



Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
Thursday, January 7 at 9:00 am
Draft Minutes

SMADC Members: Senator Jack Bailey, Joan Bearden, Eddie Bowling, Edward Goodman, Erik de Guzman, Dan Donohue, Amanda Hand, Bill Hitte, Delegate Michael Jackson, Linda Jones, Guy Kilpatric, Ronald Marney, Julie Oberg, Barbara Polito, Martin Proulx, Donna Sasscer, Charlie Sasscer Jr., Kelly Swann, Steve Wall, Lucille Walker, Mary Wood

Members Absent: Lisa Barge, Commissioner Gilbert Bowling, Catherine Cosgrove, Willie Goddard, Charles Rice, Deana Tice, Steve Walter

Staff: Juliet Glass, John Hartline, Heather Hulse, Susan McQuilkin, Cia Morey, Rachel Norris, Karyn Owens, Craig Sewell, Shelby Watson-Hampton

Guests: Kevin Atticks, Director - Grow & Fortify, Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, Administrator - St. Mary's Co. Government, Colby Ferguson, Maryland Farm Bureau, Gretchen Hardman, Governor's Office, Senator Thomas 'Mac' Middleton, Jaelon T. Moaney, Reg. Dir. for Anne Arundel/So. Md, U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

Minutes

Dan Donohue made a motion to approve the minutes from December 7, 2020. Lucille Walker seconded, all approved.

RAC Update

Director Watson-Hampton introduced Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, St. Mary's County Administrator, who has been working very closely with SMADC and her team at Economic Development and Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) to bring the RAC to fruition. Dr. Bridgett reported that St. Mary's DPWT has drafted a Request for Proposal to hire a consultant with relevant experience for the RAC project build/construction. The prospective candidate must provide a list of meat processing facilities that they have worked with to validate their expertise. The RFP launch deadline is February 1, 2021; questions for DPWT will be accepted up to March 1, with proposals due by April 1, 2021. The anticipated timeline is to identify the consultant and complete project design by May 1, 2021. Regular monthly meetings with SMADC will follow through project completion.

Craig Sewell reported that he has been working very closely with St. Mary's County DPWT to explore construction options and thanked Dr. Bridgett for her support which has helped to advance the RAC project; however, there are concerns about the project timeline, which he hopes can be compressed.

The Amish slaughter facility management has experienced a series of internal difficulties over the past months that have stalled progress. The USDA has hired and trained a dedicated inspector for the facility who will be ready to work from January 15. In the meantime, the Amish have been given a check list of urgent items that must be completed prior to USDA final inspection.

Director Watson-Hampton thanked St. Mary's Government for their continued support and cooperation and offered congratulations on the upcoming groundbreaking of the new North St. Mary's Market. Due to COVID, the groundbreaking will be hosted virtually; a video presentation is tentatively scheduled for the County Commissioners on January 26, 2021.

Executive Committee Formation Discussion – Director Watson-Hampton stressed that although there have been logistical and cultural hurdles to be navigated, the opportunity to work with the Amish to bring SMADC's goal of processing facility to the region could not be ignored and we are optimistic for a successful outcome. The formation of an Executive Committee specific to the RAC and Amish slaughter facility was proposed to advise the director, project manager and staff with decision making. A list of committee members has been drafted in consultation with the SMADC Chair and Vice Chair for approval by the Board. The proposed members include SMADC Director, SMADC Chair and Vice Chair, Craig Sewell, Bill Hitte, Eddie Bowling and Susan McQuilkin.

Following a brief discussion, Dan Donohue made a motion to appoint an Executive Committee to advise and support the RAC and Amish Slaughterhouse projects. Delegate Michael Jackson seconded the motion. All approved. The Executive Committee is effective immediately with a one-year term to be renewed every calendar year. The Committee will provide monthly progress reports to the Board. Steve Wall volunteered to assist as an ancillary to the Committee if needed.

Upcoming Legislative Session Updates

Colby Ferguson, Maryland Farm Bureau – reported there are a total of 776 pre-filed Bills (combined House and Senate) and predicted many more, due to early filing requirements. Hearings are virtual with a cap of 50 people who can testify. The signup process is online with a window for testimony sign-up between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., 48 hours prior to the Bill hearing. Senate hearings have more restrictions, details are yet to be confirmed. Priorities for Maryland Farm Bureau are to fend off legislation that may be problematic. Leadership does not anticipate many controversial Bills; priority will be on the Budget which is tight, but is workable even with the deficit. Of the Bills reviewed only a few are not supported however there are 30 that will be watched closely. One-on-one zoom calls with constituents are available. Members are invited to reach out to Colby with any budget/Bill concerns pertaining to Southern Maryland. Of note MDFB issues weekly hotline reviews of bills that FB has taken a position on, with summary of how these bills may impact agriculture. FB membership is encouraged to receive the hotline or subscribe on the MDFB website. In-person Legislative Receptions are cancelled for 2021; leadership is investigating possible virtual alternatives.

Kevin Atticks, Grow & Fortify – gave a summary of the organization's mission and outreach which represents value-added ag. producers and the organizations that support them. Top issues this year are advocacy and assistance for value-added retail to mitigate COVID-related closures, regulations and restrictions. Priority legislative issues include a bill that will codify the executive orders for craft alcohol producers, an important vineyard and winery tax credit due to expire this year, and a Bill regarding restriction of hemp production/cultivation in proximity to urban neighborhoods. Grow & Fortify is working with producers in 6 counties on land use and permitting issues to protect and increase the viability of value-added producers and has been engaged to write draft legislation defining allowable uses/events at value-added facilities, and to differentiate between land/business owners masquerading as

agriculture. The Maryland Wineries Association has developed a new financial planning tool which will be launched in February to incentivize independent grape growers/vineyards to support the growth of the wine making industry in the state.

Member Updates – Members shared news and updates.

Director's Report

Staff were directed to give brief updates on the following programs:

Forestry Industry Video – the latest video in the Farms in Focus series was released on January 11. The video illustrates how careful forest management and judicious logging ensures the region's forests are continuously replenished and remain vibrant renewable resources.

MMM – staff has been busy calculating 2020 programmatic data. An end of year fundraising campaign more than doubled goal expectations. MMM is now offered at six winter season markets and contracts are being finalized with prospective county partners.

Little Free Libraries – the program has received excellent media coverage in recent months including an independent article in the Bay Weekly. 60 libraries have been installed; 12 libraries remain to be located. A new interactive map featuring the library locations/hosts is being developed and will be launched soon on the SMADC website.

Creative Services – several upgrades and additional resources are in development for the SMADC, BLC and Southern Maryland Meats websites. A new landing page for the Farms in Focus video series has been launched, the COVID assist page is updated with new information; members were commended to check the websites regularly and promote/share new pages and updates on social media.

Fundraising – SMADC fundraising initiatives seeking grant money and donations continue. Members were commended to follow social media announcements and share updates.

Adjournment

Dan Donahue made a motion to adjourn. Julie Oberg seconded, all approved.