

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
HELD DECEMBER 12, 2024 AT 3:00 P.M.
IN THE BOARDROOM OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

PRESENT:

Members: Mr. Scott Tucker- Chairman
Mr. Warren Brown – Chairman of Farmers’ Association (FA)
Ms. Julie Greaves
Mr. Sam Fraser-Smith

Government: Dr. Geoff Smith - Director
Ms. Claire Jessey –Principal Plant Protection Officer
Mr. Stewart Swanson – Consultant Agronomist
Dr. Jonathan Nisbett – Chief Veterinary Officer
Mr. Peter Drew – Terrestrial Conservation Officer

APOLOGIES:

Members: Ms. Suzanne Mayall
Mr. Roger Pacheco
Chaplain K. Santucci
Mr. Albert Swan
Mr. Joey Weeks

Government: Mr. Tommy Sinclair – Agriculture Officer

1. Confirmation of Minutes:

It was noted that a copy of the two documents ‘Board of Agriculture- Terms of Reference’ and the ‘Organic Labelling Statement’ discussed in the last meeting should be attached to the Minutes from October’s meeting.

It was noted that the Minister should be provided with the Minutes as he is not present at the meetings and this is his advisory board. The Director stated that he would supply the Minister with a copy of the latest Minutes in his next meeting with him.

The Minutes of the October 20th, 2024 were confirmed by Warren Brown and seconded by Sam Fraser-Smith.

2. Update on the Trainee Agronomist, Mr. Omari Dill

The Director confirmed that Mr. Omari Dill, the new trainee Agronomist, had unfortunately left the DENR at the end of November to take up a position in the Department of Parks. The Director confirmed that attempts were made to try to keep him, but it was difficult to compete with a better salary offer elsewhere. His departure was noted as a big loss for the Department and agriculture.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes:

Feedback from Farmers' Association on the New Agricultural Service Centre

The Chairman of the Farmers' Association, Mr. W. Brown, reported that the Farmers' Association (FA) recently had a well-attended meeting. During the meeting, the Agricultural Service Centre (ASC) was discussed – specifically the existing structure and the necessity of a new facility. The FA voted that they do not want a new ASC as money would be better spent on other things. Farmers recommend fixing up the current centre instead and they questioned the breakdown of the costs of the repairs underway and plans for the existing center.

The FA members instead recommended revisiting a new centre in 10 years if things are better for Bermuda financially. They noted lack of funds for seniors, bridge repair for St. Georges etc. The FA members had noted that money should also be spent on agronomy issues and on existing farm practice productivity increases. Feral chicken management was also identified by the FA as being more important. The Director confirmed that money allocated for the new ASC cannot be used to upgrade the existing building. The Agricultural Consultant suggested that the money be used instead for support staff at DENR but other Board Members noted that money cannot be reassigned in that way.

The Chairman of the FA reported that the FA had agreed in their meeting that Bermuda's farmers are currently producing 20% of the local consumed produce and their membership discussed increasing that amount by identifying and developing a plan with a target of 5% output increase over 5 years from the collected efforts of commercial, part-time and homeowners.

The Board also requested a question and answer session to understand why a new build center is required at \$10 million rather than buying an existing building for \$4 million. The Director confirmed that location (central) is critical and agreed to pursue this matter in a separate meeting. It was noted that some farmers have built their own chill rooms since the original ASC plans were initiated because there was not enough availability at the existing ASC.

The Director requested a formal report from the FA on these concerns for the Board for consideration and a vote and then it will go to the Minister. The Chair of the FA requested that the ASC be put on the agenda of the next meeting for more discussion and asked if repairs underway for the existing ASC are going to be finished on schedule. The Director also confirmed that the Budget cycle is fixed for next year and he has added monies for the in the required repairs to make the existing centre more functional for now.

Water Access

The Chairman of the FA noted that the delay with water access is that the public sector denies private sector entities the right to dig up the road. The Director confirmed he is waiting for communication from S. Fraser-Smith on this matter. S. Fraser-Smith reported that he is waiting for a meeting with Watlington Waterworks. They had processed his own outstanding application, but he would still pursue the meeting on behalf of other farmers.

The Director noted that he would lend his support to any requests that were in support of food security and asked for factual information confirming that the farmers were being denied access to the water. The Director encouraged farmers to contact the Government Hydrogeologist to access fresh water that is available and underutilized in the lenses. He discussed methods for farmers to access water from shallow sources at slower rates or with a salinity switch to ensure that fresh water is accessible to them.

Strawberry Plant Imports

The Principal Plant Protection Officer (PPPO) confirmed that a shipment of strawberry plants is on the way to Bermuda imported by a farmer. A Board Member enquired whether he would distribute plants to others. The PPPO confirmed that those arrangements or agreements were up to the importer.

Caribbean Accelerator Programme - Flex Farm Hydroponic Systems

The Director reported that the Lab Technician, Ms. K. Burch, will manage classroom based hydroponic systems project which is intended to be part of a stimulator for an educational program growing lettuce, etc. in rock wool. Four units are provided and paid for by the Caribbean Accelerator Programme and worth approximately \$5000-\$6000. The Bermuda Government has agreed to cover shipping costs of approximately \$2000 and the MOU has been signed. Another MOU would be required between the DENR and the selected recipient entity (schools, groups etc.) to provide feedback and output statistics and to hold an educational workshop. A Board Member noted that the concept is good and it is a useful educational tool. He noted that younger students are generally more receptive to these types of educational projects.

Feedback from Farmers' Association on 'organic produce' and 'organic production' statement.

The FA approved the statements developed by the DENR. The agreed statement will be added to the Minutes.

Time Line for Pesticide Regulations with DOH

The PPPO presented an updated pesticide regulations development timeline provided by the DOH. The Consultation Summary Report on the importation, training and licensing sections of the Regulations is finished and should be published shortly including the summary of all the focus group meetings. In January the completed report is expected to go to Cabinet. Between Jan and April there may be another consultation/feedback point and then in April the Dept. of Health will progress the Regulations. A Board Member noted a concern at short window to provide feedback on the report. The PPPO noted that feedback/comments could probably be given to DOH at any time during this process and suggested that the FA reach out to DOH immediately to indicate that they will be providing feedback on the consultation report and then do so at their earliest opportunity.

Feral Chicken Alpha-chloralose submission from Farmers' Association

The PPPO confirmed that the Wildlife Ecologist in charge of the Feral Chicken Management Programme would like to meet with the farmers in a separate meeting to discuss tips on trapping, comments, feedback etc. The Board agreed that feral chickens are an urgent issue. There was general discussion on the new Whatsapp group chat for the farmers to report chicken problem areas. S. Fraser-Smith, Secretary of the FA, noted that the app is well used, but he that he would remind users to submit the information on what field, how many chickens and the geographical marker only and to avoid extraneous side discussions on the app. The Director expressed his support for needing more resources in this area. A Board Member asked if the DENR chicken management team could report to farmers which location they have removed chicken from. The Director confirmed that he receives a report monthly from the team with approximately 700 birds per month and he will be meeting with them soon. It was suggested including the rat problem in the discussions and noted that when the rat problem was reduced, the chicken problem increased. A Board Member confirmed that rats are a big problem.

The PPPO noted the alpha-chloralose submission was received by the DENR from the Secretary of the FA. It was clarified that the final request for the alpha-chloralose was to be submitted on behalf of the FA to the BOA for discussion and the BOA could consider adopting it and submitting the proposal to the Minister from both the FA and the BOA. The Secretary of the FA said the proposal at this stage was a draft and any input from the Wildlife Ecologist and other related DENR staff would be incorporated. The Secretary of the FA proposed that ideally every farmer should have access to the product.

The Chair of the FA noted that only two DENR staff members dealing with chickens is not sufficient given the large numbers of chickens. He noted the risk associated with Avian Flu which could become a Public Health issue. The Director noted concerns with by-catch overdosing and pet/vet liability costs that may be incurred. No current by-catch issues are currently reported. The Director also noted that this proposal should be for a pilot programme first and then consider future expansion from there. There was some discussion regarding the SPCA and other animal groups potentially objecting.

4. Policy & Legislation:

Nothing to discuss.

5. Bermuda College Study of Agriculture Initiative

The PPPO noted that in the previous meeting Mr. Weeks reported that he had been tasked with reinvigorating the study of agriculture at the Bermuda College and wished to consult with the farmers. This issue was deferred to the next meeting as Mr. Weeks was not present.

6. Farmers' Association Issues:

The Agricultural Service Centre (ASC)

The Chair of the FA noted that most issues had already been discussed in earlier conversation but noted concern for staff continuity at ASC especially after the departure of the trainee agronomist. The Director confirmed that there are two posts under the Agricultural Officer (Mr. Sinclair), the Porter and the Manager. The Porter is acting as the Manager currently but the Director has advised HR that that post must be filled as soon as possible.

The Chair of the FA suggested that ASC inventory needs to be better stocked so items do not run out whilst waiting for new shipments to arrive. The Director noted a seed shipment is imminent and demand has increased. The Chair of the FA noted that availability of seed supply at ASC is good for smaller farmers. The Director will discuss inventory with the Agricultural Officer to find out what improvements or changes need to be made to ensure stock continuity.

The Chair of the FA noted concerns that repairs and improvements may stall with the loss of the Trainee Agronomist. The Director confirmed that he would do his best to keep the repairs etc. moving.

Vertical Farming

The Chair of the FA, Mr. W. Brown, reported that the farmers were recently approached by the BEDC to meet two people (a hydroponic farmer and a venture capitalist) from abroad. Dr. J. Nisbett coordinated the meeting as Acting Director.

There was lengthy conversation about the project itself and the involvement of the BEDC and the government. The general concerns were:

- (1) No-one from government had reached out to the farmers regarding what they need/can do to increase their production locally.
- (2) Government was entertaining a company that had purchased another bankrupt company that had previously had a conversation with Bermuda and they were interested in continuing the conversation.
- (3) Local growers were given a promise of their involvement – but that had not happened.
- (4) They have vastly overestimated the demand for lettuce. Local farmers currently grow enough microgreens and lettuces.
- (5) The financial viability of the company.
- (6) The veracity of the claims made by the company.
- (7) The overseas company is using the public services of the BEDC to give them concessions.
- (8) Regarding how much public funds were being directed to a project that is clearly not going to work.
- (9) That the project seems to have been pushed through quietly without clarity on what tax payer money to be spent (or already spent).
- (10) There was no consultation with anyone who grows anything in Bermuda.
- (11) The company hasn't done any statistics.
- (12) The company reported that they expected to get the 60-40 company waived to be a 100% foreign company.
- (10) That the project will not actually create jobs as it will be automated and use robots.

In spite of the concerns, the farmers reported that they listened and showed them around some of the local growing facilities.

Board members suggested:

- (1) Putting public funds behind technologies that have a track record of being successful in Bermuda as opposed to a company with a track record or being unprofitable.
- (2) That a request be submitted to the BEDC to find out how much money has been earmarked for this project. All the hidden costs (e.g. Local BEDC staff working on this project etc. hotels, other resources, etc.) must be included. There was conversation about whether this request should come from the Farmer's Association and additional conversation on a PATI request on this matter.
- (3) As they were using millions of \$ of taxpayer money – why not wait 2 years to see the company demonstrate their track record somewhere else.
- (4) There are a few fledgling businesses locally – e.g. Kumi Bradshaw that should be receiving the support.

The Farmer's Association noted that they are against this proposed project because they know what the market is and they know that is not going to work.

The Board Members also discussed similar farming startups that did not succeed and it was reported that other growing systems shut down as they were not profitable and operating costs were too high as they were too energy inefficient. It was discussed that the system that actually works is the one that is used all over the world of just a sophisticated greenhouse. This was recommended to the Minister for about a Million \$.

It was recommended that the Board should note that the mission should be to support the local businesses.

Livestock Culling Compensation

The Chairman of the FA, on behalf of farmer Tom Wadson, asked if there is compensation for the involuntary slaughter of livestock because of disease control. The Chief Veterinary Officer noted that there is standard compensation for that procedure but he was unaware of the price and it may be very low because of outdated legislation. There was no confirmation under which piece of legislation this would fall.

Social Media

The Chairman of the FA reported that the FA may employ an individual to promote local farming on social media platforms etc.

Plant Importation

The Chairman of the FA noted that some FA members express frustrations related to the importation of plant material. He requested whether imported infested material could be fumigated and released. He suggested relaxing importation requirements as Bermuda has many things coming in all the time which puts us at risk. A Board Member confirmed however, that, as an importer, they are given now options to defoliate or treat. They also noted that Bermuda is relatively safe (due to existing quarantine measures) and that Europe, UK and Florida pests are rife- but noted that Bermuda's biggest problem is the smuggling public.

The PPPO noted that the DENR carefully assesses the quarantine risk of the plant material and the risk to Bermuda and determines what is best for the future. She noted the limited resources to do the assessments for all the many types of material that the many importers request.

A Board Member noted that he now seems to have mealybugs that he didn't have before. He noted that the Department has limited time to sample and confirm what pests are here or not and suggested that farmers could send their own samples away to get them identified. The PPPO also noted that

some insects can be resistant to pesticides or carry viruses or be a different sub-species than others and it is too simplistic to say that if a bug is already here it must therefore be the same and is ok to let in.

A Board Member asked if the Department saw any value in securing a budget to outsource any work to overseas scientists. Another Board Member noted that any risk assessments done should be prioritized for things that would actually grow in Bermuda – not for something that a hobbyist feels they want to have.

The Terrestrial Conservation Officer suggested outsourcing chicken management and noted that Bermuda is lucky to have the ocean between the US and Bermuda which keeps many pests out. He noted the importance of being careful as invasives (plants and pests) are increasing all the time.

Agricultural Consultant's Reports

The Chairman of the FA reported that farmers do not read the Agricultural Consultant's (AC's) reports so he would mail hardcopies to their membership. The AC reported that he already emails the reports to all farmers. The Director noted that a note will be added to all AC reports giving the context of the consultant's comments before they go online for the public.

Minutes of BoA

There was discussion regarding the Chairman of the FA sending the Minutes of the BoA to all the farmers with the intent to get them more engaged. Although it was agreed that they are a public record, it was decided that they would only be sent out to the BoA members at this time.

Fertilizers

The Chairman of the FA questioned why fertilizers need to be regulated by the DENR. The PPPO explained that some fertilizers contain herbicides and herbicides are regulated by the DENR. Registration is required to determine if the products do or don't contain a herbicide component which would then be regulated.

5. Agronomy (Consultant Agronomist) report

The Agricultural Consultant (AC) reported that he introduced no-till vegetables in last newsletter. He suggested looking at this in the local context to see how that would work here. The AC reported that drones are the new technology globally and he will be pushing for them locally as it is his opinion that drones are suited for use in Bermuda.

He also noted that the nutrient information recommendations he makes in his reports do not seem to be read by farmers. There was some discussion about the necessity of sulphur fertilizer on island.

The AC reported that he has located heat tolerant seed varieties that he is hopeful will be suited to Bermuda and he is hoping to extend the lettuce season for a month or so by planting earlier in the fall. Growers will be getting that seed shortly. He is hoping to source more varieties of pumpkin seed with new genetics that might be better for Bermuda. He reported that he is also looking at new varieties of strawberries that might be suited for Bermuda's climate.

6. Plant Protection Lab:

Nothing additional to report.

7. Agricultural Service Centre (ASC)

The PPPO provided the following update report on behalf of the Agricultural Officer regarding repairs underway at the ASC.

1. Chemical room – cleaning out has been completed in preparation for the other work to take place.
2. Fan- a new fan has been installed as well as two new lights.
3. Painting – waiting for W& E to confirm when they will start.
4. Dumped trash has been removed from around the building as well as old shelving.
5. New shelving is on island and waiting for completion of chemical room
6. Roller doors have been ordered. It is expected to be 12 weeks for delivery.
7. Asbestos roof had been assessed and determined to be safe. He noted that he was not sure who did the assessment – DOH/Asbestos abatement section? Confirmed it was not a detailed structural assessment.
8. Roller doors on island will be installed mid-January
9. Loading dock overhang is not happening yet. Director confirmed the W&E ticket had been submitted but DENR is waiting for them to progress this.
10. Holes in the foam barrier over the asbestos on the roof had been patched and minor leaks eliminated following that repair. Additional bracing had been placed over a crack in the ceiling that emerged.
11. Invisible trenching had been completed.
12. Floor cracks have not been resolved yet.
13. Back-up generator – no progress yet.
14. Test drilling was done to examine the new location. Director confirmed will happen early Jan or Feb.
15. Container of boxes arrived today. The shipment of seed ordered in August should arrive before Christmas. A chemical order has been initiated and the order will be finalised soon.

The Agricultural Officer noted that in spite of a slow start to the growing season there should be a good selection of vegetable ready for Christmas season. Carrots are already making their way to the stores.

8. Veterinary Services update:

The Principal Veterinary Officer (PVO) reported that a recent shipment of 42 cows had been received for one of the dairies. It was hoped that this would translate to an increase in local milk production.

The PVO reported that after a recent Tuskegee Vet Association meeting in Bermuda, this group reached out offering assistance to agriculture in Bermuda and asked what Bermuda needed. The overseas vet group offered contacts for agricultural universities for research students, access to labs, training programs, etc. Their offer included crop research. The PVO would let the PS and Minister know of this offer.

9. Planning Applications:

Board Member Julie Greaves left the meeting because of a conflict of interest with planning application under review.

The Terrestrial Conservation Officer (TCO), Mr. Peter Drew, presented a planning application for #2 Camp Hill, Southampton. It was for a proposed installation of two 28' x 10' by 100' greenhouses on the lower field of the agricultural reserve zoned area. It was noted that this had formerly been used as a plant nursery area. The soil was reported to be still present and in a reasonable state. The use was for horticultural purposes which is permissible under the Planning Act. The proposal would not disturb the soil other than a few concrete post holes which would be similar to what had previously been there.

Complaints regarding existing containers on that site had been looked into in recent months. The plastic and other debris had been removed and the area cleaned up. The TCO advised that in the past the Board did not support containers on agricultural reserve and neither did the Planning Dept. He noted however that recently the Planning Dept. appeared to have reversed that policy. The TCO noted he is seeking a confirmation of the policy from the Dept. of Planning. The Board noted concerns regarding containers placed on agricultural land in general and noted similar concerns with containers permitted to be placed on the Devonshire marsh.

The Board noted that the greenhouses can be removed and reverted to field growing if necessary. They noted that farmland is only useful with buffers (for turning tractors etc.) attached. The Board noted that containers are relatively inexpensive and secure but they don't visually look good - however, there is no lasting damage to ground at the site. The Board suggested their support for allowing containers but with regulation

regarding the number and the visual requirements (to make them less visually noticeable). The Board suggested containers can be permitted with permission with a justified use – as they do help farmers grow more efficiently – but not for storing non-agricultural items. Their use must be limited to storage of items in support of agriculture/horticulture only. To have containers around on all the agricultural fields would not be desirable.

It was agreed that the Board supports greenhouses in this location. Containers are supported at this location only if they are to be used for horticultural/agricultural use only. Any other containers must be removed.

The TCO noted his concern that the island image will be negatively impacted by the apparent change of policy allowing containers to be placed in many other areas of the island including residential. The Board suggested requesting a façade to cover containers. It was noted that there can be a practical necessity for secure storage, the equivalent of a shed, for agricultural supplies in some locations based on the fragmented fields. The Board noted that an increase in containers being placed on agricultural land for horticultural use is not desirable and there should be a line between horticultural and agricultural use and this concept shouldn't be encouraged but be dealt with on a case by case basis.

The TCO noted more than 67% of agricultural reserve is currently used for landscaping/horticulture. The small pockets of agricultural land that now exist are not good for commercial farming as they are too small. They lend themselves more to horticulture or small scale farming. Small scale farming was noted to be more valuable for the future of farming in Bermuda. The Board confirmed that putting containers on agricultural land must be regulated.

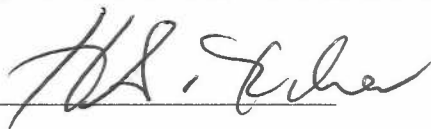
10. A.O.B.:

Director thanked all board members for serving. The Director also noted that he had been confirmed in his position as the Director and he looked forward to visiting all farms alongside the Agricultural Consultant to learn more about them and to fully understand the threats, opportunities etc.

The Chairman, Mr. Scott Tucker, noted that he is willing to continue to be a Board Member but would like to resign from the Chairman's role. The Director noted that he has received several 'Expressions of Interest' from potential new Board Members.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting Adjourned at 5:50pm.

Chairman:



Date: Dec 31, 2025

Decisions

- It was noted that the Board supports greenhouses at the #2 Camp Hill, Southampton location. Containers are supported at this location only if they are to be used for horticultural/agricultural use only. Any other containers must be removed. The Board suggested requesting a façade to soften the appearance of the containers.

Action Points

Board of Agriculture	Board would like to request information from BEDC regarding how much money has been earmarked for the vertical farming project.	
Chairman/Secretary of FA	The Chairman of the Farmers’ Association would mail hardcopies to the Farmers’ Association membership.	
	SFS will remind users of the chicken app to limit information to the field location and number of chickens and avoid unnecessary conversation on the Whatsapp group.	
	The Chairman of the Farmers’ Association requested that the ASC be put on the agenda of the next meeting for more discussion.	
	The Farmers’ Association (Board?) submit a request (PATI) to the BEDC to find out how much money has been earmarked for the vertical growing project. All the hidden costs (e.g. Local BEDC staff working on this project etc. hotels, other resources, etc.) must be included.	
	The Director asked for factual information from the farmers confirming that the farmers were being denied access to the water.	
	The Director requested a formal report from the Farmers’ Association on the Agricultural Service Centre concerns for the Board for consideration and a vote and then it will go to the Minister.	
	The Farmers’ Association will submit the official request for alpha-chloralose on behalf of the FA to the BOA for discussion.	
Director	The Director will supply the Minister with a copy of the latest Minutes in his next meeting with him.	
	The Director will keep the repairs and improvements at the ASC progressing.	
	The Director will discuss inventory with the Agricultural Officer to find out what improvements or changes need to be made to ensure stock continuity.	
	The Board requested a question and answer session (with PS/ Director) to understand why a new build center is required rather than buying an existing building.	
Feral Chicken Management Programme	A Board Member requested that the DENR chicken management team report to farmers which location they have removed chicken from.	
Principal Veterinary Officer	The Principal Veterinary Officer would let the Permanent Secretary and Minister know of the offer from the Tuskegee Vet Association.	
Minutes	The Terms of Reference documents will be added to the previous Minutes.	
	The agreed statements regarding ‘organic produce’ and ‘organic production’ statement will be added to the previous Minutes.	
	The absence of A. Swan and S. Tucker will be noted on previous Minutes.	
	Mr. Weeks had previously requested to discuss agricultural education at the Bermuda College. His absence led to addition of the item to the next agenda.	