



WASHINGTON ASPARAGUS COMMISSION
JULY 14, 2021
SNIPES MOUNTAIN RESTAURANT, SUNNYSIDE, WA
CHAIR GARY LARSEN, PRESIDING
MINUTES

Chair Gary Larsen called the meeting to order at 11:20 am.

Introduction:

Commissioners: Chair Gary Larsen, Gary Johnson, Jon Nishi, Zack Miller, Bill Middleton and Rebecca Weber

Administrative staff: Alan Schreiber and Liesl Zappler

Guests: Doug Muse, Jim Middleton and Scott Thomas

Approval of Minutes

Gary asked for approval of the March 31, 2021 minutes.

Zack made the motion to approve the minutes. Rebecca seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Financial

Financial Report

Alan reviewed the financial report and check detail. There are still pending payments for Evado (which will be reimbursed at 50% from the SCBG) and for research. WAC is within its current budget. Alan will be sending a financial report in 2 weeks after the new bookkeeper starts. There is a discrepancy that needs to be found within the books for the past 2 years for the beginning and ending balances. On July 27th Alan is meeting with Megan Finkenbinder to discuss this.

Alan also reviewed the budget and the reserve fund.

Committee Reports

Education/Promotions- PMA

Alan asked if they should send anyone to the conference. Gary Larsen felt they didn't have the funds for this. Most assessments aren't in yet, but it looks like production was down and prices weren't high, so the assessments will be down this year. It's a rarity that both volume and price are down. WSDA, in collaboration with the WA Potato Commission, is doing a produce pavilion and there are 6 spots remaining. It's \$2,000 for a kiosk for the show, which is in New Orleans, October 28th- 30th. Gary Johnson will coordinate with other

Board members to see if there is interest in volunteering for a WAC booth. Scott, Jim and Alan are interested in going.

Gary Johnson made the motion for him to look into spending up to \$3,000 for WAC to have a kiosk at the PMA. Zack seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

2021 Promotions Review

Lauren reviewed Evado's outreach efforts. They did social media efforts with grocery stores including an online shopping app. They'll have some numbers from the grocer on this. There were both regional and statewide efforts. There was a strong social ad push which reached 20 million consumers. They expanded to include Google ads which would direct consumers to the WAC website. Alan did a radio show with a chef in Seattle. It seemed that results were better this year than last year. Originally late June was the estimated finish for harvest, but some growers ended sooner. In the future they may change this to an earlier end date for promotions.

Research

Research update- Mechanized Harvesting

ADG did a review of the asparagus harvester, which was a pull behind model. Originally, they wanted to evaluate it and then take it to other asparagus fields however, it did not go well. Knives came off, there was significant damage to the spears, and it wasn't possible to use it on other fields because it was not reliable. The previous version of the machine was more efficient but injured the crowns over time. Currently there aren't the resources to fund fixing the machine. There is research for a machine in Europe, which is nonselective and is for white asparagus fields.

Field Day

Alan proposed September to get the fieldwork completed and create a presentation. The field day is expected to be September 21st.

Trade/Legislative

State Issues

The exemption from overtime will be phased in at the rates of over 55 hours in 2022, over 48 hours in 2023, and over 40 hours in 2024. Overtime for ag workers was devastated the California asparagus industry. There may be a legislative attempt to add a seasonality clause to the legislation. The Board discussed options for working with other commodity groups/Charlie Brown. The research budget has been declining. The Evado marketing effort goes through two more years. This wage issue is seen as the biggest threat to the asparagus industry. Alan will ask Charlie for a proposal and speak with the Farm Bureau, WA growers league, and WAFLA. In October Alan will report back on a plan, and by then they will know what the assessments are.

Administrative Contract Search

The HR Committee went through the RFP process. Because of other factors they have extended the existing contract through October and cancelled the original RFP. The Committee will be moving forward with an updated RFP. The goal is to have the RFP out in August, to be able to review and complete the contract before the existing contract ends. They are trying to create a buffer between administration and research. Alan had the only proposal, but DES wouldn't approve this contract and therefore they needed to re-do the RFP. This has been very time consuming. The hope is that when this contract is completed, DES will return this authority back to WAC. Alan appreciates the Board's efforts. The Committee has been changed to include Travis Meacham from the Turfgrass Seed Commission. Gary Larsen, Gary Johnson and Rebecca will remain on the Committee.

Labor-What was the labor supply like for the 2021 harvest?

Overall, the growers were short on labor, both in the field and in packing sheds. Some fields weren't harvested and packing lines were shortened. There was also an issue of the quality of the cutters, as well as having to retrain new cutters that were sent by a contractor.

What factors influenced price/demand in the 2021 season.

This season was atypical. There was a lot of asparagus from Mexico and Peru throughout the season. One industry rep said Covid 19 and decisions made regarding closures effected sales, as nobody wanted to get caught with inventory during another closure. Retail promotions were staggered. Another rep said that the volume from Mexico and Peru was higher by 60-80% this year. In May of 2020, the market was good, and growers were looking to do the same this year, but last year Peru was shut out of the market. Next season, should be better without Covid but it remains to be seen if the Mexican and Peruvian markets are going to be season long. Frost and windstorms in April had a severe impact on production.

Other Business

Specialty Crop Tour - Asparagus

The WSCPR has an annual tour and this year it's in Eastern WA. The WAC has been a sponsor since 1996. Alan asked if this should come from operating expenses. Gary Larsen approved the \$500 sponsorship that they have done in the past. August 18th would be the day for highlighting asparagus fields and Alan asked for Board members to participate.

The governor will have a press conference on heat loss and disaster relief this afternoon.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

The meeting adjourned at 1:38 pm