

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



## Department of Agricultural Resources

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### Meeting Minutes Board of Agriculture Norfolk County Agricultural High School 400 Main Street, Walpole, MA 05/12/2016

**Board Members & Guests in Attendance:** Judy Leab, Chairwoman, Laura Abrams, Fred Dabney, Michael Smolak, Michelle Harvey, Donald Chase, Noli Taylor, Alison Carr, Lucinda Williams, Lydia Sisson and Laura Spienza-Grabski via remote participation. From MDAR: John Lebeaux, Commissioner; Jason Wentworth, Assistant Commissioner; Tara Zadeh, General Counsel and Alisha Bouchard, Chief of Staff.

- 1. Call to Order & Introductions:** Chairwoman Leab called the meeting to order at 10:05AM. After introductions the Chairwoman acknowledged board member Laura Spienza-Grabski was participating remotely via phone. In accordance with the Open Meeting Law the Chairwoman employed remote participation with all votes to be taken via roll call.
- 2. Minutes Summary:** The Board considered for approval the meeting minutes of 12/02/2015.  
**Action Taken:** Donald Chase made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Michelle Harvey and the minutes were unanimously voted for approval by a roll call vote.
- 3. AG Board Chair Report:** Chairwoman Leab distributed to the Board a copy MGL Chapter 20 along with print outs from MDAR's website of the Board of Agriculture and the History of the MDAR. The Chairwoman stated that the Board should be more proactive versus reactive in its role. **Action Taken:** None.
- 4. Appointment of Director:** The Board considered the Commissioner's nomination for the appointment of Taryn LaScola as the new Director for the Division of Crop and Pest Services. The Commissioner provided the Board background the position and its vacancy through the Early Retirement Incentive Program whereby the former Director Lee Corte-Real retired. Further information on the hiring process to backfill the position was provided which resulted in the interview panel's recommendations to hire Taryn. The Commissioner noted that Taryn's resume was provided to the Board and that she was appointed as Acting Director pending the Board's approval of appointment as Director. Following the Board discussed the hiring process and applicants. Taryn then provided the Board an overview of her background and experience and further discussion ensued. **Action Taken:** Donald Chase made a motion to approve Taryn LaScola for the position of Director. The motion was seconded by Michelle Harvey and the appointment of Taryn LaScola was unanimously voted for approval by a roll call vote.
- 5. Commissioner's Report:** The Commissioner apologized to the Board for not having available additional handouts of this report due to computer issues at the Department.
  - a. Agency goals, mission and priorities.** Commissioner Lebeaux explained to the Board MDAR's objective to develop a strategic plan to provide the agency tools to accomplish goals by aligning interconnected priorities such as MDAR's mission with the Governor's 2016 Capital Investment

Goals and the Secretariat's vision for agency's priorities within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA). The Commissioner stated in brief the Department's mission of "helping keep the MA food supply safe and secure" and "working to keep MA agriculture economically and environmentally sound." Next, Commissioner Lebeaux stated the below nine goals and priorities of the Department many of which are built into MDAR's various Divisions, programs, grants, outreach and regulatory services.

MDAR Goals and Priorities:

1. To protect the public's health and safety by safeguarding and enhancing the local food supply and through the promotion of food safety practices.
2. Ensure long-term viability of agriculture through economic development and environmental sustainability.
3. To foster growth in agricultural markets and promote greater access to healthy, local food.
4. To support agricultural industries through strategic investments.
5. To promote the preservation of farmland and environmental stewardship.
6. To encourage innovations in farming through investments in technology and alternative energy.
7. To ensure the health and safety of domestic animals.
8. To regulate pesticides for public and environmental health and to prevent the spread of invasive species.
9. To build partnerships and leverage resources among the private sector, non-profits and government to encourage collaboration.

The Board discussed that perhaps it may be able to support the Department externally in reaching its goals and that the Department could guide where the Board could use help in these areas. The Commissioner noted that MDAR will distribute the above goals and priorities to the Board and indicate areas the Department already does and which Divisions work in these areas. Board members further discussed ways to support the Department including support of funding and being the Department's eyes and ears as to what Board members are hearing in the industry and agricultural community.

A long discussion of the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program then ensued. Board members noted that they hear confusion in the Ag community about the program. The Commissioner stated that there is a lot of misunderstanding about the APR program and that MDAR has and has developed an APR201 Presentation that can be provided to the Board and that this perhaps would help. The Commissioner further stated that MDAR firmly believes the more people we can educate the better. The Board decided to put the APR2.0 Presentation on the next Board agenda. **Action Taken:** None.

**b. FY2017 House Ways & Means Budget Development.** The Commissioner provided the Board the following report on the HWM FY17 budget released in April for MDAR's proposed state funding.

Administration Account (2511-0100): The House funded the MDAR Administration Account at \$5,729,746 including \$640,000 in earmarks. When earmarks and programmatic funding are excluded from both the House budget and the Governor's H2 budget proposal, the House budget provides 11.1% more in operational funds to MDAR. However, a similar comparison of the House budget to the agency's FY16 GAA approved budget reveals a 2.1% decrease in operational funds. FY17 House Budget earmarks include:

Buy Local	\$300K
SRB Mosquito Control	\$200K
Apiary Program	\$ 90K
New Bedford City Fruit Initiative	\$ 50K

Supplemental Food Account (2511-0105): The FY17 House Budget increases the Emergency Supplemental Food Account by \$665,000 above the Governor's H2 budget proposal to a total of \$17,665,000. The \$665,000 increase is comprised of \$500K in additional funding to the Emergency Food Assistance program and \$165K in earmarks.

The House budget earmarks are as follows:

Cambridge Weekend Backpack Program	\$110K
Spanish American Center	\$ 30K
Food for the World	\$ 25K

Integrated Pest Management Account (2511-3002): The FY17 House Budget level funded the IPM account at the same level as the Governor's H2 proposal and the FY16 GAA (\$57,553)

Assistant Commissioner Wentworth noted the next step in the budget process was for the Senate's version of the budget to be released next week along with any Senate amendments. Following the Conference Committee will reconcile differences between the budgets before sending to the Governor. **Action Taken:** None.

**c. FY2016 Grant Projects and FY2017 RFRs:** The Commissioner passed around a hard copy document summarizing FY16 grant projects funded this fiscal year. The spreadsheet listed grants and included the farms, locations, projects and award amounts. An electronic version of the grants projects listing will be distributed to the Board.

**FY2017 Open Grant RFRs:** The Commissioner reported to the Board the Division of Agricultural Conservation and Technical Assistance Grant Programs RFRs are posted for FY2017. The open grant programs RFRs are as follows:

**FY16 - NEW APR Grant Program: Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs**

**(SARA):** The Department invites responses from Massachusetts farmers who own or operate farm land placed under the Agricultural Preservation Restriction ("APR") Program and who wish to participate in the Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs Program ("Program") to improve the overall utilization of APR land resources for commercial agriculture. Funding up to \$25,000 must be used primarily for identified improvements that will help restore or enhance the protected resources, or ameliorate land control or use issues on APR farm property. Eligible uses of funds include costs to reclaim inactive fields to active cropland use such as; clearing vegetation, applying herbicides, fertilizer, lime, or other soil amendments, reseeding hay fields, costs for equipment rental, custom work, contractors, and approved materials and equipment to complete a project as cost effectively as possible. Funding may also be used to restore farm resources that have been negatively impacted by flooding, erosion, storms, tornadoes and other natural disasters, such as clean up, hiring contractors, or renting equipment, purchasing materials, and other crop land restoration costs. Funding may also be provided for surveying costs as identified above. The deadline for applications is Friday, May 13, 2016 and all projects must be completed by June 30, 2016. Find the application at this page: [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/sara.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/sara.html)

**Ag-Energy Grant (Ag-Energy):** The purpose of the MDAR's Ag-Energy Grant is to assist agricultural operations in an effort to improve energy efficiency and to facilitate adoption of alternative clean energy technologies in order that they can become more sustainable and the Commonwealth can maximize the environmental and economic benefits from these technologies. Reimbursement grants of up to \$30,000 will be awarded on a competitive basis. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. Ag-Energy Grant applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html).

**NEW\_Ag-Energy Special Projects Grant:** The purpose of the Ag-Energy Special Projects Grant is to provide funding for agricultural energy projects that would typically require higher capital cost but potentially yield greater savings and/or positive agricultural impacts in an effort to improve the farm's energy efficiency and to facilitate adoption of less conventional, alternative clean energy technology applications. By implementing these projects, the agricultural operation will demonstrate novel ideas that will help farms become more sustainable while contributing to the goals of: the MA Food Systems Plan; MA Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Implementation; and the MA Global Warming Solutions Act; and to advance technologies that can be replicated at other agricultural operations in Massachusetts. AgEnergy Special Projects is a competitive, reimbursement grant program that funds specifically specified project categories up to varying amounts according to the project category. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The RFR release date and deadline for applications still to be determined. Ag-Energy Special Project Grant applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/ag-energy.html)

**Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP):** The purpose of AEEP is to support agricultural operations that are looking to install conservation practices that prevent direct impacts on water quality, ensure efficient use of water, as well as address impacts on air quality. By providing reimbursement directly to agricultural operations that implement eligible projects that prevent, reduce or eliminate environmental impacts, the program achieves its purpose and goals of minimizing environmental impacts from these operations for the benefit of the Commonwealth. AEEP is a competitive, re-imbursement grant program that funds materials and labor up to \$25,000 or 85% of project costs. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AEEP grant applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aEEP.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aEEP.html).

**Agricultural Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP):** The purpose of AFSIP is to support agricultural operations that are looking to upgrade food safety practices within their operation. By enhancing food safety measures these operations are able to maintain or increase their market access while working towards minimizing the risk of microbial contamination and food-borne illnesses. AFSIP is a competitive, re-imbursement grant program that funds projects up to \$20,000 or 75% of project costs. All projects must be completed by June 30, 2017. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AFSIP grant applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/afsip.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/afsip.html).

**APR Improvement Program (AIP) – for APR farms:** The APR Improvement Program (AIP) helps sustain active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. AIP provides technical assistance and business analysis to improve farm productivity and profitability of APR farms selected to participate in the program. Grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 may be available on a reimbursement basis to implement identified on-farm infrastructure improvements. AIP funds are used primarily for capital improvements, such as constructing or repairing barns, farm stands, livestock housing, or processing facilities; or land management, such as reseeding hay fields, pasture improvements, fencing, or establishing perennial crops. The deadline for submitting applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. AIP applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aip.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/aip.html).

**Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP):** This popular business planning and technical assistance program provides management advice and grants from \$25,000 up to \$100,000 to implement farm growth and sustainability strategies. Farm operators not only receive upfront cash awards for signing a 5 or 10 year Agricultural Covenant, but also receive valuable consultations and visits from a team of experts to discuss farm production and

management, marketing, and business planning. Typical uses of funds from the Farm Viability Program include building or repairing farm structures, modernizing field equipment, purchasing delivery vehicles and tractors, and improving retail marketing structures or food processing capacity. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, June 8, 2016. FVEP applications are available at [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/fvvp.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/fvvp.html).

**Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) - Grant Program for Beginning Farmers in MA:** The Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) Program helps with business improvement on new farms. MEGA provides technical assistance and business planning help, and then provides funds for farm improvement strategies. Grants of up to \$10,000 are available from this Program on a one to one cash-matching basis. It is the objective of the MEGA Program to assist beginning farmers in their first through fifth year of business who aspire to develop their farms into commercially viable operations. Funds are typically used for equipment, infrastructure or other capital improvements needed to implement strategies recommended through the business planning process. MEGA applications are available at: [www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/mega.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/about/divisions/mega.html).

**Rollover Protective Structure (ROPS) Rebate Program (Ongoing):** The ROPS program will rebate 70% of the cost of purchasing and installing the Rollover Protective Structure (up to \$865 maximum rebate). Rebate funds are good towards the price of the ROPS kit (roll bar and seatbelt), shipping charges, tax, professional installation costs, if they so choose, a sun canopy if they so desire and purchase and install it at the same time they do the roll bar. All participants must apply on-line at [www.ropsr4u.com](http://www.ropsr4u.com) or by calling the ROPS hotline (1-877-ROPS-R4U or 1-877-767-7748).

**Urban Agriculture Grant:** This program will provide grant awards in the range of \$5,000 to \$40,000 (but may be exceeded at the discretion of the Department) for urban agriculture projects. Funding will also be available for land acquisition proposals; matching grants for land acquisition are up to \$75,000. The RFR is available at: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/urban-agriculture-program.html>  
The Board briefly discussed MDAR's grant programs.

**Action Taken:** None.

- d. **Legislative Updates:** Assistant Commissioner Wentworth reported to the Board the status on various pieces of legislation filed through the budget amendment process. Jason also updated the Omnibus Bill. **Action Taken:** None.
- e. **Food Systems Plan:** The Commissioner updated the Board on the status of the Plan and the Food Policy Council (FPC). After noting that the FPC adopted the Plan in December the Commissioner reported that MDAR developed and provided a template for FPC members to develop their own tiered priorities and action items of recommendations from the Food Systems Plan.

*At this time, the Board moved on to agenda item #6.*

- 6. **Ag Board By-Law Changes:** The Board reviewed and briefly discussed the by-laws; members suggested minor changes. **Action Taken:** Michael Smolak made a motion to approve the by-laws with amended changes. The motion was seconded by Donald Chase. Discussion: Member Laura Sapienza-Grabski stated that she thought there were issues with how the by-laws are structured and suggested re-numbering Section 1 to include the purpose of the board. Chairwoman Leab said she sees the by-laws as how the Board functions not what our purpose is. **Action Taken:** Michael Smolak restated his motion to approve the by-laws with amended changes. The motion was

seconded by Donald Chase. The motion to approve the by-laws with amended changes was unanimously voted for approval by a roll call vote.

*At this time, the Board moved on to agenda item #10 as Board members needed to leave the meeting and a quorum would leave the room.*

**10.Date, Time and Location of Next Meeting:** The Board decided to meet the every other month on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month. The next meeting will take place on Thursday, June 9<sup>th</sup> at Michael Smolak's farm in North Andover. Following the next two meeting dates of the Board are as follows:

- August 11<sup>th</sup> with a planned meeting location at Tower Hill Botanical Gardens.
- September 22<sup>nd</sup> at the BigE in West Springfield.

**11.Adjournment: Action Taken:** Laura Abrams made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Fred Dabney. The Board voted by a roll call vote unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 12:25pm.