

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
HELD JUNE 19TH, 2024 AT 3:30 P.M.
IN THE BOARDROOM OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

PRESENT:

Mr. Scott Tucker – Chairman
Mr. Roger Pacheco Jr
Ms. Julie Greaves
Chaplin Kevin Santucci
Mr. Joey Weeks
Mr. Gregory Wilson
Mr. Albert Swan
Mr. Andrew Pettit – PS (ex-Officio)
Dr. Jonathan Nisbett – Chief Veterinary Officer (Zoom)
Ms. Claire Jessey – Acting Principal Plant Officer
Ms. Wendy P Woodley – Admin. Asst.
Mr. Tommy Sinclair – Agriculture Officer
Mr. Stewart Swanson – Agronomist
Mr. Warren Brown
Mr. Sam Fraser-Smith

APOLOGIES:

Mr. Peter Drew – Terrestrial Conservation Officer
Ms. Suzanne Mayall

1. Greeting and apologies from Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Walter Roban, JP, MP via Mr. Drew Pettit, PS.

2. **Confirmation of Minutes:**

The Minutes of the November 15th, were confirmed by Mr. Gregory Wilson and seconded by Chaplin Kevin Santucci

3. **Matters arising:**

There are no Matters arising.

4. **Policy & Legislation:**

a. **Integrated Agriculture Strategy:** The PS mentioned that the Integrated Agriculture Strategy is an umbrella policy that needs to be updated and reviewed. BoA members were asking to re-prioritize on the Integrated Agriculture Strategy action plan. The PS will revise and provide the update at the next BoA meeting.

b. **Crop Strategy – discussion:** The PS stated that the Crop Strategy goals are up to date.

The recommendations around what is needed and how to resolve the problems that arise will be discussed. The Department supported that the Crop Strategy needs more input; however, some of the members have been active and driven in giving feedback and others have not. The PS will have the action plan at the next BoA meeting.

5. Farmers Association Issues:

Mr. W. Brown presented a list of concerns (below) that had been prepared by the Farmers' Association. They noted that they had hoped the Minister would have been present to hear the issues and had sent a letter to the Permanent Secretary separately, but were happy to present them to the Board in his absence. They said that overall, it was their opinion that farming is in crisis and the DENR is not promoting the function of agriculture but focuses more on protecting environmental resources.

- a) The Agricultural Services Centre (ASC): The Farmers' Association (FA) noted that the facility is 'on its knees' and that budgeting is not sufficient for maintenance of the building and particularly for stocking supplies and materials for farmers. They referred to the example of boxes for produce that were held on the dock due to a funding holdup. Additionally, they requested that the budget be increased so the facility can be stocked properly with supplies for farmers and critical repairs can be carried out. They requested that the existing facility be repaired and fixed rather than focusing on getting a new facility. The acting Director noted that \$500,000 is allocated for capital repairs and a 'to-do' list of action points for the existing facility has been prepared.
- b) The Agricultural Services Centre- Staffing: The FA noted that the ASC does not have enough staff and although Tommy Sinclair does an excellent job, the embargo suffers because he is too busy to get out. The PS noted that the Trainee Agronomist is due to start at the beginning of August and will be helping with agronomy issues and to help at the Marketing Centre. When the Porter's post is filled, then there will be a full complement which should help. The FA hoped that a full staff would allow T. Sinclair to do more field visits.
- c) Embargo: This was noted as being a vital support to the agricultural industry and if it wasn't in place, it was the opinion of the FA that there would not be any farming in Bermuda. The FA thanked the DENR for their continued support with the embargo including the review of incoming shipments of produce for compliance with the embargo.
- d) BEDC: The Farmers' Association noted that the BEDC should not be involved in farming and farming should be left to the farmers. They noted that vertical farming is a very small niche type of farming and is only suitable for a few crop types. The PS confirmed that the DENR has limited to no involvement with the BEDC and any vertical farming initiatives.
- e) Seed Potato Importation: The FA discussed that the sale of local harvested potatoes ended in July and due to a late decision regarding importation, some farmers didn't plant that year and therefore less local potatoes were harvested. The FA expressed gratitude for clarity and support by the Plant Protection Section regarding the importation requirements – which they noted were important.

- f) Strawberry plant importation: The FA noted an interest in growing more strawberries locally but farmers needed more access to plants that meet the entry requirements and more access to plant protection products (pesticides).
- g) Agronomy programme: The FA noted that the addition of the agricultural consultant, Stewart Swanson, had added a dimension to farming that had previously been absent and farmers had not had this type of guidance. They appreciated his surveys (nutrient and nematode) and requested that the consultant's time be increased on island as he is only present for short visits at periodic intervals. Mr. Swanson noted that the farmers can email him at any time and he will answer any questions they have. The FA reported that they would like the newsletter that Mr. Swanson distributes to be available to the smaller growers. The PS said it could easily be posted on the website for all to access.
- h) Pest Control: The FA reported problems with rodents and chickens. They noted that the rodent pest control programme (Vector Control at Dept. of Health) is poorly run and inconsistent and that farmers need servicing on a higher level. They noted that the boxes are baited and then left instead of being revisited to replenish bait. Warren Brown noted that the chicken catching team is unresponsive and requested that farmers have access to the alpha-chloralose product that the DENR uses to sedate the feral chickens. The FA requested an effective solution to the ongoing chicken problem.
- i) Theft: The FA suggested a 'Whatsapp' group to report people removing produce from fields.
- j) Broken Glass: The FA also noted a lot of broken glass and trash being thrown in the fields.
- k) Hurricanes: The FA suggested a disaster relief programme may work in Bermuda similar to those in other jurisdictions for extreme weather events. They reported that some farmers had had discussions with AON to progress a relief fund for farming and that individual losses would need to be quantified. It could provide just enough to get back on their feet after a hit. The Acting Director questioned where the funding would come from and W. Brown noted that visiting insurers would make a donation to the fund that they could write off for taxes.
- l) Customer Service: The FA reported that some staff at the DENR are antagonistic and recommended customer service training.
- m) Pesticide Applications: The FA noted that turnaround times can be lengthy for pesticide applications. The Acting Principal Plant Protection Officer noted that the workload is heavy and staff shortages have been experienced but turnaround time should improve, particularly as an online system is being explored for efficiency.
- n) Virus Testing: The FA noted that virus testing is not available on island, but they could send samples abroad relatively easily.
- o) Policies: The FA requested that DENR policies should be available online for all to access.
- p) Fees: W. Brown requested that DENR seek opportunities to reduce fees for farmers.
- q) Reduce Red Tape: The FA requested that the DENR look for efficiencies in all administrative processes.

6. Agronomy Update:

Nematodes and Nutrient Survey Results: The consultant agronomist, S. Swanson, reported that his survey revealed that reniform nematodes are distributed island wide. The former Director Ed Manuel also found these in his survey of 1962 but that the current survey found higher numbers. These nematodes are most serious in sweet potatoes and their presence can negatively affect yield during the first 2 weeks of production. S. Swanson also noted as a result of his nutrient survey that sulphur is deficient and therefore recommended as a supplement for all. He also suspected some crops have iron deficiencies. Specific information has already been distributed on the local nutrient profile to the farmers. He also noted poor field sanitation in some circumstances.

Market Development - 'Grow To Market Strategy': S. Swanson spoke about the 'Grow To Market Strategy' that was being developed by the former Director Pettit (now PS) to explore opportunities for expansion of the local production market. Swanson categorized 627 different categories of fresh produce imported into Bermuda into approximately 100 groupings i.e. peppers, tomatoes, potatoes etc. to identify what in reality can be grown in Bermuda and what can't. W. Brown noted that this had been done in the past to understand the tomato market in Bermuda. Of these 100 groups, Swanson estimated that 30 groups cannot be grown in Bermuda realistically and can be removed from further discussion. These are mostly the tree fruits (avocado, citrus etc.), as they are not economically viable for commercial farming because of the delay to harvest. He recommended that fruit trees are a better fit for home gardens. He noted that crop diversity is good however, as an insurance policy to reduce risk of loss, but that different crops require different management strategies. It was noted that local farmers do a good job diversifying their crops.

7. Plant Protection Lab update:

Organic Labelling: The issue of organic labelling of locally produced produce was raised by the Acting Principal Plant Protection Officer and information presented to the Board for their awareness and with a request for feedback. C. Jessey noted that there is no local certification agency on island to verify inputs or provide standards or ensure compliance. Therefore any local produce promoted for sale as 'organic' cannot be certified by the DENR or any other agency. The DENR had prepared a position statement on this matter which would be put on the DENR website. S. Fraser-Smith suggested amending specific wording in the statement to ensure that it is clear that the DENR cannot instruct growers on how to promote their produce. This suggestion was accepted and the final statement will be amended accordingly.

Proposed DENR position statement on local "organic" produce:

"The Bermuda Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has no legal authority to regulate or certify 'organic' crop production in Bermuda.

Additionally, the DENR cannot verify inputs, and therefore, any product reported to be 'organic' cannot be certified or authenticated by this Department. The DENR supports conventional agricultural production systems as well as evolving crop production systems that seek to be sustainable and reduce impact on the environment.

Proposed DENR position statement on labelling local produce as "organic":

The DENR has no legal authority to prevent local farmers from marketing their produce in the manner they see fit, but recommends that promotion of produce be an honest reflection of the production system. If it comes to the attention of DENR that any grower is promoting and selling his/her produce as "organic" yet is violating standard organic growing principles, this matter will be discussed with them and brought to the attention of Consumer Affairs and the Department of Health. Consumers are well advised to be mindful of potentially false advertising in any industry and to educate themselves and question suppliers accordingly.

Biological Control Program: The Acting Principal Plant Protection Officer noted that a new temporary additional lab technician had enabled the Plant Protection Section to begin to collect samples of some crop pests that will be sent away for identification. Potential suitable species specific biological control agents will be researched for possible importation in an effort to bring balance to pest outbreaks of specific pests which hopefully will lead to a reduction of the reliance on pesticide products in general.

Pesticide Product Lists: the Acting Principal Plant Protection Officer noted that another project underway is to explore the practicality of having a single list of approved general use pesticide products for retail sale. Importers could import items on this list without the need to submit applications and supporting documentation for review and approval. This list could reduce the amount of time receiving and processing multiple applications for products which are already approved for importation for use in Bermuda.

8. Agricultural Service Centre

The Agricultural Officer, T. Sinclair reported that some repairs are underway at the Agricultural Service Centre. He also noted that the holdup with the boxes mentioned earlier was to do with payments to the supplier but that had been resolved. The AGSC Officer mentioned that the budget does not increase annually, but the cost of materials does, so the ASC is asked to do more with less which leads to gaps in supply. R. Pacheco noted that because of this, many farmers chose to bring in their own supplies.

9. Veterinary Services update:

The Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) reported on challenges faced by dairy farmers in terms of milk quality, to the extent that the Department of Health

had threatened to revoke licenses last year. The CVO reported that Dr. White (Tuft's University) had visited the island on 11th May 2024. He conducted site visits at Westover Farm and Greenland Dairy Farm, with frank and thorough discussions of his observations. Dr. White forwarded a report of his findings. In addition, Dr. White shared references that will serve as a good starting point to establish practices and standards going forward to ensure that milk meets legislated standards. (US federal regulations, Farmers Assuring Responsive Management (FARM) (programme)).

A summer student is researching the European legislated standards of milk quality. DENR, DOH, farmers and Dunkley's will have to work together to help resolve the milk quality problem.

The quality of milk fluctuates and the dairy farmers are trying to rectify issues for a more consistent product. Dunkley's Dairy conducts tests on every truckload of milk received, and Department of Health conducts tests every 2-4 weeks (more frequently when a problem is being closely monitored). At present, none of the dairy farmers are under threat.

The milk quantity has been dropping steadily over recent years.

Dr. Nisbett reported they are making strides and moving forward to making a better quality of milk. Retailers are stocking several different types of milk, i.e. oat, cashew, almond, soy. Miles Market imported a variety of illegal milks which were confiscated last year.

The CVO also shared that one dairy farmer is looking to import more cows by July that will help the farmer in terms of improving their milk production and quality. Those cows are to be A2 cows, and once these cows produce sufficient milk, A2 milk will be available on retailer shelves by the end of the year. Globally A2 milk is considered to be a growing brand for people having a lactose-like intolerance to regular milk. Greenland Dairy Farm has also expressed interest in producing A2 milk, but are not as advanced in its plans.

It was reported that Stuart Swanson (Agricultural Consultant) did a site visit to Greenland Dairy Farm and calculated that based on the number of cows they have, he estimated they should have at least 10 acres of pasture. He suggested they would need at least 20 – 130 acres of whole pastures for the amount of cows and they would have to subsidize of feed for the lack of pasture.

Greenland Dairy Farm still continues to struggle with the odor problem coming from the manure pit. They have an aeration system in place which operates approximately 50 minutes a day. Better odor control would occur with longer operation, but the electrical costs makes this cost prohibitive. Greenland has ordered a vacuum truck, and Transport Control Department has approved transport of the manure from the farm to the Marsh.

Board of Agriculture

Request for Comment: Organic Labelling of Local Produce

June 18th 2024



Stock Image

- The DENR received a request for the Department's position on advertising/labelling claims that state that locally produced produce is "organic".
- The term "organic" in the food industry can imply verified compliance by growers to certain practices and standards.
- Farming 'organically' is a far broader concept than just the exclusion of certain pesticides. It is a holistic approach to food production for the 'life' of the product: from the soil preparation, the seeds, the fertiliser, pest and disease management, product handling and processing.
- If the word 'organic' is associated with a logo such as 'USDA' that agency has certified the entire growing system and all inputs. Therefore that produce can be **certified** as 'organic'.



Sample Logos

- Bermuda does not have a local certifying agency and the DENR does not regulate how local farmers choose to advertise their produce for sale. As such, the DENR cannot authenticate, verify or refute any claims to be organic.
- The DENR referred this query to the Department of Consumer Affairs that regulates advertising claims. They confirmed that they do not regulate food labelling. They will discuss with the Department of Health for their input.
- The DENR recommends that promotion of produce is an honest reflection of their growing system and encourages consumers to engage in conversations with their local farming regarding pesticide treatments and production systems.

Proposed DENR position statement on local “organic” produce:

“The Bermuda Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has no legal authority to regulate or certify ‘organic’ crop production in Bermuda. Additionally, the DENR cannot verify inputs, and therefore, any product reported to be ‘organic’ cannot be certified or authenticated by this Department. The DENR supports conventional agricultural production systems as well as evolving crop production systems that seek to be sustainable and reduce impact on the environment.

Proposed DENR position statement on labelling local produce as “organic”:

The DENR has no legal authority to prevent local farmers from marketing their produce in the manner they see fit, but recommends that promotion of produce be an honest reflection of the production system. If it comes to the attention of DENR that any grower is promoting and selling his/her produce as “organic” yet is violating standard organic growing principles, he/she will be advised to refrain from using the term “organic” and reported to Consumer Affairs and the Department of Health. Consumers are well advised to be mindful of potentially false advertising in any industry and to educate themselves and question suppliers accordingly.

The BOA is invited to provide comment.

Revised statements including feedback from Board of Agriculture August 2024:

Proposed DENR position statement on local “organic” production systems:

“The Bermuda Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has no legal authority to regulate or certify ‘organic’ crop production in Bermuda. Additionally, the DENR is unable to verify inputs used in crop production systems, and therefore, any locally produced crop product reported to be ‘organic’ cannot be certified or authenticated by this Department. The DENR supports conventional agricultural production methods as well as evolving crop production systems that aim to be sustainable and reduce impact on the environment.”

Proposed DENR position statement on marketing (labelling) local produce as “organic”:

“The Bermuda Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) does not have the legal authority to regulate the marketing of produce in Bermuda. The DENR recommends that promotion of produce be an honest reflection of the production system.

Consumer Affairs oversees the commercial activities of businesses operating in Bermuda that provide ‘consumer goods and services’ to the public. Consumer protection laws may apply in cases where a vendor makes false claims about their products. Consumers are well advised to be mindful of potentially false advertising in any industry and to educate themselves and question suppliers accordingly.”

Oct. 21, 2024

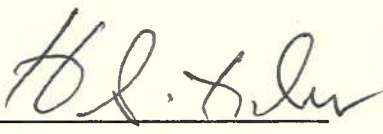
10.Planning Applications:

Nothing to report.

11.A.O.B.:

- a) One of the Farmers had some concerns regarding the availability of water and the rates per gallon is costly to the farmers. The Pollution Control section in DENR has a Hydrogeologist who looks after the fresh water lenses and the water rights for those metered so that they don't over abstract from fresh water lenses that is filled from rain water. If you require data or to be advised, you can contact Pollution Control at DENR.
- b) The BoA Chairman stated this is a more robust Board and the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and input.

There is no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.


Chairman


Date

