

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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**MEETING MINUTES**  
**MASSACHUSETTS AGRICULTURAL TOURISM STUDY**  
**COMMISSION**

**Monday, September 14, 2020**  
**Via Zoom**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chair John Lebeaux, Senator Anne Gobi Designee: Yael Langer, Representative Paul McMurtry Designee: Peter Morse, Keiko Orrall, Brad Mitchell, Erin Williams, Karen Schwalbe, Michael Moore, and Senator Edward Kennedy

**Absent:** Nathan L'Etoile, Representative Smitty Pignatelli

**MDAR Staff in attendance:** Ashley Randle, Christine Smith, William Kenefake, Alisha Bouchard, Mary Jordan, Lauren Oliveira, Myron Inglis

**1. Call to Order:** The meeting started at 1:04 pm, with full remote participation.

**2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting on August 10, 2020.**

Brad Mitchell made a motion, seconded by Karen Schwalbe, to approve the minutes from the last meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

**3. Industry Updates.**

Chair Lebeaux asked Karen Schwalbe if she had anything to share on agritourism and COVID based on her conversations with farmers.

Ms. Schwalbe stated that there is concern from farmers over how to promote their businesses based on how things may change with the number of people on the farm or there for events, which are concerns for them. The biggest concern is the pandemic and how to adapt to everything that is changing. Apple picking places are having issues about keeping people safely spaced when the pick your own tree assigned is not yet ripe. There are also issues with drought and size of fruit such as pumpkins.

Mr. Mitchell said from what he is hearing they're doing well because people generally want to get out of the house, but there have been issues where different boards of health in different towns are making rules; some places have different rules which can be confusing for the public.

Chair Lebeaux said that MDAR has run into a number of situations with different boards of health in different towns having different rules and said he was not sure if there was an easy fix for that. He then invited Keiko Orrall to speak.

Ms. Orrall said their “My Local MA” campaign will run from the tax-free weekend through the end of September. The website ( [www.findmylocalma.com](http://www.findmylocalma.com) ) has tools for local businesses to download to encourage MA residents buying local. There is a social media campaign to promote branding - #MyLocalMA. The website also connects to regional tourism councils. This campaign relates to agritourism by us working with an ad agency reaching out to regional tourism councils reaching out to local farms encouraging them to use that hashtag. Travel and Tourism is not endorsing individual businesses but are endorsing a movement. The My Local MA campaign had over 2 million impressions on social media the first week so it is getting good reviews. They are looking forward to seeing how it can help grow agritourism in the state. They are hoping for 87 million impressions/engagements by the end of the campaign, - digital, radio, TV. The touchpoints are the regional tourism councils which are divided into 16 districts. Please reach out to them or the regional tourism councils. The message is Buy Local and Support MA.

Ms. Orrall said they are including and need MDAR’s help and comments and are working with MDOT as well and appreciate help and suggestions from MDAR.

Chair Lebeaux thanked her and said it has been a very impressive campaign. Ms. Orrall said they are asking all MA departments and businesses to buy into the idea that our local MA businesses are the heart of our economy.

Chair Lebeaux thanked her and introduced Erin Williams to talk about her business and operation as we come into cranberry harvest season.

Ms. Williams said they have seen a huge pent up demand for cranberry bog tours here in the Commonwealth. Back in July they started selling reservations in advance for tours and they are the only ones open as far as she knows. Weddings and large food group gatherings have been curtailed due to COVID. Small groups under the size of 15 or 10 and small group and family tours are what they have been doing. They are looking into extending their tour season a little longer than normal into Thanksgiving season due to demand.

Chair Lebeaux said a lot of cranberry growers do some sort of agritourism around harvest time. He asked how much of a grower’s business agritourism could be.

Ms. Williams said she knows some cranberry growers who have been doing smaller low touch tours at different price points than them. Over the last 10-15 years fees have shifted. Many consumers are willing to pay for the experience and the “Instagram photo”. She felt if they could increase tours it could have a big impact on business.

Chair Lebeaux said the Commission may want to explore and understand the impact of agritourism on the Commonwealth as we do not have much data.

Ms. Williams said the conversations you will have with the next generation could be shifting depending on what diversification may look like.

Chair Lebeaux asked the Commission members if they had anything else to add.

#### **4. Final Report discussion.**

There was a discussion about format and content of the final report. Chair Lebeaux stated that the report that came out of the Cranberry Revitalization Task Force was well done and could be a model for the Commission's final report. It had goals for what the legislative, executive, and business side could all do.

There was a discussion of ideas of what might be needed in the report. Chair Lebeaux asked about a definition of Agritourism.

Mr. Mitchell stated that he thinks we should keep things general and not too specific. The Commission could look to where agriculture is used in other bylaws, for example.

Ms. Schwalbe said on the definition of agritourism can be difficult as each town can define and then we have too many standards.

Mr. Mitchell said we have so many statutes that potentially relate to this such as nuisance laws, land use and zoning so it can get complicated.

Ms. Schwalbe brought up municipal bylaws and said she does not know if a full review is necessary in the study, but a lot of municipalities have bylaws that restrict agritourism.

Mr. Mitchell said that if we do the state laws correctly they will largely preempt municipal laws. They could address this by looking at municipal laws so they can fix it by state law.

Chair Lebeaux asked if anyone had ideas on organization of the final report document.

Ms. Orrall answered that she thought organizing by how it relates to the law would make sense.

Chair Lebeaux said to the point Ms. Schwalbe raised, he was not sure if reverse engineering is the concept, but it would be helpful to understand the pain points with the municipal law so the state law can then resolve those issues.

Chair Lebeaux asked people for any other ideas.

Ms. Schwalbe answered grants supporting agritourism.

Ms. Orrall said efforts related to marketing.

Mr. Mitchell said issues with Liquor licenses.

Chair Lebeaux asked if there is any association related to agritourism.

Ms. Williams answered that she just found in the last 12 months NAFTAMA- which is private and has some state partners. They host a national conference every year.

Chair Lebeaux asked if there were any at the state level.

Ms. Williams said she was not aware of any associations at the state level.

Mr. Mitchell said he doesn't know of any state level association either.

Sen. Kennedy asked if anyone had looked into what California has done. He said they have a pretty good industry already in the agritourism realm.

Chair Lebeaux said we do work with California on some things already.

Ms. Randle stated that there was a video that the Ohio State Ag extension did that was good, but as for California, it varies greatly due to land access, topography, etc. so things vary greatly east to west coast but that definitely looking at other states is helpful.

Chair Lebeaux said at MDAR they internally talk about agritourism. He noted that associations usually start due to problems so I guess pre-COVID they did not have anything that banded them together. The situation in MA has been workable for lack of a better word. He stated that another thing we need to look at is what are the inherent challenges to agritourism. One example is APR Farms. The APR Program focuses on soil protection as a main component and it can be at odds with agritourism activities.

Mr. Mitchell stated that the APR program should be a component of the report so that people know the difference between different farms. He said there is also the concern that the activity becomes ancillary to farming.

Chair Lebeaux said it is unfortunate, MDAR does a lot of great things promoting our farms and agritourism, but how the APR program is designed it sometimes comes into conflict with what the farmer wants to do. If this body sees fit to call out the APR program in some respects then that is what we are supposed to do. He said it is an important area to examine.

Chair Lebeaux asked members to scan the cranberry report before the next meeting to see if they liked that format.

## **5. New Business**

Chair Lebeaux asked if there was any new business anyone wanted to bring up, and no business was brought.

## **6. Scheduling Next Meeting**

Chair Lebeaux said there is no good way to schedule meetings but maybe a certain date and time every month, understanding individual times may not work out. Today is Monday and we met at 1:00 p.m. on the second Monday of the month. He asked if the second or third Monday in every month would be okay. The third Monday is the 19<sup>th</sup> in October. Hearing no objections, the next meeting was scheduled for October 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 P.M. Meetings will then be the third Monday of the month at 1:00 pm. going forward.

Sen. Kennedy asked will it be the same zoom link every meeting.

Ms. Schwalbe said there is a way to make it a recurrent link.

Chair Lebeaux said they would look into using the same link for each meeting.

## **7. Adjournment**

Chair Lebeaux called for a vote to adjourn.

Ms. Schwalbe made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Mitchell seconded. It was voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 1:47 p.m.