



BOARD OF AGRICULTURE MEETING MINUTES

Augusta, Maine

April 23, 2019

Present:

Board of Agriculture Members: D. Bell; S. Belle; J. Bickford; R. Causey; J. Dill; J. Jordan; E. Mallory; D. Marean; M. Meyerhans; L. Phelps; D. Pierson; H. Spalding; L. Titus; L. Turner (for Eric Seaman)

University of Maine Representatives: R. Brzozowski; J. Ferrini-Mundy; M. Hutton; F. Servello

University of Maine System Representatives: S. Warren

Guests: D. Flannery; C. Granger; O. Hartkopf; P. Kontur; N. McBrady; C. Rector; C. Weymouth

Legislative Guests: Sen. Russell Black; Sen. Dana Dow; Rep. Michelle Dunphy; Sen. Stacey Guerin; Sen. James Hamper; Sen. Dave Miramant; Sen. Marianne Moore; Sen. Jeff Timberlake

Staff: J. Dieffenbacher-Krall

Call to order and introductions – *Marilyn Meyerhans, Chair*

Marilyn Meyerhans called the meeting to order. The meeting initially convened at the Welcome Center in the Statehouse. Introductions ensued.

Review of Board's Legislative Charge - *Marilyn Meyerhans, Chair*

Marilyn reviewed the Board of Agriculture's legislative charge, to "advise the Chancellor of the University of Maine System and the President of the University of Maine at Orono on matters concerning the operation and management of agricultural research conducted by the Maine Agricultural Experiment Station and university farm-based programs, including those of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service."

Preparation for meeting with Governor Mills - *Marilyn Meyerhans, Chair*

Marilyn Meyerhans asked for board member input on how the Board of Agriculture should best use the time it has available with Governor Mills. Several people offered their suggestions. The discussion ended around 9:45 in order to walk to the Governor's Cabinet Room.

Meeting with Governor Mills

Governor Mills was joined by Nancy McBrady, Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources, and Tom Abello, Senior Policy Advisor/Legislative Affairs. Governor Mills informed the group that Commissioner Amanda Beal expressed her regret that she was unable to attend due to illness. Attendees introduced themselves.

Marilyn Meyerhans reviewed the Board of Agriculture's legislative charge and recent work undertaken by the Board. One board member raised several labor bills pending before the Maine Legislature. She outlined the impact the minimum wage increase has had on growers, absorbing small profit margins some growers may have had prior to the increase and creating the disparity that veteran employees highly skilled in their jobs and loyal to their employers making little more than new hires. Another person talked about the impact of paid leave on growers.

Marilyn Meyerhans invited Governor Mills to share her vision and priorities regarding the University of Maine's role in agricultural matters. Governor Mills stated she was not supporting a breakup of the Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry though she acknowledged some members of the agriculture community would prefer a standalone agency solely devoted to agricultural matters. She intends to focus on making the combined agency work better. Governor Mills offered to bring matters of concern for the agricultural community to the Maine congressional delegation anticipating that she would be meeting with them regularly. She talked about the Climate Change Council. Governor Mills acknowledged the negative impact of high electricity costs on the agricultural community. She predicted the Maine Revenue Forecast due May 1 should align with earlier projections allowing final work on the biennial budget to commence with the best projected revenue figures available.

A board member described a recent health insurance premium increase sustained by his employer of 34%. He talked about the individual and societal cost of people not taking care of themselves. Another board member told Governor Mills the University of Maine is a driving economic engine.

Approval of November 8, 2018 Minutes - Marilyn Meyerhans, Chair

Motion: Recommended approving the draft minutes of November 8, 2018. **Minutes of the November 8, 2018 meeting were unanimously approved.**

Review of Draft Agricultural Engineer Job Description and Status of Position – Richard Brzozowski, Food System Program Administrator, Cooperative Extension

Dick Brzozowski reviewed the draft job description. He was asked if the job description had been shared with Dean Humphrey of the College of Engineering. Dick confirmed Dean Humphrey had received it and offered his input. A participant asked is the position envisioned to have faculty status? Dick answered no, it is intended to be a professional position. In the course of the discussion, Dick confirmed the proposed position would be more focused on scoping projects instead of designing them. A suggestion was made to prioritize the essential duties moving other duties/responsibilities to a secondary category. After receiving written comments on the draft job description, Dick pledged to recirculate it to the Board.

Cooperative Extension Update – *Lisa Phelps, Interim Extension Director & Richard Brzozowski, Cooperative Extension*

Jim Dwyer, Crops Specialist, will be retiring. A search was conducted. Two applicants were offered the position. Both of them declined. Extension leadership is considering a modification of the qualifications for the position requiring a master's degree instead of a doctorate. A final decision on the Crops Specialist position qualifications will be held until Dr. Hannah Carter assumes the dean position on May 1. Richard Kersbergen, Extension Professor, Sustainable Dairy and Forage Systems, will begin a phased retirement to last three years.

Lisa Phelps thanked the agricultural community for their support while she served as interim director.

Evaluation of Meeting with Governor Mills - *Marilyn Meyerhans, Chair*

Marilyn asked for an assessment of the meeting with Governor Mills. One board member remarked, "She gets it." Another person commented that the agricultural community has a role to play in Governor Mills' Maine Climate Council stressing adaptation as a necessary response to climate change.

Lunch Reception and Discussion with Legislators

Turnout to the event was hampered by the fact that the Maine House of Representatives remained in session for the duration of the event. Seven senators attended and one House member.

University of Maine Update — *President Joan Ferrini-Mundy*

President Ferrini-Mundy thanked the Board of Agriculture for the invitation to address them. She relayed on behalf of Chancellor James Page his appreciation for the support the agricultural community had given him and the University of Maine System during his tenure in the position. He was unable to join the Board because of the need to attend a meeting at USM.

President Ferrini-Mundy touted For/Maine (<https://formaine.org/>) as an impressive collaboration of stakeholders and the University of Maine to boost a critical sector of the Maine economy. She suggested it might serve as a useful model for similar collaborations in other domains.

Since President Ferrini-Mundy last addressed the Board of Agriculture in November 2018, the University of Maine System Board of Trustees issued a Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs (<http://staticweb.maine.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Declaration-of-Strategic-Priorities-as-of-12-18-18-1.pdf?0d0f03>). It features four strategic goals:

- 1) Advancing Workforce Readiness and Economic Development
- 2) Increasing Maine Educational Attainment
- 3) Aligning Academic Programs and Innovation to Drive Student Success and Employer Responsiveness
- 4) Maintaining Competitiveness and Sustainability to Meet Critical State Needs

Action 2 under Goal 1 calls for work to "Strengthen research and economic development efforts to support Maine industries and to foster business formation and expansion." Last December the University of Maine System Board of Trustees assigned President Ferrini-Mundy the task to "deliver a multi-year plan for prioritizing expanded research and development across the University of Maine System." She presented the plan at the March 2019 Board of Trustees meeting. The working title is

University of Maine System Research and Development Plan FY 2020 –FY2024 R&D to promote industry, business, and community growth in Maine. President Ferrini-Mundy noted this is the first time in the University of Maine System’s history such a plan has been developed. She offered to give a presentation to the Board of Agriculture on the plan if board members wanted such a session.

Excellent progress is being made on a new initiative called Strategic Vision and Values: Defining Tomorrow at the University of Maine to succeed the Blue Sky Plan. It has three elements:

- Learner success (at all stages, students and professionals) Intended to serve all learners. Part of a vision of the University of Maine as a community of learners.
- Creation of new knowledge/discovery (usable knowledge)
- Partnerships (new and streamlined ways to collaborate)

A board member asked how do you approach prioritization of UMaine research? President Ferrini-Mundy answered we need to do an analysis of how the signature areas worked. She expressed possible interest in developing a “grand challenge,” an initiative to “energize not only the scientific and engineering community, but also students, journalists, the public, and their elected representatives, to develop a sense of the possibilities, an appreciation of the risks, and an urgent commitment to accelerate progress (Omenn, Gilbert S. "Grand challenges and great opportunities in science, technology, and public policy." *Science* 314.5806 (2006): 1696-1704.)” President Ferrini-Mundy expressed the possibility such a grand challenge could cut across subject areas and potentially serve as a replacement for the signature areas.

Another board member stated how “thrilled” she was to be having a discussion about research at this level. She stressed the importance of workforce development and the need to impart to workers such basic skills as showing up on time and what is expected when a person is working. Fred Servello suggested a possible university response might be more emphasis on what it means to be a professional and increasing student understanding of professionalism. Interest was also expressed in more formalization of worker placement.

College of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture and Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station Update; Overview of the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, & Agriculture – Dean Fred Servello

Dean Servello gave an abridged update as he had yielded much of his time to President Ferrini-Mundy. He reported that the School of Economics has successfully recruited an agricultural economist who is scheduled to begin 9/1/19. The School of Biology and Ecology is completing interviews for an agricultural entomologist position. The same unit will also be conducting a search for a forest entomologist position.

In the School of Food and Agriculture, Dean Servello provided updates on three positions. A search for an assistant professor position in animal veterinary sciences with an emphasis on microbiome work is actively underway. Applications are being actively reviewed for an assistant professor of sustainable agriculture. An offer has been made and verbal acceptance given for a Food Pilot Plant manager.

Fred Servello provided brief updates on each Maine Agricultural Research and Forest Experiment Station research farm. He announced Aroostook Farm lost two techs to retirement and another to military service. Two people have been hired. Blueberry Hill Farm Superintendent Jeff Brann has been out for an extended period on medical leave. Josh Stubbs has been promoted to Interim Superintendent. Highmoor Farm has had approval for a new greenhouse. A contractor withdrew from the project just before work was scheduled to begin last year. Planning and bidding is resuming with a goal of having it underway for the Highmoor field day that traditionally takes place in July. Witter Farm will be supporting a pastured pork project. A board member commented that the Natural Resources Conservation Service has refused to fund any grants for pastured pork because the agency views the practice as inherently bad for soils. The Witter Farm project would be a good opportunity to provide some research on soil impacts.

In addition, Fred Servello stated he has been involved in a number of interesting two-way discussions on cannabis. A suggestion was made that research should be done to figure out the fiber aspect of hemp.

Legislative Update – *Samantha Warren, Director, Government and Community Relations, University of Maine System*

Samantha stressed the significance of the \$99 million investment made in University of Maine System infrastructure last year. Question 4 passed last November provided \$49 million to modernize and improve the facilities and infrastructure of Maine's public universities. Passage of the referendum question followed \$50 million that was made available for debt service during the first year of the biennium. The Maine Legislature provided a 1.4% increase in the University of Maine System's budget.

As she works with the Maine Legislature, Samantha identified three priorities: 1) biennial budget 2) leveraging opportunity 3) do no harm. In the budget category, Governor Mills has proposed a 3% increase year-over-year. The University of Maine System did not seek an increase in allocations from the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF) as leaders want to do some more thinking about the next round of initiatives.

Samantha reported President Ferrini-Mundy and she recently participated in a meeting that included Office of the Governor staff person Tom Abello about how to better align University of Maine research with agency needs. An example of University of Maine System research support of Maine State Government is the research provided by the Maine Educational Policy Institute comprised of UMaine and USM to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

In the category of do no harm, Samantha mentioned bills that attack public employers currently pending before the Labor and Housing Committee.

Next Meeting Date

The Board of Agriculture agreed to hold the next meeting in Orono during the fall.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn passed unanimously.