

Concord Agriculture Committee
Thursday, January 10, 2019 7:00 pm
Assessor's Office, 24 Court Lane

Present:

Brian Cramer, member
Happy Goethert, chair
Lise Holdorf, clerk
Steve Verrill, member
Emily Wheeler, member
Fan Watkinson, Gaining Ground
Melissa Maxwell, Barrett's Mill Farm

Meeting called to order at 7:03

Approve Minutes

December 2018 minutes were approved as amended.

News and announcements

Happy shared some news from Lancaster Ag. The Massachusetts Farm Bureau chose Verrill Farm as one of their Horse Farms of Distinction. Also, 23 grants were awarded to Massachusetts farmers for the implementation of conservation practices. There are also several upcoming events of interest to farmers. MAGIC (Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination) is hosting a forum on Tuesday January 29th in Boxborough about agricultural exemptions for zoning laws and Board of Health oversight. The SEMAP annual Ag & Food Conference in Dighton, MA is all day Feb 24th. On March 7th 5-7pm, MDAR (Mass Department of Agricultural Resources) is hosting a talk in Leominster about farm succession planning.

Concord Seed Lending Library founder Enid Boasberg approached Emily about recruiting a farmer to speak at their annual kick-off event on March 9th, 2:00-3:30 pm. Brian and Ben Elliot have both spoken at past opening events for the Seed Lending Library. They are also looking for farmers to speak to gardeners January 26th 2-3:30PM as well as March 23rd. Emily would like to recruit Ricky Marshall to speak at one of the dates. Melissa Maxwell from Barrett's Mill Farm agreed to speak on March 23rd. Fan Watkinson suggested approaching some of the kitchen gardeners who hosted tours in the past to speak at one of the dates, as a gardener might have a perspective that would be relevant to the likely audience. Lise isn't available for January 26th, but will be speaking to inmates at MCI Concord about farming as a career.

Brian attended the most recent Pollinator Committee meeting. They are applying to get an extension of the charge of the committee. With Town Meeting coming up, the original idea was to get a proposal ready for Town meeting, but some of the things they thought about proposing are already done. For instance, the Town already doesn't use neonicotinoids on Town-owned lands. Sarah Grimwood is the chair of the committee. Another topic the Committee has discussed is the problem of transparency in pesticide usage. There isn't an easily accessible and searchable database for citizens who want to learn what pesticides are being used around them. You have to go to MDAR's office to look at paper records of individuals with pesticide applicator licenses. This makes it difficult to find out what landscapers are using. Brian shared that two people from the committee went to MDAR to look at the records. Many people in Concord hire landscapers, so one potential project for the pollinator Committee could be to put together an informational pamphlet with sample questions to ask your landscapers, as well as suggestions of ways homeowners can promote pollinator habitats.

Steve mentioned that he recently attended a Vegetable Growers meeting where they discussed new varieties of cucumbers that are downy mildew resistant. They also discussed new label laws and heard a FSMA (Food Safety and Modernization Act) update. There was also discussion about dealing with negative reviews on social media. The presenter noted that it is usually important to answer negative reviews and try to appease the reviewer. The best scenario is if other customers stick up for you.

Happy shared that Jo-Ann Lovejoy is planning to step down from the Ag Committee. Emily, Brian and Steve's terms expire in 2020. Lise and Happy's terms end in 2021. Terms are 3 years and there is a limit of 2 terms, though the Town will sometimes make exceptions if the committee is short-handed. Lise asked if there was any prohibition on two representatives from the same farm serving on the committee, as Melissa would be a natural fit. Melissa and Fan have both been trying to encourage Hannah and Doug from Gaining Ground to attend some meetings, and Melissa has also been in touch with Mark, the farmer at Saltbox, about attending meetings.

Spring forum

Lise wondered if a Thursday evening would be a particularly challenging time for chefs to attend a forum. In approaching chefs members could ask for feedback about whether Thursday is too difficult. The panel discussion will center around how local chefs create seasonal menus with local produce year-round.

Everyone will report back to Happy in a week about responses from chefs. If no Concord chefs can participate, we may cast a wider net to Cambridge chefs who buy from a lot of Concord farms (like Jason Bond or Peter Davis). Emily will check in with Saltbox and try to firm up, Lise will follow up with 80 Thoreau, Steve will ask Papa Razzi and Newbury Court, Happy will talk to the Cheese Shop and will ask Jo-Ann if she has had any success contacting Woods Hill Table.

Ag Day

Most respondents to Happy's query about date didn't have a strong preference for September 7th vs September 14th. Someone suggested that garden tours could start at 2 rather than 1 so that there isn't so much overlap between the market and tours. However, it was decided that it probably wouldn't leave enough time for tours. Sunday tours are a possibility, as farm tours could be spread out earlier in the summer tied to the farm passport. The 2019 passports will be launched at the Spring Forum. Tours will be scheduled throughout the summer and people will get an extra stamp for each tour they attend.

September 14th was agreed on as the date for the market. Emily suggested checking the Town calendar to make sure there are no conflicts for that date. Stone Soup is usually 2 weeks after the market, so that would likely be scheduled for Sunday September 29th.

Passports could not only be distributed at the March event, but also at the farm stands and at town events like the July 4th picnic in the park. The longer season for a passport would give people more opportunity to visit all the farms and the earlier people visit, the more likely they are to return. Happy suggested a letter to the editor to announce the passport program and Spring Forum.

Happy also suggested inviting a "guest farmer" from Middlesex county to the market, perhaps a farmer that does something that isn't as well-represented by Concord farmers (like a livestock

farmer). Steve suggested that there are already a lot of farms in Concord and we could work on encouraging more of them to participate in the market.

Annual Report

Happy circulated a draft of the Ag Committee summary for the annual report. The draft was approved as amended.

Instagram Account

Melissa agreed to work on the Instagram account since Jo-Ann is stepping down from the committee. She will start managing the account for now, but the committee will try to rotate responsibility for posting to the account monthly.

Next meeting February 7th, 2019

Meeting adjourned at 8:48

Minutes submitted by Lise Holdorf

Minutes approved __Feb 7, 2019

C. Goethert, Ag Comm Chair_____