



Maine Board of Agriculture



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February 2, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

- Amber Lambke, President's Appointee, Founder and CEO, Maine Grains
- Nancy McBrady, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
- William (Nick) Smith, Maine Farm Bureau
- Kevin Woltemath, Agricultural Council of Maine
- Jeannie Tapley, Maine Potato Board
- Eric Venturini, Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine
- Marilyn Meyerhans, Maine State Pomological Society
- Justin Gray, ME Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers' Association, Farm Manager, Pineland Farms Inc.
- Mary Castonguay, Maine Dairy Association
- Jake Pierson, Maine Landscape and Nursery Association
- Ryan Dennet, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
- Marge Kilkelly, Livestock other than Dairy, Owner, Dragonfly Cove Farm
- Sebastian Belle, Maine Aquaculture Association
- Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President, University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias; John Volin, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost; 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 Director of the Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station; Jason Bolton, Associate Dean of Cooperative Extension; Cheryl Spencer Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station Scientific Research Specialist.
- Carol Woodbury, Representative of Senator Collins Office
- Jim Dill, State Legislative Representative
- Meeting Minutes recorded by Cheryl Spencer

Meeting Minutes:

- Marge Kilkelly, Chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. She welcomed all, followed by a round of self-introductions by those present. The agenda was presented, and solicitation of changes or additions was made but none were forthcoming.
- Joan Ferrini- Mundy, President of the University of Maine and University of Maine Machias thanked the Board for its instructive critique of the statute of being advisors to the President and Chancellor to advance agriculture.
- John Volin, Provost, Thanked the Board for their cooperation on the legislation concerning the statute. The modernizing of the Witter farm is now underway. The Alford public pathway to careers (\$320 million gift) is a collaboration with employers based in student retention and success. These funds will be leveraged over a 5-year period and end up being close to \$5 million The Maine jobs and recovery funding will be available to apprentices for housing and travel, it covers all 7 U Maine System campuses. It should cover about 500 students and needs to be spent by December 31, 2024. It is meant to be used during the spring, summer, and fall.



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- Marge Kilkelly introduced her vision for more efficient and effective operation of the board by having most work done in committee where smaller groups could focus on specific issues and bring them back to the whole group. She created an executive Committee consisting of Amber, Eric, Kevin, and Jeannie for setting agendas well ahead of time. The current committees of Governance, whose function is nominating officers, and the Structure and Charge committee will be merged, and nominations would become an ad hoc committee. The Advisory to the Dean committee will need restructuring and renaming. We will be adjusting the agenda to be by committee and led by committee chairs. We want to hear from everyone but increase our efficiency. She has personally spoken to most folks on the board about this change.
- Amber Lambke stated that each committee will have a charge. Amber will draft one for her committee. It will be a layout for transparency and approving plans before they are in place. Different committees will boil down issues to bring to the entire group. Her template can then be used for other committees so we can create a guidebook for future boards. Amber reviewed the 5 life stages of non-profits. There was concern about needing a deadline for this reorganization to occur.
- Marge reiterates that the statute will create a work plan. This is why we are struggling with the statute. We will work to support agriculture while we create structure. That is the goal. She appreciates the board's ideas, thoughts, and feedback.
- Marge reports on the Executive committee work on agenda development. This work will occur between meetings to move things forward. A near-term Board matter is the meeting with the governor during Ag week. We will communicate our appreciation for her support of Agriculture. We plan to move our listening session to the Ag trade show next year with members staffing the table. We can create a 5-year outlook for what is on the horizon for Ag business that we can share with the legislature and UMaine Board of Trustees in our annual reports. We can restructure our meeting with the Governor, so it is when the governor is working on the budget not after it has been decided.
- We know about tight budgets but need to continue to raise issues and continue the education piece. Marge was asked if we could flesh out what "asks" the University has in, so we could support to give her a couple of key priorities. Discussion moved to finding three things to push for on the agenda rather than wins and losses. Dean Rowland suggested 1. Workforce development, 2. Infrastructure to serve you through research at the College and Experiment Station and 3. Incorporate into the stories about how research happens on a shoestring. President Ferrini-Mundy adds that general positivity about how the University has an impact on your industry while keeping the message general is helpful.
- President Ferrini-Mundy stated that the UMaine budget begins with conversations with the Deans and Provost. This board has a legislative mandate to participate and UMaine is developing the 2025 budget. The Provost goes before a committee of the BOT. It becomes more general by the time it gets to the full BOT. The provost and deans are at the meetings where your needs, advice, and recommendations can be documented. The BOT will not see your Dean's requests. We are now in the internal process, and we do owe you a response. We are very tight in the 2025 budget.
- The Governance/Structure and Change Committee will continue to work on the legislation. A report from Samantha Warren was circulated to all members. The committee will come back to the board at the next meeting. Nothing will happen until the next legislative session, but our bill needs to be ready to file in December 2024.



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- Jake Pierson moved the renaming of the Advisory to the Director Committee as the Advisory Committee. Eric Venturini seconds the motion. There is no further discussion and a vote of all in favor is taken. Amber Lambke will create the charge and charter for this committee. Amber asks for Dean Rowland's input on the calendar for times of input and looks ahead to 2025 for restructuring. We would like to capture the key Ag events in the year, namely the Ag trade show and March Ag week and Ag Day at the statehouse. The next meetings of the board are April 5 and October 4.
- The question is asked, considering the lower enrollment, short budget, and loss of the college communications position problems, how are decisions made considering impacts on enrollment? Dean Rowland's reply is through academic course mapping we can assess the need to fill gaps with adjuncts and do what is needed to maintain and move programs into the future. The college drives one-third of the research at the University. We are placing more needs on research grants, a national trend. We are moving to all graduate support coming from grants. UMaine has worked with the BOT to balance the budget over three years. There was some loss in enrollment due to the free community college. We are not firing but may not be filling positions. We are doing a deep dive into programs. Except for pre-vet ag enrollments are low. We don't have programs we would eliminate but some may go from undergraduate to graduate. Proposals are encouraged to include support for grad students. A percentage of the grant goes to indirect costs, this year was about \$22 million from \$200 million in grants. About 90% of these grad students get jobs in Maine upon graduation.
- Amber brings us back to the committee discussion reminding us that an email thread is not a meeting so no decision making can happen there. There is discussion of who is or wants to be on the committees. It doesn't need to be decided today. Please contact Marge or Amber to be included on the committee. The Executive Committee consists of Marge Kilkelly, Kevin Woltemath, Amber Lambke, Eric Venturini, and Jeannie Tapley. The combined Structure and Charge and Governance Committee will be called Governance. The goal is transparency, and all are invited to listen in. Dean Rowland reminded folks that she is not a member of the board and has no vote unlike Dean Carter who has membership and voting rights.
- Marge gave an update on the rewrite of the BOA statute that failed to make it past the legislative committee. She said the BOA was told to work through their internal differences.
- Marge also requested that the University supply their reports ahead of time and have a question-and-answer session when we meet.
- A short break for lunch was taken and work resumed at 12:20
- **A motion to accept the minutes of December 1, 2023, was made by Eric Venturini and seconded by Jake Pierson. The motion was unanimously accepted.**
- Members then gave the major issues of their commodities as priorities for the Deans.
- Small fruit and veg- Deer, climate, PFAS effects on pesticides, rule changes around labor.
- Wild blueberries – engineering support of Ag, Ag economics, need an economic impact study for blueberry industry like that of the potato industry.
- Maine Farm Bureau – More technological advances to improve turnaround time for Soil and Plant disease labs, support for small livestock producers.
- College of Earth Life and Health sciences – We got a good pool of applicants for the soil scientist position and will be bringing 4 to campus for interviews.
- Extension– Reduce sweet consumption and reduce protein costs



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- Aquaculture – need more Ag economists and ag engineers, there are no aquatic plant pathologists- US is exposed there, aquaculture nutrition specialist, Debbie Bouchard’s lab needs to double-she has a three-year backlog.
- Livestock other than dairy – goats on silva pasture – amount of land needed, hides go to PA shipping is a problem, fiber interests, forage issues.
- Nursery - Waiting for hire of new extension person.
- President’s appointee - PFAS support – to what extent does grain attenuate PFAS? Agroforestry as a solution to interrupting disease, food grain links to soil health and rotations, a pilot lab, growing business, grain being squeezed by potato success.
- Pomology- More Ag engineers, deer, PFAS uptake in fruits, apples are shrinking to small farms, PFAS in containers, food safety for cider going out of state – why not here? Labels come from out of state so regulated by FDA.
- MOFGA – Economic impact report from farm survey, professionalize the workforce, increase infrastructure on farms, adding fruits and nursery stock to farms, how to access USDA crop insurance, climate adaptation and disaster preparedness, mental health, Continued PFAS support, dairy declining, solar on farms, growth in organic grain, horticulture, and blueberries.
- Ag Council – Meat quality, forage quality.
- Potato board – Ag engineers, entomology-aphids, breeding program, labor, and technology – drones for suspect areas without labor.
- The meeting adjourned to tour the facilities of the University of Maine Roger Clapp Greenhouse, hosted by Associate Professor of Horticulture, Stephanie Burnett, and Plant and Soil Analytical Laboratory in Deering Hall, hosted by Bruce Hoskins, Assistant Scientist of Plant, Soil, and Environmental Sciences.