

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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JOHN LEBEAUX
Commissioner

MEETING MINUTES MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 18, 2020
10:00 AM, Via Zoom

Board Members in Attendance: Chair Abrams, Don Chase, Alison Carr, Megan Russell, Karen Schwalbe, Lisa Colby, Michael Smolak, Lydia Sisson, Fred Dabney, Lucinda Williams and Crystal Card.

1. **Start: Call to Order:** Chair Abrams called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. with full remote participation. All votes were taken via roll call.
2. **Minutes from September:** Alison Carr moved to approve the minutes of September 24, 2020 which was seconded by Chair Laura Abrams. The minutes were approved unanimously by roll call vote.
3. **Department Updates:** Commissioner Lebeaux began the program updates by stating that MDAR is working as much as possible on COVID - food security grants which have been very popular and sought after. There were over 1300 applications for the last round of grants - far more than any other program in the past. Once grants are awarded there is a contract process that must take place. Also, the MassGrown exchange has been launched, providing links to services, businesses and operations.

Ashley Randle added that MDAR committed 8 staff members to the Food Security Grant Program. Once an applicant hears they are awarded a grant, it is usually a two-week turnaround to hear about the contract. All awardees will be notified by the end of December.

Commissioner Lebeaux said they are still very involved with the food security taskforce as well.

Alison Carr asked if there has been any thought on indoor farmers markets or if they are feasible at all?

Commissioner Lebeaux and Ashley Randle answered that they have heard from some markets that were not planning on holding a winter's market and the guidance documents have not been updated to consider indoor markets. They also communicated that anyone with questions should refer to MDAR's website for the latest guidance documents.

Commissioner Lebeaux then gave staff updates; the APR program has added several new staff members. He said it has been a very busy 8 months for Human Resources. MDAR is in the process of bringing in another full time Apiary inspector.

Chair Laura Abrams asked if any MDAR staff members on the call had any other updates.

Mary Jordan from MDAR spoke about helping vendors at the Massachusetts building at the Big E. They're already planning/preparing for the September 2021 Big E in the hopes that it can take place. They developed a virtual marketplace where everyone who would have been in the Massachusetts building for the Big E could at least be found online for online purchases as well as information about vendors who cannot offer any online purchases.

Laura Abrams asked what the website/virtual marketplace was? It was put into the chat-
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-state-exposition-building-exhibitors>
September 17-October 3 are the planned dates for the 2021 Big E.

Gerry Palano then spoke about the dual-use program in the SMART Massachusetts Solar Program. The goal is to keep agricultural land open and productive and the inter-connection costs are extremely high.

Commissioner Lebeaux talked about issues with M.G.L. c. 61A and possible legislation coming in 2021.

Cullen Roberts then spoke about budget issues based on EEE response and issues with funding a study from the 21st Century Taskforce on Mosquito Control in the Commonwealth. The House also has not yet budgeted any amount to deal with the Spotted Lanternfly; the Governor's budget had \$100,000 for SLF but the House budget did not. He is hopeful it will be restored.

Commissioner Lebeaux said Phase 1 of the move to the Southboro Offices is complete. Phase 2 is tentatively planned for December 8th. An extension of the lease at 251 Causeway was negotiated to last until June 2023. He then moved on to discuss October's successful Cranberry Month. He mentioned moving to online Pesticide Exams as well as other exams the Department provides by the end of November. Massachusetts is the first state to do this and we are fielding questions from other states considering this as well.

Commissioner Lebeaux then discussed the Spotted Lanternfly and the threat to agriculture it poses as well as its threat as a nuisance. Right now, states are on their own with this until USDA chooses to classify it as they did the Asian Long-Horned Beetle.

Alison Carr asked if there is any cross-state collaboration with states like Pennsylvania in handling the Spotted Lanternfly?

Commissioner Lebeaux said there is no formal inter-agency action, but that they have an excellent relationship with other state's departments of AG so they feel confident they'll hear any updates on the SLF quickly from other states. He informed the Board about the upcoming December 9th public hearing on the proposed Apiary regulations, and the December 10th hearing on the proposed NEONIC study. He discussed the Agritourism commission that he chairs, as well as the 21st Century taskforce on Mosquito Control in the Commonwealth.

Michael Smolak Jr. asked if the links to the December 9th and 10th public hearings were available, and he was told they would be sent out.

Fred Dabney asked if there were any updates on the shellfish issue from Scott Soares; Scott Soares talked about how the industry is struggling because of the lack of people eating at restaurants.

Karen Schwalbe spoke about the struggle to get some winter markets set up and discussed promoting HIP, SNAP and Farmers Markets coupons in communities that need the information.

Crystal Card asked about guidance or guidelines available for Christmas tree shopping and how many people are allowed inside? Commissioner Lebeaux said they would get back to her directly on that. Crystal Card then talked about beekeeping and how she has not been negatively affected by COVID.

Commissioner Lebeaux said a lot more hemp growers tested above the 0.3% THC figure than in past years.

Chair Laura Abrams asked if anyone had any new business. Commissioner Lebeaux mentioned that he has been tracking who the possible new Secretary of Agriculture at the Federal Level will be.

4. **Next Meeting and Adjournment:** Chair Laura Abrams said the next meeting will be in January, but no exact date has been yet selected. She called for a motion for adjournment. Michael Smolak made a motion which was seconded by Fred Dabney. The vote to adjourn was unanimous.