

Board of Agriculture

September 2022 Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Approved at the December 2nd, 2022 meeting

Executive Summary

The meeting was held on Friday, September 9th 2022, from 9 am to 2 pm. The meeting was attended by 14 board members and 18 invited guests including the President of the University of Maine and University of Maine Machias, as well as all 3 members of the Board administration. The history of the Board was provided at the start of the meeting, followed by a discussion among board members and invited guests how the Board, the University, and the Legislature could engage and communicate to move Maine agriculture forward. An update on PFAS research progress was provided by Director and Dean Rowland and Associate Provost and Dean Carter as well as University faculty Juan Romero, Glenda Pereria, and Rachel Schattman, and graduate student Alexandra Scraece. After lunch it was determined that three subcommittees (Structure and Charge, Governance, Advisory Committees to the Director) would be formed and meet at least twice between the next Board meeting to be held in December. The last item of the meeting was a presentation of the structure and funding of the Experiment Station by Director and Dean Rowland.

Meeting Details

Date: Friday, September 9th 2022

Time: 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

Location: Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station's Highmoor Farm

Format: In person with select attendees over Zoom

Recorder: Linden Schenider, Board of Agriculture Clerk

Attendees: Julie Ann Smith, Bonnie Green, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Tade Sullivan, James Dill, Nancy McBrady, Amber Lambke, Carol Woodcock, Rihannon Hampson, Katey Campbell, Hannah Carter, Shannon Weber, Heather Spalding, Eric Venturini, Justin Gray, Marge Kilkely, David Bell, Kevin Woltemath, William Pluecker, Robert Causey, Linden Schneider, Diane Rowland, John Volin, Diego Zamudio Ayala, MaryAnne Kinney, Clark Granger, Zach Schmesser, Jason Bolton, Craig Hickman, Samantha Warren, Jessica Leahy, Jeanne Christie, Juan Romero, Glenda Pereira, Erin Miller, Rachel Schattman, Alexandra Scarce

Board Members in Attendance (14): Julie Ann Smith, Tade Sullivan, James Dill, Nancy McBrady (proxy), Amber Lambke, Katey Campbell, Hannah Carter, Heather Spalding, Eric Venturini (interim), Justin Gray, Marge Kilkely, Kevin Woltemath, William Pluecker, Robert Causey

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9:15 Meeting was called to order by Chair of the Board, Julie Ann Smith. Marilyn Meyerhans, Board Member, will not be joining the meeting, too busy picking apples. Smith requested that everyone introduce themselves. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President of the University of Maine, and the University of Maine at Machias, indicated that she represents Dannel Malloy, Chancellor of the University of Maine System as well. Nancy McBrady, Board Member proxy, indicated that she is in attendance in Commissioner Amanda Beals board seat. Not all attendees were introduced at this time - only attendees who were sitting at the tables.

The zoom recording was started.

The Honorable (Hon.) Bonnie Green, invited guest, provided the history of the establishment of the Board of Agriculture (the Board). It started with the news that the University of Maine (the University) was thinking about shutting down Highmoor Farm. The group that wrote the Statute to establish the Board of Agriculture came from gatherings with representatives of agriculture and the University to determine how to prevent the closing of farms around the state. It was hoped that bringing together the University, researchers, and practitioners Maine could become cutting edge in agricultural production.

The Hon. Marge Kilkelly, Board Member, built on what Hon. Bonnie Green articulated but added the Board of Agriculture was formed to address the lack of equitable access to the legislature and the University for all groups. Kilkelly expressed that this was also an issue today and that the Board should look at who is missing from the table and facilitate engagement with the Board for all groups. At the time of the drafting of the Statute there was concern that research was absolutely critical and Maine agriculture depends on the University for this research, and on Cooperative Extension to bring the information to the field. Kilkelly was very excited to see the work of the Board continue.

David Bell, former Chair of the Board and University of Maine alumni in plant and soil sciences, provided some context to the founding of the Board in the landscape of Research and Development (R&D) in Maine. In the 1980-90s Maine started to invest larger amounts into the R&D and the university, but when inflation set in the state's investments could not keep up and by the late 90s deferred maintenance took a hold of the University. The board came out of 4 years of work to educate the legislature on advanced technology in agriculture. Because of the diversity of Maine agriculture the board did not want to focus on any one sector or research area, but tried to work at supporting agricultural research at the higher level through MEIF, bond issues for the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station (the Experiment Station) and the Diagnostic facility. And this higher level of focus is reflected in the legislation. The goal of understanding how the money was spent in the Experiment Station was to be able to support agriculture at the legislative level. For the agricultural community to support the University they need to understand how the Experiment Station works. He

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pointed out that Maine is a very small community, and bad news makes a lasting impression on people and can impact support for the University through bond issues. Bell concluded that this Board is an opportunity for the University to educate the agricultural community about what needs are not being met in agricultural research. He wished the Board well.

The floor was opened for discussion by the Chair.

Hannah Carter, Board Member, expressed her appreciation for the thoughts that were shared. Carter inquires about the development of a Long-Range Plan as specified in Title 7 Chapter 5 Section 125 item 7 of the Statute and where it might be. Bell thinks that it did happen but is not sure of the location and thinks that Steve Reiling would have been heavily involved. Additionally Kilkelly would like to know where the old annual reports are.

Katey Campbell, Board Member, inquired if there is a resource to know about what research the University is doing. Diane Rowland, Director of the Experiment Station and Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, replies that yes there is and it is on this meeting agenda to be discussed later. Director and Dean Rowland also makes note that it is important that what the Board needs to know is what of importance to the development of this resource around research activity in the Experiment Station.

Chair Smith remarked that as the Statute is written it will require a lot of work of the Board and the University going forward to have a productive partnership such that the Board can go to the legislature and advocate for the needs of the University. The Chair sees the Board as a great partnership between the agricultural community and the University and asks how we are going to run the board and would like to talk and work together to develop a plan.

Introductions of those sitting in the gallery.

Chair Smith requested the legislators on the Board and in the audience to weigh in on the annual legislative report that the Board submits to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

William Pluecker, Board Member, referenced the Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) and is interested in knowing how the legislature can pick up the work of the AIIP program and start a regular grant program for agricultural infrastructure.

James Dill, Board Member, recommended structuring the report around impacts and outcomes and things that need to be done including asks from the legislature, Experiment Station, and the University.

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MaryAnne Kinney, invited guest and Maine State Representative, recommended that the report be about critical issues, like the budget. The report could be structured around how each issue impacts different crops.

Craig Hickman, invited guest and Maine State Senator, concurred with the aforementioned suggestions and also adds that the Board should pay attention to how it educates the legislature about the importance of agricultural research and elevating the role of Maine's food economy. Hickman advises consistent and frequent communications from the Board like what they receive from many other groups.

Bell echoed that education of the legislature is an excellent point and inquires about how best to communicate with the State House and Senate.

Dill recommended communication with the Senate in person with essential points. Eric Ventruini, Interim Board Member, inquired how one would present to the entire legislature. Smith recommended that the Board would buddy up with a Senator or Representative to make a floor speech with better and more precise information. Kilkelly remarked that education is important because the rural economy is not understood by urbaners and that agriculture must be translated into something better understood in the legislature like jobs and taxes. Kilkelly would like to have a county by county breakdown of all R&D activities that the University is undertaking. Hickman suggested that the Board develops an official communication strategy. Bell recalled the [interactive research map](#) that Fred Sarvello presented at one point and Dill recommended a weekly one pager that is in color to be delivered on the desks of senators. Kinney remarked that the house can receive these digitally. Kilkelly remarked that the Board of Agriculture should attend Ag Day at the Hall of Flags as well as the reception for legislators for that evening. Green remarked that if possible the direct connection between the economic impact and research the University has undertaken should be made. Green also expressed having a consistent presence at and point of contact for the legislature to reach out to could be beneficial. McBrady would like relevant data about Maine agriculture to articulate the value of agriculture and this is perhaps something that economists at the University could provide. With all this discussion, Smith wrapped stating there is much work to be done and creation of subcommittees, monthly meetings, and reporting back to the whole board and the University could be a good way forward. Robert Causey, Board Member, thought this was a great idea.

Next there was a presentation by Director and Dean Rowland and Associate Provost and Dean Carter on findings and recommendations for a PFAS Study Plan supporting LD 558. After the presentation members of the board and invited guests ask questions. Pleucker asked about health monitoring and Director and Dean Rowland replied that there were units in the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture that could address this - but that this would be a separate document. McBrady thanked Pluecker for the bill and mentioned that a large portion of the PFAS fund will go to health

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monitoring. Tade Sullivan, Board Member, mentioned how the University is bringing the two sides of their areas of expertise together, Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension, as exemplified by the collaboration between Dr. Juan Romero and Dr. Glenda Pereria. Director and Dean Rowland mentioned that the University is responding quickly to the need for PFAS research through the creation and funding of postdoctoral positions. Rihannon Hampson, invited guest, expressed interest in data available to support decision making and Associate Provost and Dean Carter mentioned that she had been discussing how this would work with McBrady. Director and Dean Rowland resurded that results from research efforts will be publicly available and that Artificial Intelligence is a valuable tool that will be essential in aiding problem solving around PFAS. There was discussion about regulatory levels and McBrady reiterated that there are action levels and screening levels for food, but there is no legal obligation to disclose. Amber Lambke, Board Member, wanted action to ensure that Maine agriculture, while currently at the forefront of disclosure, would not bear the brunt of negative consequences for the presence of a ubiquitous substance. Clark Granger, invited guest, reminded the group of the Maine state soil bank program and if some contaminated fields could be converted into forest and forest back into agriculture that could be one management technique to use to address PFAS. There was discussion of regional and national collaboration around food safety as well as research with the topic of a multistate USDA grant, working groups, MOUs, conference hosted by the University, engagement with the Northeastern Regional Center for Rural Development, and regulation of PFAS impact on pesticide use.

Dr. Juan Romero and Dr. Glenda Pereira provided a PFAS Dairy and Forage research update. They are developing strategies to produce clean milk and reduce soil contamination by optimal manure and urine management through leveraging the physiological process of ruminants, novel binders (including lobster shells) that would be fed to cows, and forage harvest timing.

Dr. Rachel Schattman and Graduate Student Alex Scraece provided an update on their PFAS and crop research. They are working on exploring intercropping as a strategy to strategically leverage uptake differences between plant types to continue to use contaminated soil for food production. They expressed the crucial need for soil science expertise to do their work, and this is currently lacking at the University with vacant positions.

Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President of the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias, gave closing remarks before lunch. President Ferrini-Mundy echoed the Boards call to a commitment to communication and the need for establishing a communication system. President Ferrini-Mundy wanted all to know that they have partners in all of the University of Maine and the University of Maine System. The President and Chancellor understand the criticality of the issues and support a range of research from foundational to extremely applied in the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, Cooperative Extension, and across the University. The President emphasized that interdisciplinarity will be key for research questions as well as investment.

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12:15 - Lunch

12:52 - Return to meeting

Chair Smith suggests that the full board meet the first Friday in December 2022 and informs the attendees that the remainder of the meeting will focus on creating a plan for our work going forward starting with a review of the legislative charge. Kilkelly recommends forming a subcommittee on Structure and Charge of the Statute to review the legislation and determine what is a realistic function of the Board today. Two other subcommittees were suggested: Governance and an Advisory Committee to the Director of the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment station.

Venturini makes a motion to move forward with three committees: (1) Structure and Charge, (2) Governance, and (3) Advisory Committee to the Director

Kilkelly seconds

Director and Dean Rowland expresses that she would like the nature of the advisory committee to be a dialogue between herself and the committee.

All vote in favor of forming three committees.

Chair Smith suggests that there be a friendly amendment to the statute to include Cooperative Extension as an entity the Board advises in addition to the Experiment Station

Sullivan makes a motion to add a friendly amendment to the statute to include Cooperative Extension as an entity the Board advises.

Kilkelly Seconds

All vote in favor of a friendly amendment.

Membership of the three subcommittees was then solicited and board members volunteered as followed:

Governance Committee

- Tade Sullivan
- Justin Gray
- Eric Venturini
- Heather Spalding
- Kevin Woltemath
- Katey Campbell

Structure and Charge Committee

- Marge Kilkelly

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- Eric Venturini
- Tade Sullivan
- Hannah Carter
- Robert Causey

Advisory Committee to the Director

- Eric Venturini
- Justin Gray
- Amber Lambke

Linden Schneider, Board of Agriculture Clerk was designated responsible for coordination of the initial meetings, sharing meeting times to the full board to facilitate attendance of other members as desired, and circulating minutes of the subcommittee meetings to the full board.

Associate Provost and Dean Carter suggested that, at the December meeting, it could be helpful to understand how the funding flows from the state and federal appropriations into the University and the Board requested that Samantha Warren, Director of Community and Government Relations and invited guest, present.

The group requested that Director and Dean Rowland give the presentation planned on the structure and funding streams of the Experiment Station. Director and Dean Rowland stated that she would prefer to do the presentation jointly with Cooperative Extension as it more accurately articulates the full agricultural enterprise at the University, but is happy to discuss the Experiment Station with the promise of discussing Cooperative Extension next time. Director and Dean Rowland started the presentation by discussing the founding Hatch Act for the Experiment Station and the Smith Lever Act for Cooperative Extension and how these two Acts form a partnership between agricultural colleges and USDA to bring the latest research to people who support America's food system. Director and Dean Rowland provided an overview of the funding streams and breakdown of those streams into categories for the Experiment Station. Next, Director and Dean Rowland showed the mandatory topics that must be addressed by Hatch Act funding. She noted that she would look forward to the Board contributing to the Critical Issues that are annually defined in the Plan of Work that is submitted jointly by the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extensions to the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Additionally, Director and Dean Rowland noted all information on projects funded by the Hatch Act is available at <https://cris.nifa.usda.gov/> and noted that the Experiment Station office will help with navigating this site. Director and Dean Rowland welcomed new faculty members joining the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension who joined the University from January 2020 through to Spring 2022. Additionally Director and Dean Rowland discussed the Experiment Stations farms and forests and needs for critical deferred maintenance, as well

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as service facilities including the Analytical Laboratory and Maine Soil Testing Service, that also need critical maintenance to maintain this key service for Maine agriculture.

13:56 meeting adjourned