

PENNSYLVANIA APPLE PROGRAM BOARD MEETING
Minutes of the September 7, 2023 Board Meeting

Public notice of the September 7, 2023 Pennsylvania Apple Program Board Meeting was given as stipulated by the Sunshine Law.

CALL TO ORDER

David Peters, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. Board members in attendance in addition to Chairman Peters included Ellie Vranich, Treasurer; Mark Boyer; and Benjamin Keim.

Mark Boyer was not present at the commencement of the meeting. Carolyn McQuiston was not present.

Also present: Patrick Andrews, Chief of Marketing Development, PDA; and Holly Zarefoss, Administrative Assistant for Commodities.

Julie Bancroft, Chief Executive Officer, Feeding PA; Tom Mainzer, Director, Agricultural Partnerships, Feeding PA; Beth Hamilton, Director, Member Services, Feeding PA; John Sciortino, Operations Manager, Mid-Atlantic Regional Cooperative, Feeding PA; Cheryl Cook, Deputy Secretary for Strategic Initiatives and Market Development, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture; and Caryn Long Earl, Director, Bureau of Food Assistance, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

APPLE HARVEST 2023

Chair Peters and members had discussion regarding current concerns in the apple industry, indicating apples that are likely not to get picked, growers who are struggling to find an outlet for apples, the dry weather, hail storms and cold weather and small apples.

Mr. Andrews noted Mark's attendance at the U.S. Apple Outlook Forum in Chicago as well as his concern regarding how the huge apple crops coming in from all around the country would be utilized.

Mr. Keim stated Mark also had concerns regarding how to address the off color and lower grade fruit. Mr. Keim was uneasy about the downward pressure on price in the fresh market.

Mark Boyer entered the meeting at 1:12 p.m.

Mr. Boyer noted Julie Bancroft and Tom Mainzer, members of Feeding PA were present at the meeting and would be discussing the state program.

USDA GRANT

Caryn Long Earl, Director, Bureau of Food Assistance, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, had discussion regarding the different state and federal programs and the charitable feeding programs that the Bureau administers. She discussed some programs available to assist Pennsylvania apple producers, including a bonus buy for fresh or processed apples which is supported by Secretary Redding.

The Local Foods for Schools Grant Program is also available to drive funds to Pennsylvania school food authorities for purchase of local foods. Ms. Long Earl talked about dedicating \$2.2 million of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation towards fresh or minimally processed apple purchases. She requested a list of contacts who would be involved in the purchasing process.

Ms. Long Earl commented program funding was to be spent by the end of June but that an extension would be requested due to the challenges apple growers are facing in Pennsylvania.

PASS AND LFPA PROGRAMS

Tom Mainzer, Director, Agricultural Partnerships, noted that he manages the Pennsylvania Ag Surplus System (PASS) program and the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) programs which go through the Bureau of Food Assistance which are state and federal dollars that go to the network of food banks covering all 67 counties. Those include fresh produce and dairy products and apple cider, apple juice, tomato and bean products.

Mr. Mainzer reported both programs work with smaller growers up to packers. All products are charitably distributed to individuals who qualify, and food banks work with producers in their regions. Mr. Mainzer discussed a telephone call from a grower in Adams County, who is expecting 10,000 bushels, which he did not have a home for and requested industry guidance in preparation for this type of a phone call.

Mr. Mainzer described the process involved in finding food banks which can take the product and store it or move it quickly.

MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL COOPERATIVE

Beth Hamilton, Feeding Pennsylvania, noted that there are nine Feeding America foodbanks in Pennsylvania and 13 food banks that Mr. Mainzer is involved with. She noted that since apples can be placed in cold storage, smaller food banks are able to take them on a consistent basis.

John Sciortino, Operations Manager, Middle Atlantic Regional Cooperative, Philadelphia, a nonprofit fresh produce wholesaler for approximately 30 foodbanks in the Northeast and MidAtlantic Regions and the ability to broker product out of state to foodbanks along the East Coast and across the country. He discussed pricing per pack and shipping options. Ms. Hamilton noted that trucks are currently being sent weekly to the Pennsylvania foodbanks.

Food packaging requirements were discussed and return of packaging totes was noted to present a challenge.

Mr. Sciortino mentioned that grading and size are not really factors since the cooperative deals primarily in the off grade number two market. Mr. Keim requested comment on grading standards involved with the USDA program. Ms. Hamilton explained that in general there is no requirement. There was further discussion.

Q&A

Ms. Vranich requested that a summary of options and contact information be provided. Mr. Andrews indicated that letters could be sent to the producers regarding the matter. He also suggested compiling a list of all universities and colleges in the state and also food service directors and providing that to either himself or Holly regarding suggestions to structure communications.

Ms. Long Earl noted that USDA could also bid and purchase processed apple products to provide more shelf stable product into the charitable and school programs. Cheryl Cook, Deputy Secretary for Strategic Initiatives and Market Development, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, indicated that Secretary Redding would help to move USDA forward in whatever way possible but that she would first like to have an informal discussion with Undersecretary Moffitt first. Chair Peters stated "the sooner all conversations could be had the better" as the producers move thorough this harvest. In the meantime, bullet point information would be sent to the Board recapping the programs and requirements discussed today.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Chair Peters noted the letters would be a big help to provide hope or solution to producers. After information regarding the programs is sent, Ms. Vranich would draft a letter and submit it to Holly or Ashley for review, followed by final review by the Board. It is imperative that both fresh and processed products be included on the buy.

ADJOURNMENT

RESOLUTION 2023.13-ADJOURNMENT

Presented by: Ellie Vranich

Seconded by: No second

To adjourn the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:21 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Devin Nunemaker", written in black ink. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Devin Nunemaker

September 7, 2023