we could get the Haws machine up here this season. Kevin feels it is always interesting to have it in the field for everyone to watch, but to get it up here seems to be a problem.

Alan asks if there is anything we should do for mechanization, Rebecca says yes. Keith is going to buy more and put them in the field. Gary says that he has a four acre plot, if the picker he has in there hours go down than it would be considered a success. Alan would like to see growers come out for field day and have a cart in use.

**Field Research**

Schreiber has removed one variety trial and is taking out the white asparagus trial. The high yielding asparagus trial is staying in. There will be an asparagus aphid trial and a herbicide trial. Alan would like anyone that has an idea to bring it to him and he will present a proposal. Gary Larsen would like to see a project using the chemical layby. Alan will put together a proposal regarding this and the Commission can go over it at the next meeting.

The Commission scheduled the upcoming 2017 Commission meetings.

**Other Business**

Chair Gary asked if we have any other business. Alan would like a proposal on a pesticide survey regarding chlorpropham, Bryan was asking if this would be all growers or just a sample. Chair Gary asks the other Commissioners how they feel about this testing, Jeff stated he would be concerned about public perception of this project. Other comments were made, for and against this proposal. Keith asked about a utilization project with water for a research project, overhead verses drip irrigation.

Chair Gary asks if there is any public comment?

There were none at this time.

Chair Gary made the motion to end the meeting.

*Kevin Lynch Who is Kevin Lynch made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jon Nishi seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.*

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