



# Maine Board of Agriculture



## Board of Agriculture

December 1, 2023

## Meeting Minutes

### Meeting Details:

**Date:** December 1, 2023 9:00 a.m. - 11:45 p.m.

**Location:** Wells Conference Center, University of Maine, Orono, ME

### **Board Members in Attendance: (14)**

Amber Lambke, President's Appointee, Founder and CEO, Maine Grains  
Donald Marean, Chancellors Appointee, Owner Lindon Farm Inc.  
Nancy McBrady, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry  
William Smith, Maine Farm Bureau  
Kevin Woltemath, Agricultural Council of Maine  
Eric Venturini, Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine  
Justin Gray, ME Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association, Farm Manager, Pineland Farms Inc.  
Mary Castonguay, Maine Dairy Association  
Ryan Dennet, Programs Director, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association  
William Pluecker, Legislative Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
Marge Kilkelly, Livestock other than Dairy, Owner, Dragonfly Cove Farm  
Robert Causey, University of Maine Faculty associated with Agricultural Research  
Hannah Carter, University of Maine Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost and  
Dean of Cooperative Extension  
Sebastian Belle, Executive Director, Maine Aquaculture Association

### **UMaine/UMS attendees:**

John Volin, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost; Samantha Warren, Director of Government and Community Relations at the University of Maine System; Diane Rowland, Dean of the College of Earth, Life, and Health Sciences and Director of the Maine Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station; George Criner, Associate Dean, College of Earth, Life and Health Sciences, and Associate Director of the Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station; Jason Bolton, Associate Dean of Cooperative Extension; Erin Miller, Marketing and Communications Manager, College of Earth Life and Health Sciences; Cheryl Spencer Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station Director's Technician.

### **Other Attendees:**

Jim Dill, State Legislative Representative

**Minutes recorded and formatted by Cheryl Spencer and George Criner**

### Meeting Minutes:

Eric Venturini, Chair of the Governance Committee, called the meeting to order at 9:12 AM. Following a round of introductions, the first order of business was to elect new officers. The Governance Committee introduced the slate being put forth: Marge Kilkelly as Chair and Kevin Woltemath as Vice Chair. Each of the candidates presented themselves at the podium and stated their leadership vision. A paper vote for



## Maine Board of Agriculture



those in the room and an electronic anonymous poll for those on Zoom was then called with 14 members voting unanimously to accept the slate. Marge proceeded to lead the meeting and there was no other governance committee business or announcements.

Marge Kilkelly presented the business of the Structure and Change Committee by introducing two versions of the proposed statute. The copy with yellow highlights was what was introduced in last year's legislative session. Since the board was not fully in agreement with this version, it was decided at the October meeting that the BOA would draft a version that just cleans up and modernizes naming and adds an aquaculture seat. This cleaned-up version would be presented when it is heard this session, as a holdover bill and will likely progress quite quickly. This will give the board another year to work on substantive changes to how we do the work and clarify the charge. Any substantive changes will need to have agreement amongst the board members before moving them forward. There is a motion and second to adopt the second statute revision that just cleans up the names and adds the seat for Aquaculture. There is no further discussion. The vote is 14 votes (unanimous) in the affirmative.

Amber Lambke took the floor to give the report of the Advisory to the Director Committee. One meeting was held on 10-6-22 with Bruce Hall, Justin Gray, and Amber Lambke in attendance. They identified the need for an outline of the charge to the subcommittee and that it should come from this board. To be participatory in the University budget process we will need a work plan for pre-meetings. Some areas we would like to be informed on and participate in, including: Positions for retirement and rehire; The budget cycle and process; Details of budgets; Student majors and trends. We would like to be useful to the Board of Trustees, Presidents, and Deans. At the 10-6-22 meeting, President Ferrini Mundy suggested a task force to examine the budgets for faculty, facilities, etc.

The Structure and Charge Committee agreed to follow up on the President's suggestion of creating a joint task force to help with the budget discussions. The committee will need a schedule of relevant dates and deadlines for the University and the State. It was noted that it may be beneficial to change some of the Board's traditional meeting times to better fit with the budget process. Marge will speak to members individually regarding priority areas and present a synopsis. Members should reach out to Amber Lambke with ideas for developing and drafting the charge for the Taskforce, and if they are interested in being on the committee.

Dean Rowland is excited about engaging in this process and could put forth various models of sharing in a usable format. A multi-year plan would be most helpful in developing a cluster of research in an area. The board could help in prioritizing areas and guide faculty to funding that the board members could advocate for. Understaffed areas and research bricks and mortar needs could be shared. A break was taken at 10:15 and the group reconvened at 10:37

John Volin welcomed the Board to the University. He reported that although the enrollment numbers are down they had good projections, are operating within budget, and are not in a dire situation with >200,000 credit hours which are within 0.3% of projection. The free community college accounts for 25% of the decrease but most losses were out of state students. They are working with the community colleges to recruit students for their third and fourth years. Retention is up 3% from last year however the mental health crisis is real and there is increased use of counseling services with no wait. One program boosting the retention numbers is the research experience in the first year. Grad enrollment continues to rocket with 550 PhD students and spending of research dollars was > 150 million. They have had 8 new deans in 4 years, currently have 4 interim deans and 2 looking to retire.



## Maine Board of Agriculture



Dean Rowland and Samantha Warren note some efforts by UMaine and the Un. of Maine System to increase enrollment. The board discussed the possibility of marketing to international employees seeking credentials here and the increase of internship programs and retention through UMS transforms, pathways to careers, Maine jobs recovery in 17 economic sectors where an increase in funding to hire students would help them better afford their education. This could be expanded to agricultural industries, especially in rural areas and the Board could be an asset in making these connections. Students may require housing and there are costs associated with running the programs outside of the employer paying the student. This workforce development could leverage further grants. The agricultural community could also use healthcare students to address the mental health issues associated with agrarian life and rural isolation.

Marge Kilkelly asked for a motion to accept the October 6, 2023 minutes. A change was requested on page 3 to reflect the Board's decision to move forward with the conclusion to only make minimal changes to the statute at this time. The minutes, with this additional amendment, were moved, seconded, and unanimously approved.

Marge then presented the tentative meeting schedule and the topics for 2024. The group was reminded that it takes resources to support the Board of Agriculture and an estimate of cost and time has been prepared for the last several years. All meetings are planned to be hybrid at this time. Discussion then revolved around the meeting with the governor and the timeframes when the board can be most relevant and effective. Everyone should work on their priorities for the March meeting with the Governor and begin thinking about a 3-year plan. The board should strive to emerge from the February meeting with a united front to present at the Governor's meeting. The board should ask the University how it can best support them through their meeting with the governor. This year the meeting will be in March but the board should revamp its calendar to coincide with when budget decisions are being made so next year we should be prepared to meet with the Governor in November or December before the budgets are finalized. It would then be good to meet with the Ag committee early in the session to request advocacy for the education budget.

Hearing no other business to be discussed, a motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting. The business meeting adjourned at 11:40.

Following lunch, the board was invited to tour the restoration project at the Edith Patch house, Braeside, with Dean Rowland then continue on to the Wyman's Blueberry Research and Innovation Center where an overview of the work there was given by Graduate Student Kylie Holt. Lastly, the group was treated to a tour of Witter Farm where construction of a new milking parlor will be underway shortly. New calves as well as older cows enjoyed our company under the guidance of Patricia Henderson, farm manager, and Madison Philbrick, livestock operations manager.

### **Action Items:**

1. Work on the statute.
2. Marge - contact President Ferrini Mundy to set up a budget task force.
4. Members interested in being on the task force contact Amber.
5. Marge – Solicit budget priorities (on a three year time scale) and ideas for charge to the task force from members.



## Maine Board of Agriculture



6. Marge - prepare priorities synopsis pre February meeting (prep for Governors meeting).
7. Marge - contact Dean Rowland to determine budget timelines and how information can be shared.
8. Contact Samantha Warren to schedule the Governor for next November/December for a pre finalized budget meeting.
9. George Make preparations for the February 2 meeting.
10. George work on filling remaining board vacancies.
- 11 Prepare and restructure the new meeting calendar if needed based on budgeting timelines.