



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
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MEMORANDUM

To: Agricultural Advisory Committee
From: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director
Subject: Committee Meeting Minutes – January 16, 2024
Date: January 25, 2024

The seventh Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting was held on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, at 9:30am via Zoom video conference.

The following were present:

Committee: Highlands Council Vice Chair/Committee Chair Alstede, Jamie Bourgeois (Riamede Farm), Adam Furlong (B.W. Furlong & Associates), and Michael Beneduce (Beneduce Vineyards).

Highlands Staff: Gabrielle Gallagher, Neda Hartman, James Humphries, Corey Piasecki, Carolyn Klaube, and Karen Castanhas.

Also present was Marc Saluk (Hunterdon County).

Committee Chair Alstede opened the meeting at 9:41am.

Committee Minutes of June 8, 2023

Committee Chair Alstede asked the committee if they had any edits to make on the June 8, 2023, minutes. There were no edits.

Chair Alstede asked for a motion on the Agricultural Advisory Committee minutes of June 8, 2023.

Mr. Bourgeois made a motion to approve the Agricultural Advisory Committee minutes of June 8, 2023. Mr. Furlong seconded it.

2023 Highlands Council Agricultural Sustainability Grants Update

Mr. Piasecki, Principal Planner, gave a detailed update on the six approved agricultural sustainability grants.

Chair Alstede asked when will the next round of funding be available for the grantees.

Mr. Piasecki explained that the terms of the grants are for three fiscal years. After this year, the grants will be reviewed by the Agricultural Advisory committee to continue into the next fiscal year.

USDA/Highlands Coordination

Mr. Piasecki gave an update on the recent Highlands staff meeting with the USDA.

Agriculture and Cannabis in the Highlands

Mr. Piasecki gave a detailed update on the agriculture and cannabis in the Highlands region.

Mr. Beneduce asked how the growing or processing of cannabis works in New Jersey.

Mr. Humphries, Director of Planning, Science and GIS, advised that the growing and processing needs to be in an indoor grow facility in New Jersey in most cases.

Ms. Hartman joined the meeting at 9:58am.

At this time there was discussion on whether cannabis is considered agricultural or not. Mr. Humphries reviewed the Highlands Council's position that cannabis is considered agriculture, but it is not protected under the Right to Farm Act and therefore can be regulated under the Municipal Land Use Law. However, a state-wide policy would be preferable to having the Highlands Council issue its own policy.

Highlands Forestry BMPs

Ms. Klaube, Senior Natural Resource Specialist gave a detailed background explaining that the Highlands staff is no longer working on the Forestry BMP's and this will now be taken over by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Mr. Saluk left the meeting at 10:09am.

Agricultural Economic Sustainability Plan

Mr. Saluk rejoined the meeting at 10:18am.

Mr. Piasecki stated the Highlands staff are still awaiting funding for the economic sustainability plan.

Highlands Marketing and Tourism Plan

Mr. Piasecki stated the Marketing and Tourism responses to the Requests for Proposals are due January 16, 2024.

Committee Chair Alstede asked if any committee members had additional comments.

Mr. Beneduce added that it would be very helpful for new and existing farmers to have a centralized contact person at the state level, to be able to contact regarding any items that farmers need for their farm.

Mr. Bourgeois and Mr. Furlong both agreed with Mr. Beneduce's suggestion of a centralized state level contact person.

Committee Chair Alstede added that the Highlands staff has an excellent reputation to assist farmers in the Highlands regions, however, a state level contact person would be helpful for farmers outside of the Highlands region.

Mr. Saluk left the meeting at 10:38am.

Next Steps

Committee Chair Alstede requested the next Agricultural Committee meeting be held mid-March.

Committee Chair Alstede will give a recap of the New Jersey Agricultural Convention at the next meeting.

Highlands staff will contact Northwest Food Processing and New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to request a presentation of both services at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00am.