

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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MEETING MINUTES
MASSACHUSETTS AGRITOURISM STUDY COMMISSION

Monday August 23, 2021
Via Zoom

Board Members in Attendance: Chair John Lebeaux, Erin Williams, Senator Edward Kennedy, Katelyn Parsons on behalf of Brad Mitchell, Derek Dunlea on behalf of Rep. Fiola, Karen Schwalbe, Michael Moore

Absent: Rep. Dykema, Sen. Rausch, Keiko Orrall, Nathan L'Etoile

Also in Attendance: Derek Silver on behalf of Sen. Gobi, Sen. Gobi, Amy Parker

MDAR Staff in attendance: Christine Smith, Ashley Randle, Phu Mai, Alisha Bouchard

1. Call to Order: The meeting started at 1:05 pm, with full remote participation.

2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting on July 12, 2021.

Sen. Kennedy made a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting, which was seconded by Karen Schwalbe. The vote to approve the minutes was unanimous.

3. Industry Updates.

Karen Schwalbe reported that the Barnstable County Fair had their best year ever. There have also been many other events on the Cape that have been well attended. Marshfield Fair just started this past weekend. Also, Karen noted that rain has been impacting events. SEMAP has decided to remain remote for all meetings for the rest of the year.

Chair Lebeaux noted that MDAR has attended several fairs over the past couple of weeks. Reports are that hot weather and also rain/tropical storms had impacted fairs.

4. Old Business

None.

5. New Business

a. Review/Update of Agritourism Study Commission Tour on 8/16

Ashley Randle reported on the tour. She reported that it was a fruitful conversation regarding collaborative farming. Michael Sabatini hosted the group. He owns a farm and also hosts weddings on the farm and tries to work mostly with local farmers. He also leases out fields to local farmers and sources the items grown to use in the weddings. She noted that the current regulations do not account for lessees and what they grow on the location vs. owner's production on the farm.

Derek Dunlea reported that the tour was very beneficial in knowing the issues they are bringing up in the Commission impacts the constituents on the ground.

Erin Williams added that it was interesting to see how other operations work and to see their creativity and collaboration.

Ashley Randle added that Phu Mai would be assisting with final report and would be including photos, case studies and reports from the tours in the final report.

Chair Lebeaux was not able to attend but was happy to hear that Mr. Sabatini has a successful operation on his farm as he was dealing with some issues when he was getting it up and running.

Sen Kennedy noted that one of the solutions that Mr. Sabatini had to address with the municipal issues was to go all electric, which was unique. He noted that the current legislation pending did not include weddings in its definition and wondered if they should include that in the definitions. He noted that the legislation hearings for S. 2245 should be heard in late September or early October.

b. Tour Locations and Dates

Chair Lebeaux stated that they hoped to schedule a tour at Carlson Orchards early in September. He said no others were scheduled but suggested that October might be a good time to tour a cranberry farm and asked Erin Williams to assist in scheduling.

c. Agricultural Fairs

Chair Lebeaux reported that there are a wide variety of fairs in the Commonwealth, with different business models. He noted that some are more secure than others financially but even some of the big ones used their reserves from 2019 because there were no fairs in 2020 and are low on funding and are facing other issues like volunteer shortages. There used to be funding through MDAR in the past for items like prize money but there is no financial support provided at this time. He stated that fairs need to be a component of the report, including both the cultural and agricultural heritage but also the economic spinoff/benefit from the fairs. Fairs can also introduce agriculture to the general public.

Erin noted that there had been a privately sponsored Cranberry Festival, much like a fair, that has decided not to go forward due to many of the issues that Chair Lebeaux mentioned.

Ashley Randle stated that the Department is working with the fairs to determine what their financials look like at the end of fair season and that we hope to use that information to include in the final report what the challenges are financially.

Chair Lebeaux noted that operating budgets are at risk as well as capital budgets. He noted that support of capital budgets would be helpful but that would leave still an issue with operating budgets.

Sen. Kennedy expressed an interest in receiving the financial information on fairs.

d. Final Report Discussion/Assignments

Chair Lebeaux noted that the deadline for a final report is approaching, noting that subcommittee meetings have been difficult to schedule. He suggested that members could take on topics to be responsible for in the final report. He asked Katelyn Parsons to ask Brad Mitchell to provide some rough draft language as to zoning before the September meeting.

Chair Lebeaux asked Michael Moore if he could provide some language regarding cottage foods and boards of health related matters.

Erin Mitchell was asked if she could provide some case study information for what she does on her cranberry farm.

Nathan L'Etoile will be asked to put information together regarding farm spirits – brewing, distilling, winery.

Karen Schwalbe was asked to provide details regarding promotion and marketing end of agritourism, both on the Buy Local side and also on agricultural fairs.

Keiko Orrall could provide information as to where Agritourism fits in the Travel and Tourism area.

Chair Lebeaux stated that MDAR could probably assist in providing information in the report regarding agricultural fairs as they are a key component of agritourism.

Regarding legislation, he asked the legislative teams to provide a summary of pending legislation and also, should the development of the report bring out a need for additional legislation, he asked if the legislative teams could assist with that.

6. Next Meeting

Chair Lebeaux noted September 27 at 1 pm for the next meeting date.

7. Adjournment

Sen Kennedy made a motion for a vote to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Karen Schwalbe. The vote to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting was adjourned at 1:45 pm.