

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
HELD OCTOBER 29TH, 2024 AT 3:00 P.M.
IN THE BOARDROOM OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

PRESENT: Mr. Warren Brown – Acting Chairman
Dr. Geoff Smith – Acting Director
Ms. Julie Greaves
Ms. Suzanne Mayall
Mr. Gregory Wilson
Mr. Joey Weeks
Ms. Claire Jessey –Principal Plant Protection Officer
Ms. Wendy P Woodley – Admin. Asst.
Mr. Stewart Swanson – Consultant Agronomist (ZOOM)
Mr. Omari Dill – Trainee Agronomist
Mr. Sam Fraser-Smith

APOLOGIES: Dr. Jonathan Nisbett – Chief Veterinary Officer
Mr. Tommy Sinclair – Agriculture Officer (Vacation)
Mr. Peter Drew – Terrestrial Conservation Officer

1. Confirmation of Minutes:

The Minutes of the AUGUST 26TH, 2024 were confirmed by Julie Greaves and seconded by Gregory Wilson.

2. Matters arising from previous minutes:

- a) The Acting Chairman wanted to thank Ms. Claire Jessey, Dr. Geoff Smith and the BoA for their input in the BoA meetings.

3. Policy & Legislation:

a. Board of Agriculture – Terms of Reference:

Board members were provided with a summary of the functions of the Board of Agriculture and a copy of the Information Statement prepared for the PATI act for their awareness and review. The Board's purpose is to advise the responsible Minister on all agriculture and horticulture - related matters, ranging from commercial and dairy farming, home and community gardening to aquaculture. The BoA has no powers under the Act and functions only in an advisory capacity for the Minister.

According to the PATI statement, the functions of the BoA are:

- To consult and advise on the practice of agriculture and horticulture in Bermuda
- Promote the improvement of plants and livestock and their protection against diseases.
- Promote good practices in poultry and livestock care and management.
- Promote the prevention and control of soil erosion through the promotion of proper agricultural and horticultural practices.
- Promote the marketing of the agricultural produce of Bermuda
- Advise on the need for inquiries concerning the practice of agriculture.
- Promote the recording of statistical data and publication of reports.
- Promote the study of agriculture and dissemination of information regarding techniques of agriculture and the holding of agricultural exhibitions.

Members noted that there is less agricultural land available now but that the Board is still tasked with promoting and advising on agriculture and all aspects of growing food. Mr. Weeks noted the 'promotion of the study of agriculture' and reported that he had been tasked with the expansion of aquaponics at the Bermuda College with input from farmers and the Board. It was recommended that this be a discussion point for the next meeting.

It was noted that it was not realistic for the Minister to read the Minutes. It was suggested that a summary at the end may suffice. The Acting Chairman noted that the Chairman is supposed to set the agenda. S. Fraser-Smith commented that Board members should raise issues of concern and put them to the Chairman for inclusion on the agenda but noted that the Chairman should keep an eye on time. Any outcomes of the meetings (decisions etc.) should go from the Board to the Director to raise/share with the Minister.

- b.** The PPP Officer had previously provided the Department's position statements on organic production and organic produce. The Acting Chairman, W. Brown, said he will send the statements to the Farmers' Association and share with the Board any comments the Association made at their next meeting.

4. Farmers' Association Issues:

Agriculture Service Centre

Mr. W. Brown raised some issues regarding the Agriculture Service Centre and he stated that the DENR is not doing enough when it comes to the Agriculture Service Centre. DENR responded – see point 8 below. A BoA member said the building is no longer fit for purpose. There was some discussion on whether a new ASC was needed. Some members noted that many farmers have their own chill rooms now. W. Brown said he would solicit feedback from the Farmers' Association and report back to the Board. He stated that the request for a new ASC did not come from the farmers and was a surprise to them. O. Dill noted that it was important to think ahead to the future and what those needs might be for future farmers.

Pesticide Safety Act

The Farmers' Association asked if they could have a timeline on the Pesticide Safety Regulations under development in order to understand what is next. The PPPO noted that the Department of Health is driving the regulations' development process but she will provide the time line that DOH has proposed at the next meeting.

Feral Chickens: The farmers have reported ongoing problems with feral chickens which are causing economic losses. The farmers offered to be trained to use alphachloralose to kill the feral chickens. W. Brown stated they need a quick response for farmers and having access to the anesthetizing chemical for chicken control would help. W. Brown suggested the BoA take a vote to allow farmers access to using alphachloralose to kill the feral chickens. S. Fraser-Smith noted that no new government funds are realistically coming for chicken control. The PPPO requested that the Farmers' Association submit an official request that could be reviewed internally.

Resignation

A BoA member, farmer Mr. Gregory Wilson stated that he had some serious concerns with the Board and DENR. He referred to recent discussions of pesticides focus groups referring to the importation of pesticides and pesticide applicator training. He was concerned that the values and visions of the Board and the DENR are going in different directions than his and therefore he elected to resign from the BoA. The Acting Chairman stated that Mr. Wilson's farming philosophy was highly valued on the Board and encouraged him to change his mind. W. Brown confirmed that the focus groups were stakeholder consultations for the developing Pesticide Safety Regulations under the Pesticide Safety Act were for all pesticides, conventional and 'non-toxic/organic' and not encouragement to use conventional pesticides. Several Board members and staff also reiterated the

importance of Mr. Wilson's presence on the Board. Mr. Wilson departed the meeting.

Reduction of Red-Tape

S. Fraser-Smith asked if the DENR could look into opportunities to remove outdated items from the Agriculture Act that were no longer relevant or not enforced i.e. registering to sell seeds.

Water Rates

The Farmer's Association asked why government water was so slow to process applications? The Director asked if he could be cc'd on all requests for updates on outstanding applications so he could progress them if he was able.

Importation of Seed Potatoes and Strawberry Plants

The Farmers' Association asked for any updates. The PPPO reported that both are underway and in progress. She also noted that the Plant Protection Section is evaluating and researching established and internationally recognized certification systems in an effort to ensure that the cleanest stock is imported that is pathogen free and already in a testing programme under the supervision of other jurisdictions. Certified seed potatoes are already accepted.

5. Consultant Agronomist report

The Consultant Agronomist, Mr. Stewart Swanson, reported that he will be on the island from December 9th to the 18th 2024. Mr. Swanson asked if there were any comments or questions on the summer newsletter. He noted that he is trying to locate sources of different avocado varieties in Bermuda and had visited trees that the late former Director Ed Manuel had planted. He would report any information in the next newsletter. He also suggested the possibility of exploring drone pesticide application in Bermuda because the fields are small and suggested this could reduce overall pesticide use as the amount applied would be much less than a conventional application. There was some discussion regarding no-till vegetable production and also general discussion on the global prevalence of some disease pathogens.

6. Plant Protection Lab update:

Nothing additional to report as issues were addressed earlier in the meeting.

7. Agricultural Service Centre

The Trainee Agronomist, Mr. Omari Dill gave an update on the issues that are currently being worked on at the Agricultural Service Centre:

Underway:

1. The chemical room has been cleaned out and all outdated chemicals removed by hazardous waste.

2. A new fan has been secured for the chemical room and is scheduled to be installed.
3. Works and Engineering has been contacted to schedule to paint the inside and outside of the facility.
4. Dumped trash outside the ASC was removed as well as the old shelving.
5. New shelving for chemical room has been ordered.
6. Roller doors for the chemical room have been ordered.
7. The asbestos roof has been assessed and determined to be safe.
8. New roller doors have been ordered for the southern loading dock.

To be completed:

9. The loading dock overhang is due to be repaired.
10. The roof also needs holes patching and the water leak from the roof has caused ceiling cracks in the chill room which need to be repaired.
11. Invisible Trenching will start shortly to install the fibrewire for the security and fire alarms.
12. The floor of two the chillrooms needs to be resurfaced by Works and Engineering to remove cracks to prevent bruising of produce when moved in or out of the room.
13. The quote for the backup generator has been submitted for approval for funding.
14. A quote has been put forward for the test drilling for the new ASC facility. The funds will come from the monies set aside for the new building.
15. Works and Engineering will be contacted regarding the possibility of installation of speed bumps in the area to reduce the speed of drivers using the area as a short cut. Some members commented that wrong placement of speed bumps could bruise the produce being delivered.

8. Veterinary Services update:

Nothing to report.

9. Planning Applications:

Nothing to report.

10. A.O.B.:

- a) The Caribbean Accelerator Program has teamed up with Flex Farms to provide Bermuda with four small indoor hydroponic systems designed for schools, community groups and small hydroponic situations to grow leafy vegetables. The units come with lights, pumps, water tank, rock wool and nutrients for a year. Government would pay for shipping and electricity and give feedback to the supplier. The recipients must keep records on their produce and be willing to host workshops etc. This is a top down food

security initiative which could be linked up with an entity such as the Bermuda College, Windreach, schools etc. to promote agriculture and alternative growing methods.

W. Brown generally agreed that this is a good teaching tool for farming concepts and it promotes agriculture but he warned that in his opinion it is not commercially viable in the long run as only a limited number of crops can grow well in that system. He suggested maybe one private school and one government school could be recipients of units.

It was noted that at least one person needs to be responsible for collecting the recipient records and feedback to provide this information to the supplier and that the agreement framework, responsibilities and expectations needs to be confirmed and formalized.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Chairman: 

Date: 11-12-21