

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, September 27, 2021  
Via Zoom

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chair John Lebeaux, Dominik Lay on behalf of Senator Edward Kennedy, Brad Mitchell, Michael Moore, Nathan L'Etoile, Keiko Orrall, Karen Schwalbe (arrived late), Derek Dunlea on behalf of Rep Fiola (arrived late)

**Absent:** Rep. Dykema, Sen. Rausch, Rep. Fiola, Erin Williams

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

**MDAR Staff in attendance:** Christine Smith, Phu Mai, Tina Smith, Delia Delongchamp

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 August 23, 2021.**

Motion made by Michael Moore, seconded by Nathan L'Etoile. Motion passed with two abstentions (Brad Mitchell and Keiko Orrall).

3. **Industry Updates.**

Brad Mitchell reported that PYO was going very well with high attendance being reported at PYO farms.

Chair Lebeaux reported that the cranberry operations were experiencing some issues with flooding.

Keiko Orrall reported on Massachusetts Day at the Big E, with the Governor, Lt. Governor, Travel and Tourism in attendance, along with MDAR and DCR. She reported that the building now has a people counter so that there was a count of how many people were in the building, and that the vendors were spread out and it felt safe. Keiko Orrall complimented Phu Mai and Mary Jordan and the rest of the MDAR staff for doing a great job.

Chair Lebeaux reported that the Big E opened on Friday September 17 and that the West Springfield Board of Health required masks for indoor spaces. There was a lot of cooperation from staff and volunteers but there were some issues with attendees, especially

during the evening. Chair Lebeaux also reported that the staff at the Massachusetts Building do have masks on hand to provide for people who forgot to bring them. Big E was reporting that some attendance was better than 2019 and some worse than 2019 but overall, it is trending positively. Chair Lebeaux reported that the NY State Fair was off this year in terms of attendance and the Big E expected similar results as NY; however, it appears that it performed better than the NY State Fair. It appears some attendees may have chosen not to go inside buildings, but vendors are happy with sales from the fair. There were some staffing issues that impacted vendors.

Chair Lebeaux also reported that some other fairs in the state did cancel for this year.

Keiko Orrall reported that the Office of Travel and Tourism will be offering additional grants relating to agritourism, which will be available later in October. She also stated that as you enter the Mass building, there is a new kiosk built by MassCor.

#### **4. Old Business**

None.

#### **5. New Business**

##### **a. Review/Update of Agritourism Study Commission Tour at Carlson Orchards**

Chair Lebeaux reported that there was a tour and discussion at Carlson Orchards a few weeks ago by the Commission and some MDAR staff. He reported that Mr. Carlson expressed some issues he had with expanding of facility for agritourism activities and a major issue was that in the middle of the process, after permits were issued, there was a change in interpretation by the building inspector as to what was needed in terms of fire safety, which added financial and timing burdens. Mr. Carlson felt that this was a detriment to agritourism.

Brad Mitchell stated that Carlson's issue with the building code was similar to what other farms were seeing. He reported that there have been some budget cuts to BBRS leaving a gap in the policy side of things.

Keiko Orrall asked what the solution would be.

Brad Mitchell felt that they needed some legislative interest to perhaps get legislative relief. He suggested funding from BBRS would also help. Brad reported that other states were not requiring the same things as were being required here and goes beyond agritourism.

Chair Lebeaux stated that they were continuing to engage with the appropriate Commonwealth personnel on this issue and hopes there is some direct engagement with stakeholders.

##### **b. Final Report Assignment Updates and Discussion**

Chair Lebeaux reminded attendees that this was discussed at the last meeting and that the final report is nearing its due date. MDAR would hope to get

reports by November 1 which would give sufficient time to put the report together. MDAR Staff Phu Mai and Myron Inglis are going to start working on the introduction and organizing the report.

Chair Lebeaux thanked Brad Mitchell for the information regarding zoning provided by Farm Bureau and noted that they were still waiting on other information. Brad Mitchell stated that the information he sent was preliminary and needed some further discussion and had sent out to Rep. Fiola and Sen. Kennedy. Commissioner noted that he would try to set up meeting for Rep. Fiola, Sen. Kennedy, Phu Mai and either Deputy Commissioner Randle or himself.

Chair Lebeaux asked the legislative delegation to put together proposed and potential legislation, noting that the only proposed legislation filed is relating to the definition of agritourism.

Chair Lebeaux reminded that Michael Moore was responsible for cottage foods and Board of Health related matters. Michael Moore reported that he had asked members of staff to reach out to Deputy Commissioner Randle.

Chair asked Nathan L'Etoile if Deputy Commissioner Randle reached out to him regarding liquor licensing. Nathan reported that he had discussed with Deputy Commissioner Randle but that he would like some additional details.

Karen Schwalbe was assigned promotion and marketing information. Karen Schwalbe asked to have a conversation as well with Deputy Commissioner Randle about details.

Director Orrall was asked to report on the intersection of agritourism with Travel and Tourism.

Chair Lebeaux asked people to reach out if they needed any assistance.

#### **c. Next Tour Location and Date**

Phu Mai from MDAR suggested that the next tour location would be on a cranberry farm and would be reaching out to Erin Williams to see if she could offer her cranberry farm later in October. Karen Schwalbe offered to find an alternative if needed.

Nathan L'Etoile offered his farm in Western Mass if another location was needed later in the year.

### **6. Next Meeting**

Chair Lebeaux noted October 18 at 1 pm for the next meeting date.

### **7. Adjournment**

Karen Schwalbe made a motion for a vote to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Brad Mitchell. The vote to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting was adjourned at 1:48 pm.