



Maine Board of Agriculture



Maine Board of Agriculture

March 3, 2023

Meeting Minutes

### **Executive Summary**

The meeting was held on Friday, March 3rd 2023, from 10 am to 3 pm. The meeting was attended by 11 board members (Kevin Woltemath listened via Zoom) and 6 invited guests, as well as 2 members of the Board administration. The Board elected Bruce Hall as Vice Chair. Diane Rowland and Hannah Carter presented on the University of Maine USDA Capacity Funds Plan of Work and Critical Issues and requested that the Board of Agriculture help to craft the critical issues for 2024's Plan of Work. Rowland presented the Expertise Directory from the Experiment Station that is meant to directly address a request from the first Board of Agriculture meeting she attended in November 2021. Rowland and Carter discussed open positions in agriculture, with the Experiment Station having 6 positions that have or will be retiring in 2023 and Cooperative Extension having 5 vacant positions currently. President Ferrini-Mundy took time to make remarks on the current state of the University's revenue streams and lead a discussion with the Board about creative ways to increase enrollment, yield, and retention rates. The President explicitly requested that the Board provide a list of program ideas. The Board discussed the meeting with Governor Mills set for March 23rd. It was discussed that they would request an increase in funding under the Maine Economic Improvement Fund that would be directed at agricultural research and extension and each Board Member presente provided their specific needs to be addressed by the requested funding increase. The Board will meet at 12:30 pm in the Cross Building Room 103 A/B in Augusta on Thursday, March 23rd, 2023 for the Governors meeting. This will be followed by a listening session for the agricultural community from 2:30 - 4:00 pm in the same location.

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### **Meeting Details**

**Date:** Friday, March 3rd, 2023

**Time:** 9:00 am - 2:30 pm

**Location:** Page Farm and Home Museum, University of Maine, Orono

**Format:** In person with Kevin Woltemath, Seat 05 Agricultural Council of Maine attending by Zoom

**Recorder:** Linden Schneider, Board of Agriculture Clerk

**Attendees:** Julie Ann Smith , Jake Pierson, Diane Rowland, Linden Schneider, Marilyn Meyerhans, Bruce Hall, Amber Lambke, Justin Gray, George Criner, Katey Campbell, Jeannie



Tapley, Tori Lee Jackson, Jessica Leahy, Hannah Carter, Marge Kilkelly, Edie Smith, Ryan Dennett, Barbara Hayslett, Kevin Woltemath (10:50 via Zoom), Joan Ferrini-Mundy

**Board Members in Attendance (11):** Julie Ann Smith , Jake Pierson, Marilyn Meyerhans, Bruce Hall, Amber Lambke, Justin Gray, Katey Campbell, Jeannie Tapley, Hannah Carter, Marge Kilkelly, Ryan Dennett, Kevin Woltemath (10:50 via Zoom)

### Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 by the Board of Agriculture Chair Julie Ann Smith and all those present provided a brief introduction. The first order of business was to approve minutes from the December 2nd meeting. Board Member Bruce Hall recommended that updates to the statute be described as ‘clarifying’ rather than as currently stated in the minutes as ‘softening’. Hall motioned for this amendment, Board Member Marge Kilkelly seconded the motion, and all members present voted in favor, no opposition and no abstention. Kilkelly motioned to approve the minutes as amended, Board Member Marilyn Meyerhans seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor, no opposition and no abstention.

The second item for approval was the Annual Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the University of Maine, Board of Trustees. Kilkelly moved to approve the same amendments as for the minutes, that updates to the statute be described as ‘clarifying’ rather than as currently stated in the annual report as ‘softening’. Hall seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor, no opposition and no abstention. Hall motioned to approve the annual report as amended and for the clerk to then submit it to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the University of Maine, Board of Trustees. Meyerhans seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor, no opposition and no abstention.

University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias President and Vice Chancellor for Research Joan Ferrini-Mundy arrived at 9:10.

Chair Smith moved to the agenda item of Election of Vice Chair of the Board and solicited nominations from the floor. Board Member Jeannie Tapley nominated Bruce Hall and Kilkelly seconded that nomination. Chair Smith nominated Board Member and Interim Vice Chair Jake Pierson. Election took place anonymously of the 10 Board Members that were currently present. Six votes were casted for Bruce Hall and 4 votes were casted for Jake Pierson. Bruce Hall was elected as Vice Chair.

The meeting moved to the discussion led by Dean, Director and Secretary to the Board Diane Rowland of the University of Maine USDA Capacity Funds Plan of Work and Critical Issues that is submitted annually by the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension. Rowland requested that the Board review the plan of work prior to submission to the USDA. The goal of the critical issues are that they are broad enough that people can see their work and that they align with the goals of NIFA granting opportunities and goals of other federal



agencies as well. The critical issues also align with State needs. Kilkelly inquired about the opportunity to collaborate regionally around critical issues with other land grants in Northern New England. Rowland provided that faculty submit collaborations in their reports, that there are both regional Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Directors groups, and multistate projects where faculty are involved in a multistate consortium of faculty around a research theme can all help with the regional collaboration.

Chair Smith articulated that the top three needs in agriculture are labor, technology and sustainability and inquired as to where these sit in the current critical issues. Rowland clarified that this is not a valued or ranked process for approving faculty projects, rather NIFA reviews objectives, methods, connections, and impacts in the state. Ferinni-Mundy inquired about the engagement with external partnerships in the project drafting process. Board Member Amber Lambke inquired about how the critical issues were formulated - in response to funding opportunities or state issues. Invited Guest, Associate Dean and Director Jessica Leahy clarified that federal funds must be matched with the state funds and the USDA allows that the state define their own critical issues and then the Experiment Station helps guide faculty to ensure that they address critical issues in their projects. Hall inquired about the trend of federal and state funding and ExOfficio Board Member Hannah Carter noted that in her tenure at the University of Maine that it had remained flat. Smith inquired about where the difference is being made up and Rowland indicated that the source was extramural funding success and Pierson expressed the desire to support grant applications through letters of support. Additionally, Rowland recommended engaging with collaborating organizations for applications to the Foundation for Food and Agriculture which requires a partner match. Hall described the process by which the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee collaboratively developed research priorities: The Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee creates a list of industry research priorities in conjunction with core researchers at the University of Maine and then these are also combined with the USDA NIFA annual call. The Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee makes an effort to tailor the language of their research priorities to be deliverable by faculty members when they are applying for USDA NIFA funding. Rowland requests that when Board Members are in Washington DC or Kansas City that they take the time to advocate for grant programs based on research priorities that Maine needs. Rowland suggests that determining critical issues could be a standing agenda item for the spring meeting because the deadline for submitting the Annual Report is in March. Hall suggested that candidate critical areas could be developed out of the listening sessions and April Agricultural Needs Board meeting. Rowland additionally noted that the critical areas are a good opportunity to show the USDA what the issues are in the state, even if they are more transient that would capture a 30 year faculty career. Kilkelly liked the idea of a whole year to discuss agricultural needs as it would be a good process and result in a richer product once needs were elevated to the level of a critical issue.

Rowland moved to the next agenda item of presenting the Expertise Directory from the Experiment Station addressing the need to know what faculty are doing by external parties that she heard at



the first Board of Agriculture meeting she attended in November 2021. The Expertise directory is searchable, sortable by keyword, and shows the time allocation of each faculty member between research, teaching, and extension. Carter provided information on the Maine Food and Agricultural Center directory which will aggregate both Cooperative Extension and Experiment Station directory. Meyerhans expressed her appreciation for the directory and that this has been a request of the board for a long time. Hall mentioned that it was also beneficial for internal use among faculty to understand each other's research programs. Rowland mentioned that the current directory is a draft and she looks forward to input on it from the Board. Ferinni-Mundy brought up the breadth of expertise the University of Maine contributes to agriculture and was excited to think about an 'agriculture adjacent' directory as well.

The topic of open positions was brought up by Board Member Lambke. Rowland expressed that when she gets a position approved by the University of Maine administration she would love to notify the Board. Carter also expressed that when a position is approved that leveraging the networks for circulation is a great help. Chair Smith inquired about how responsive faculty can be to emerging crises, for example the 4000 pesticides that will not be renewed for licenses in the state of Maine. Rowland used the PFAS response as an example, that many faculty are currently mobilized and in the process of modifying their research programs. The response capacity will largely depend on the topic and what expertise is currently at the University of Maine. Postdoctoral scholars are good ways to address issues rapidly, as well as short term professional and collaborations with institutions and organizations.

Carter provided a summary of the current open positions in Cooperative Extension. There were 11 faculty that took advantage of Special Retirement Incentives (SRI) in Cooperative Extension, and 10 were in agriculture and 1 in positive youth development. Four of these faculty members were given and accepted the opportunity to defer through 2023, leaving 7 SRI impacted positions. Two of those positions have been filled, leaving 5 vacant positions. The two that have been filled are a Potato Pathologist in Aroostook County and a Veterinary Lab Manager at the Diagnostics and Research Laboratory. Cooperative Extension will do the Statewide Needs Assessment this year and then hire for these positions depending on where and what the needs are around the State. There are also two fixed length positions that have been approved with collaboration with NRCS in Urban Agriculture and Forestry. Pierson expressed the need for an Extension Faculty in Ornamental Horticulture with its role as a fast growing industry in the state. There was also discussion of looking at capacity regionally between UNH, UVM, and Cornell. Carter noted there is also the hiring of Postdoctoral Scholar Jamine Garzon who will be a dairy forage specialist.

Rowland provided a summary of the current open positions in the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station faculty. There are 6 positions that have or will be retiring in 2023. Three in soil science, one is Animal and Veterinary Science, Food Science, and one in crop breeding. The areas of expertise include soil chemistry, soil science, biogeochemistry, livestock immunology and University of Maine Veterinarian, food safety and potato breeding. The potato breeding position has been filled and the new faculty will arrive on March 9th. Currently the largest issues are the



loss of all soil science faculty at the University of Maine and the loss of a critical team member in animal sciences. Many of these faculty have teaching appointments so loss of faculty also results in loss of the ability to teach critical soil and animal science courses. Rowland informed the board that all these positions have been put forward as requests to the Provost. Meyerhans voiced that these positions should be high priority. Pierson inquired about how the Board can assist and help the University realize the importance of these positions.

To address the question about the ability of the Board to advocate for these positions Ferinni-Mundy took the opportunity to make remarks. Ferinni-Mundy expressed her happiness and appreciation for the discussion. Ferinni-Mundy looks forward to exploring ideas, making connections and developing strategies to move forward. Ferinni-Mundy expressed that the land grant mission is at the core of the University of Maine's mission and identity, and she appreciates the defined focus of this Board on that mission. She is excited about offers for networking opportunities and extends special thanks to the Maine Potato Board and Wild Blueberry Commission for their support of education and research. She expressed how critical MEIF funding is to all the work that had been discussed so far. She provided a report on what the Governor's budget currently reflects for the University of Maine System. To the Education and General fund there is a 4.5% annual increase and a one time increase of 7.9 million additional and expressed that those numbers combined will help UMS significantly. Ferinni-Mundy then moved to discuss the declining enrollment and expressed the need for help from the Board to show families and young people see the value of the University of Maine. She expressed great thanks to the invited guests from the Federal Delegation, Edie Smith and Barbara Hayslett, for the support of the four agriculturally focused earmarks that were received in the last federal budget as well as two of the agricultural adjacent earmarks. Ferinni-Mundy reminded the group that enrollment is down, costs are up and tuition is flat. Only 53% of the Maine population is moving on to higher education. Revenues for the University of Maine are tuition and fees, state appropriations, and indirect cost recoveries from external grants. Ferinni-Mundy would love to have a list of specifics including (1) what does Maine agriculture need, (2) How do we partner, (3) What research needs to be pursued, and (5) How can we match that with our faculty.

Ferinni-Mundy solicited feedback and discussion with the Board. There was discussion of connection with community colleges (providing Eastern Maine Community College newly established agreement as an example), how the Board can impact decreased enrollment yield, and engagement with high school students. Rowland extended the invitation to Board members to join the High School Ambassadors program that the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture has established - particularly when faculty meet one - on - one with interested students either in person or virtually. The group additionally discussed diverse modes of education including exploration path for those who are not ready to declare a major, online learning, weekend courses, and microcredentials.

Kilkelly redirected the conversation by stating that Agriculture research and extension programs are not student based and inquired how to balance these needs with the revenue streams of



university being primarily from student enrollment. President Ferrini-Mundy provided some direction by stating that the university drives economic stability and that quantifying the economic impact of the University is essential to articulating the return on investment for things like the Maine Economic Improvement Fund that provides significant support to the University research enterprise.

Board Member Katey Campbell provided an interesting idea in order to recruit faculty to UMaine but also teachers generally - encouraging students to come back and teach through a clear education path, like we do for careers in agricultural industries. President references the nursing program's success in growing their own faculty. Lambke mentioned working with Maine Community Foundation on bold initiatives to address the root cause of problems - and in this case it would be access to higher education via free tuition and subsequent career placement. President Ferrini-Mundy discussed how to get those with incomplete degrees to return to complete their degrees through easy, customizable financial and programmatic pathways to learn and work at the same time, providing examples of University of Maine Presque Isle YourPace and Competency Based Education programs. There was further discussion of the impacts of COVID on educational attainment and college readiness of students.

Pierson expressed that many in his generation feel negatively about the college experience due to college debt incurred and that this impacts the encouragement of parents to send their children to school. Parents are still paying substantial money on their student loans and this impacts the quality of life as well as the ability to now pay for college for their students. President Ferrini-Mundy reflected that UMaine could be more clear about financial aid, scholarships, and provide accurate data about debt load that students carry when they leave. The final remark came from Lambke who expressed that Maine's Innovation Economy Advisory Committee can integrate needs for key faculty into the state science and technology plan. President Ferrini-Mundy requested a list of program ideas for the University from the Board and then departed.

The Board moved to the next agenda item - Preparing for the Board of Agriculture Meeting with the Governor. Chair Smith announced that the meeting with the Governor will be held March 23 in her Cabinet Room from 1 -2 pm. The Board has reserved the Room 103 A/B in Cross Building from 12:30 - 4:00 pm. The Board will all meet in the Cross Building then walk over together. The Board discussed making a request of increasing Maine Economic Innovation Fund dollar amount and that increase be directed towards agriculture.

The Board broke for lunch and Carter left to return after 1 pm.

Chair Smith then suggested that each member present provide the needs that increased funding to the Maine Economic Innovation Fund could meet and that they would like presented to the Governor. Invited Guest Associate Dean George Criner offered to provide historical information on faculty numbers and notes the college faculty are down 15 or more for the past 20 years.

Topics for the Governors Meeting



1. All Board members - Soil Science: UMaine needs to replace two current openings in Soil Science and Soil Chemistry and one future opening (September 2023) in biogeochemistry. This is critical to the state's agricultural, but also larger natural resource, economy. UMaine must reinstate this capacity to provide state and national soil science certification as well as provide foundational courses for all agricultural majors.
2. Jake Pierson - Funds must be used for hiring a Cooperative Extension Specialist in Horticulture - it touches apple, blueberries, home gardens, small operations that don't have a greenhouse, equipment, fertilizer. Positive impact on climate change and we must be growing plants climate adapted for Maine.
3. Amber Lambke - Funds must maximize interdisciplinary and innovative work that will directly impact Maine agriculture such as packaging using Maine's renewable resources, tractor technology and right to repair and skills, access to small scale equipment from Asia, could be fabricated here, 3D printing applied to packaging, soils and nutrient management, grain and agricultural products can be mitigation tools for climate change. Lambke would advocate for positions who engage students in research to solve these issues
4. Bruce Hall - Funds must be used to upgrade infrastructure, fill faculty positions, and provide increased extension capabilities. Infrastructure must be creative and innovative to attract talent. Hall reminds the Board that we are currently seeing privatization of services that used to be publicly available like at Wymans and Johnny's Selected Seeds. As budgets remain flat at the University, private companies take on those responsibilities.
5. Justin Gray - Funds must be used to support Cooperative Extension and the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station taking into consideration what positions will experience near term attrition. We need resources and expertise in place to help farmers that are not from sales people. Particularly in the areas of climate change and the need for irrigation, soils, and nutritional health. Particularly making sure the University can backfill and rebuild what it used to have
6. Marilyn Meyerhans - Funds must be used for maintaining Highmoor Farm and take into consideration who is close to retirement or leaving to ensure the shortest possible lapse in capacity. Some positions that are needed are in soil science, marketing, cold storage, equipment replacement for small scale operation, and variety research and development.
7. Marge Kilkelly - Funds must be used for technology for small livestock producers, development of small scale equipment. Maine agriculture is right sized for Maine, but not right sized for equipment that is produced and this should be the focus of design and research. Additionally an economic impact study for the agriculture research and extension efforts by the University is circuital to articulating the importance of this work to the legislature.
8. Katey Campbell - Funds must be used for hiring a Cooperative Extension Specialist in Horticulture. Campbell reminds us that agriculture and horticulture are the basis of every single person's daily life. Additionally if we want to be new and innovating and up and coming - we need the facilities to do so. We have seen the significant loss of big name



faculty over the years. We should take advantage of the local movement to engage with improved greenhouse infrastructure and sustainable materials and season extension.

9. Ryan Dennett - Funds should be used for addressing the economic disruption we are experiencing with innovation. A good example of how to do this is the Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program grants that have gone towards infrastructure investment as we learn from COVID and build a resilient local food supply. Areas that still need to be addressed are food safety and value added processing support, how to scale up production, pivoting operations to support PFAS affected farmers, especially dairy, land stewardship and keeping people on the land, increase grain production and profitability, hire an emerging enterprises faculty, financial and business planning and assistance with production of nitrogen fertilizer.

After all of the Board Members present expressed their priorities for the increased funding ask for the Maine Economic Innovation Fund the format of the meeting with the governor was discussed. It was agreed that each person introduces themselves, and then we have three top priorities provided in a written document to Governor Mills as this shows power in the consensus. Julie Ann will then present the priorities in a narrative format to the Governor. Clerk of the Board Linden Schneider, Criner, Hall and Chair Smith will gather some data and draft a narrative and the document for the Governor. Leahy reminded Board members that on March 23rd from 9am to 12pm it is the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension's day in the Hall of Flags. It was further agreed that the handout to the governor as well as Chair Smith's narrative to be presented to the governor will be run by Dean Rowland, Dean Carter, and Director of Community and Government Relations Samantha Warren.

Meyerhans moved that we adjourn, Killkelly seconded, and all members present voted in favor, no opposition and no abstention.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.