

Agriculture Committee meeting minutes: Thursday, March 11 2021 Via Zoom

Melissa Maxwell, Clerk – running meeting in Lise’s absence.

Joe Rogers, Associate Member

Dan Schmid, Member

Happy Goethert, Member

Liza Bemis, Member – taking notes for Melissa

Steve Verrill, Member

Terri Ackerman, Select Board

Brian Cramer, Hutchins Farm

Emily Wheeler, visitor

Grace Scimone, Scimone Farm

Chip Poutasse, Brigham Farm

Called to order 7:05

Approve previous minutes:

Liza motioned to approve February meeting minutes, Dan seconds. Minutes approved.

News about Concord Farms and Farmers:

Farms are starting to seed and get greenhouses going – lots of onions, leeks, and early greens to be transplanted.

Steve mentioned that he got a notice that some of his seeds are coming from China this year.

A discussion ensued about housing issues with Steve’s migrant labor workers. This year he is renting them apartments in Maynard for this season, but long term he may have to build new housing for workers. The issue is that the current housing is too close to the horses. If the workers lived there year-round (as Steve does) it wouldn’t be a problem, but because they are temporary it’s an issue.

Brian shared that Hutchins Farm just poured a foundation for a new shed/headhouse for a new greenhouse as part of an ongoing project to separate Hutchins Farm’s utility services from their neighbors.

Town Meeting: Article 49 Update:

Steve summarized the ruling from the state: The State Pesticide Board did go forward with restricting use of neonicotinoids to licensed pesticide applicators only, removing it from garden stores and other public access points. Further, they also will now require landscapers to get written permission from land owners before using neonicotinoids on their properties.

Melissa asked if in light of this change, should the Ag committee amend our current statement or adjust it in anyway? Currently we have not taken a position on Article 49. Part of our not taking a position was waiting for what the state was going to say.

Steve mentioned he attended a Select Board meeting and the board seemed currently split on moving this warrant forward. He spoke for himself at this meeting, and pointed out to the Select Board the difference between the amount of neonicotinoids on a treated seed vs the amount to treat a single hemlock tree. Also mentioned was that most of the research done on this issue was on older methods of use, such as powder on seeds, not the current encapsulated ones. It was asked should the Ag Committee's position be amended to recommend the warrant not be included at this year's town meeting?

Melissa asked if we could amend the statement to be positive about continued research and education, while still coming out against this warrant going forward. Dan thought it made sense to him that the experts at the state should be coming to the conclusions. Liza agreed. Brian pointed out that we need to recognize that neonicotinoids are unpopular with the public, warranted or not. Joe thought that we should have a statement to the select board since we know that if it goes up at town meeting it will likely pass. Joe brought up that in the last select board meeting Mark Hanson brought up that the town had previously said they would take steps to reduce neonicotinoid use. Brian confirmed this.

Brian mentioned that Mark Hanson called him recently about wanting the Pollinator Committee to continue going forward (they have not met this whole past year) and seems like he's mostly concerned with golf courses and other land like that.

Terri said that this warrant isn't on this Monday's Select Board meeting's agenda, but it will be coming back up soon. She encouraged us to have a statement and take a position if we want to. If the Select Board doesn't support it going to town meeting, it still could come up as a petition article.

Chip brought up that Bill Kenney uses neonicotinoid treated seeds and was worried about this impacting his leases with the town. Brian mentioned that this only applies to new leases, not renewals, so it's largely symbolic.

Brian said that there is a lot of work being done by pesticide companies to find a replacement for neonicotinoids because of how unpopular they are, but of course the question is how dangerous will those replacements be? Steve agreed.

Steve asked if we could amend the statement to suggest that seed application is exempt from this rule, and all other applications are banned? Steve noted that it's often hard to find certain seed varieties untreated. Chip wondered if our statement could be more educational about the risks of different kinds of uses of neonicotinoids – seed vs spray etc. Melissa pointed out we would have to be very careful about what is proven vs speculation if we did that. Brian further mentioned that a lot of the studies use older methods of application, so not necessarily applicable to methods people use today and would be hard to find exact science beyond speculation.

Melissa wondered how this article would hold up if new information comes out about neonicotinoids? Terri said it would need to be brought up again in town meeting to be repealed.

Brian doesn't support the article because the state pesticide board stepped in and that's the more appropriate origin of these kinds of regulations. The state's new regulations achieve much more than this article was going to do. Liza, Melissa, Dan, and Steve agreed.

Terri said she will give her report to the Select Board about this meeting, that we don't need this article because the state changed how neonicotinoids are regulated and the state may be the better regulator of this. Terri will let us know when the next Select Board meeting this will come up at is so we can have a prepared statement. Brian and Steve agreed to work on amending our current statement to reflect our position that this article should not go forward.

Spring Forum Project:

Melissa, Lise, and Emily met with Minuteman network. Phil thought of the idea of doing two shorter pieces, one now and one before Ag Day. They could have footage from all farms participating, but then focus on 3-4 of them doing a demonstration of some kind. We have 7-8 farms who want to participate, so this would split them up into two films. Emily liked this idea because it might be good for short attention spans in the digital age, the first video really being focused on "welcome to spring, and welcome to Concord". Joe has a contact who is interested in doing some drone footage to help with this project

Happy asked does this mean we are forgoing the spring forum idea? Previously we had said it was about the growing process, but the garden groups in Concord and Carlisle are already having their educational meetings, so perhaps we are too late? Should we just focus on summer/fall? Melissa didn't think we were being instructional about these demos, as it was more behind the scenes stuff at the farm, in many cases with equipment that gardeners don't have at home (tractors etc), that this was more of a mini-tour. Steve remembered that at one point we were thinking of doing public demos. Melissa thought that for filming purposes we had moved to separating the filming demos from anything open to the public, but that we could do both if farmers were interested in that.

Melissa relayed that Lise had the idea that Emily could narrate the videos as a cohesive voice, and Emily agreed. Deciding on which demos are in the first video and building the script around them is the first step.

Lise and Emily will coordinate with Phil the filming schedule, and requested that people email them what dates and times would be good for filming. Other footage of the farms can be worked in.

Happy brought up that we don't have a title for this project. "What's growing in Concord" was already taken. "Farms of Concord 2021" and "What's growing in Concord NOW" were brought up, but we can continue to work on it.

For the first video we are looking at four demonstrations:

- Saltbox Farm – Beekeeping
- Verrill Farm – Bedforming and Drip Irrigation
- Scimone Farm – Pea planting
- Brigham Farm – Planting either Beans or Corn

For the second video it would likely be:

- Farm at Walden Woods
- Hutchins Farm

- Barrett's Mill Farm
- Marshall Farm (maybe something with the chickens)

Emily will coordinate all of this with Phil. Melissa asked if we will need a subcommittee at this point? Emily thought not yet, but maybe we should discuss it at next meeting. We will need a list of people to thank on the video. Melissa will draft a list and we should all think about it.

Happy suggested we use the brochure map and farm list as a beginning or end to the video

Vaccine Update for Essential Workers:

Lise had sent out the link to sign up for pre-registration for the state mass vaccination sites. There will be other ways to get the vaccine, but you can sign up for this preregistration list and get off it if you get vaccinated elsewhere in the meantime. Steve asked if there is still a site set up at the high school. Terri said yes, but the town doesn't have any vaccinees currently. They have applied with nine other towns to be a regional site, but they don't know yet.

Appoint Committee Co-Chair:

Dan nominated Liza. Happy and Steve voted yes. Was unanimous approved.

Other Business:

Happy mentioned we should get a date locked down for Ag Day. Melissa and Emily asked which calendars do we need to check with at the town? Tentatively decided on September 11th, it's the Saturday after Labor Day. Terri said we need to email Jeremy and if he doesn't know, he will know who to ask. Melissa will email him.

More discussion ensued on if farms want to do live demos with the public in addition to the filmed ones. Emily brought up that we often do these in conjunction with Ag day if we want to wait and do something then. Steve said they will do them on their own anyway. Melissa said maybe what the Ag committee can do is promote whoever decides to do them throughout the season, by putting them on the Ag day website, or through social media promotions. Melissa will add this to next month's agenda to talk more about this.

Public Comment:

None.

Next Meeting:

Next meeting set for April 8th 2021 at 7pm.

Happy motions to adjourn, and Dan seconds. Meeting adjourned at 8:50pm