



Maine Board of Agriculture



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Governor's Meeting

March 23, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, March 23rd, 2023

Time: 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Location: Governor's Cabinet Room, Augusta, Maine

Format: In person

Recorder: Linden Schneider, Board of Agriculture Clerk

[Note by G. Criner: As of Sept. 1, 2023, George Criner took over the Clerk duties from Linden Schneider. These minutes are not yet approved.]

Attendees: Mary Castonguay, Samantha Warren, Kevin Woltemath, Julie Ann Smith, Marilyn Meyerhans, Justin Gray, Marge Kilkelly, John Volin, Diane Rowland, Linden Schneider, Hannah Carter, Bruce Hall, Jeannie Tapley, Rep. Bill Pluecker, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Ryan Dennett, Emily Horton, Governor Janet Mills, Commissioner Amanda Beal, Tom Abello, Sen. Henry Ingwersen

Board Members in Attendance (13): Mary Castonguay, Kevin Woltemath, Julie Ann Smith, Marilyn Meyerhans, Justin Gray, Marge Kilkelly, Hannah Carter, Bruce Hall, Jeannie Tapley, Rep. Bill Pluecker, Ryan Dennett, Commissioner Amanda Beal, Sen. Henry Ingwersen

The meeting was called to order by Governor Mills at 1:19 pm.

Board of Agriculture Chair Julie Ann Smith (Seat 04) provided the opportunity for President and Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation Joan Ferrini-Mundy to provide remarks. President Ferrini-Mundy remarked on the importance of agriculture to the state of Maine and the University of Maine's commitment to serving the land grant mission well. The President looks to the Board of Agriculture for how to advance issues and questions that the agricultural community faces including PFAS that required the convening of many experts. President Ferrini-Mundy thanked Governor Mills for the 3 million dollar increase proposed in the budget for the Maine Economic Improvement Fund and the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan funding that has supported modernization at Aroostook Farm and the Food Innovation Center. President Ferrini-Mundy concluded her remarks by looking forward to continued work together to determine priorities, express them and fund them. Governor Mills responded by complimenting President Ferrini-Mundy, the University of Maine being the leader in research and development, and the excellent research that is done there placing Maine at the forefront of many issues.



Maine Board of Agriculture



Chair Smith then proceeded to present her remarks.

“Good Afternoon Governor Mills,

On behalf of the Board of Agriculture, I want to begin by expressing our deep gratitude for your continued and unwavering support for Maine’s agriculture industry and the University of Maine. The members of our board consist of farmers and organizations that support farmers. Our farms and constituents are beneficiaries of the significant education, research, and support that the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension provides.

By exploring best practices for livestock, fish, and plant breeding; analyzing agricultural value chains; examining interactions among soil health, agricultural productivity, and water quality; and supporting integrated pest management practices to protect crop production, human health, and the environment, the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension impacts not only the professional lives of farmers but the daily life of every Mainer. Everyone in Maine eats food, and we all benefit from access to healthy, locally-grown crops and value-added products. The future of agriculture in Maine depends on farmers’ ability to improve per-acre production, increased access to national and international markets, and ultimately increase profitability. We cannot be successful without the support of the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension.

Right now, agriculture is experiencing a period where income has decreased, the cost of production has exponentially increased, and sales are, at best, stagnant. Not only are farmers struggling financially, but physical and mental wellness barriers and the overwhelming challenges of PFAS contamination in land and water throughout our state are creating unprecedented obstacles.

The University has been a critical partner in beginning to address these crises in agriculture. Many faculty are currently mobilized and in the process of modifying their research programs to examine PFAS contamination. The Ag Mediation program and Agribility are helping address farmers’ physical and mental wellness. The University is working to support the whole farm experience, from field to farmer.

However, the University also faces unprecedented challenges with a significant decrease in enrollment, extraordinary inflationary pressures, and flat tuition rates. As the University works to strategically invest for the future, we are looking for your leadership and guidance on how to ensure the generous funding you have proposed in the biennial budget addresses the significant financial needs of the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension in order to guarantee they are able to continue supporting Maine farmers and food consumers.

We have identified three primary concerns we wish to share with you today:”

Governor Mills stopped the Chair and inquired about what the Board of Agriculture was asking her to do. She suggests that the Board of Agriculture brings their concerns to the University of Maine System Board of Trustees as they advise on finance. The discussion opens up various topics brought by individual board members including lack of faculty and programs, PFAS and the states response, Maine grown food, greenhouses, the need for a broad economic impact study



Maine Board of Agriculture



of agriculture in Maine, incentivizing participation of younger generation in agriculture, public private research and development partnerships and housing enhancements.

The Governor concluded the meeting by expressing her and Commissioner Beal's (seat 03) availability for communications at any time and encouraging the Board to reach out if they feel like their voices are not being heard. She also encouraged participation in town meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 2:03 pm and the group took a photo with Governor Mills.