

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 3, 2013

Members and Alternates Present: Cindy Steinbeck, Lisen Bonnier, Tom Ikeda, Bill Struble, Jerry Diefenderfer, Dick Nock, Eric Michielssen, Richard Hawley, Don Warden, Joy Fitzhugh, David Pruitt, Krista Herlihy, Chuck Pritchard, Richard Quandt, Martin Settevendemie

Absent Members: Jean-Pierre Wolff, Mark Pearce, Mary Bianchi

Guests Present: Patricia Wilmore - Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, Michael Russ – Cal Poly student

Staff Present: Laurie Salo - SLO County Environmental Health Department, Marc Lea and Brenda Ouwerkerk – SLO County Dept. of Agriculture

1. **Call to Order:** 6:05pm by vice-chair, Cindy Steinbeck. Quorum present.

2. **Announcements from ALAB Members & County AG Dept Staff Updates:**
 - David Pruitt reported the wholesale nursery business has had a quiet spring sales season and drought conditions may negatively affect it.

 - Martin Settevendemie reported the Department has received requests from SLO County Farm Bureau and the SLO County Cattlemen's Association to reinstate the Department's rodenticide bait sales program for ground squirrel control. Martin provided a history of why the program was cut, an explanation of current availability of identical baits from the Kings County Department of Agriculture and a brief description of what it would take to bring the program back. Several members shared their frustration about crop damage and the high population of squirrels due to drought conditions and lack of control material. Members also offered various ideas about storage units and the concept of pre-ordered, prepaid, large shipments from Kings County organized once or twice a season for growers to pick up.
Eric Michielssen commented about the potential for the rodenticides to cause secondary kill to raptors and mentioned birds of prey are effective for his organic operation and several local vineyards use falcons and owl boxes to entice predatory birds.
Martin will continue to evaluate costs and strive to avoid implementing a program with greater cost to growers than current options offer.

 - Richard Hawley mentioned he has noticed an increase in insects due to the current dry conditions.

 - Richard Quandt indicated a farm worker wage survey has been completed, with the base wage at \$9.27/hour which has increased 2% from last year. Labor supply is scarce and 19 – 24% additional workers are needed to keep up with harvests. Last year 892

acres were not harvested or were under harvested resulting in a \$4.2 million loss in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. Tightened border enforcement and an increase in labor intensive crops (strawberries for example) on the central coast have contributed to the labor shortage. The agricultural industry is generally supportive of immigration reform. Richard mentioned Claire Wineman was attending this evening's DPR Chloropicrin soil fumigation meeting where future additional restrictions will be discussed. Richard shared his frustration regarding a proposal from the agricultural industry to create a cooperative ground water monitoring program to meet monitoring requirements for the Regional Water Quality Control Board's ag waiver program. The Board has not been receptive to this proposal, which could mean individual monitoring. June 15 is the deadline for a decision.

- Jerry Diefenderfer reported on the severe drought conditions, no rain, no grass, but wild land fires are still happening.
- Dick Nock reported a run of sales recently at the Templeton Livestock Market. Due to drought conditions, no feed is available north or east. Beef prices are high in stores, chicken and pork half as expensive. It will take 5-6 years for ranchers to recover and bring cow herds back to normal levels. SLO County will see a drop in cattle production over the next few years.
- Chuck Pritchard reported cattle producers are having the same problems caused by drought conditions across the west and other places. Chuck announced the June 20 Summer Solstice Event in support of the Upper Salinas – Las Tablas Resource Conservation District programs.
- Patricia Wilmore announced the various Paso Robles ground water basin meetings. The Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance's grower educational outreach meetings have had good participation. The 2013 Wine Festival was a great success creating an increase in visitors to local tasting rooms.
- Tom Ikeda expanded on the labor shortage resulting in cooperation from neighboring producers sharing harvesters. Lots more insects are out because of the warm weather. Lack of rain has created soil salt problems earlier and shallow wells are going dry.
- Eric Michielssen reported the SLO Natural Foods (formally called Cuesta Coop) is moving to a new location at the end of Caudill near Victoria in San Luis Obispo with a July 13 grand opening. More room for local produce, especially organic will be available and local wines will be stocked.

- Bill Struble reported avocados are fighting wind damage and fruit knocked to the ground and salt burn as result of lack of rain.
- Lisen Bonnier concurred water and labor shortages are concerns. Lisen attended the League of Woman's Voters fracking presentation.
- Cindy Steinbeck reported a group of concerned individuals in North County have formed the Paso Robles Agricultural Alliance for Groundwater Solutions (PRAAGS) and has assessed growers, not just vineyards, for ground water studies to address the water supply issues in the Paso Robles Ground Water Basin. Focus is to keep ahead of issues, distribute factual information and avoid future litigation. She suggested a representative from PRAAGS make a presentation to ALAB in future.
- Joy Fitzhugh suggested Mark Battany from UCCE to present results to ALAB of his multiyear vineyard water use study.

3. **Open Comment:** none

4. **Previous Minutes:**

MOTION: Approve March 4, 2013 minutes: Motion: Jerry Diefenderfer, 2nd by Tom Ikeda.
Approved: unanimous. (Cindy Steinbeck abstained - not present at the March 4 meeting).

5. **Presentation: "Local Food Movement & Food Safety Issues" :**

Laurie Salo – SLO County Public Health Agency, Environmental Health Services

Laurie provided an overview of food safety concerns as related to the interest in local food movements. She provided information from the Sanitation Standards of the California Retail Food Code (Cal Code) which provides uniform standards statewide. Laurie explained local ordinances cannot be less restrictive than the Cal Code and federal regulations. Food safety and the protection of the public's health is the highest priority regarding how food is handled. Laurie provided a handout that outlined the application (or not) of the Cal Code to various situations such as community gardens, herd shares and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Members had questions about food safety and asked for clarification of the information on the handout. California AB 996 may affect direct marketing regulations if approved. Tom Ikeda asked about food safety liability. Liability would reside with the owner of the product.

Eric Michielssen felt the farmer is usually the liable party, regardless. Eric mentioned he met with Laurie's boss, Curt Batson, to discuss current regulations of food handling and he has backed-off of pursuing a local ordinance similar to the El Dorado County "Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance" that he presented to members at the March 4, 2013 ALAB meeting because state and federal regulations would most likely supersede this type of

ordinance. Eric pointed out CSA operations and Farmers' Markets can be regulated more if complaints of illness are made to the Environmental Health Department.

Eric mentioned implementation of the FDA approved Food Safety Modernization Act may change the way food is handled in the future. Water, soil amendments, health and safety of workers, domestic and wild animals, equipment and tools for production areas are all included in the Act. A 60-day comment period on the Act is coming soon. Exemptions may be available based on annual farm income.

6. Presentation: Review of DRAFT "Economic Contributions of SLO County Agriculture" Report:

Marc Lea provided a brief history and summary of the draft report and explained the Ag Commissioner's role as facilitator to provide questions from consultants to subject matter experts within ALAB and to forward ALAB's questions back to the consultants. The 2007 Paso Robles Wine County Alliance's economic study was discussed, and it was pointed out that theirs was a different kind of study and data from the PRWCA's study is not included in the economic report. Marc indicated the PRWCA's study focused on different factors, especially tourism, and that the two studies are not comparable.

Lisen Bonnier questioned why the study did not include tourism and felt the conclusions were too low and underrepresented the economic contributions of the local agricultural industry, especially if the study will be used by decision makers as a reference point. Marc explained the cost of the study did not allow for expanding the analysis into tourism. Diversity of local agriculture is the focus and the data goes well beyond the Ag Commissioner's Annual Crop Report farm gate values.

Bill Struble reminded members the report was a 2011 snapshot of the ag industry and the data will change from year to year.

Richard Quandt felt the employment data was consistent with EDD numbers. Richard said he was impressed with the summary statements on page 1 and the Diversity Index rating text does not explain the data well to the average person. Members had suggestions for clarification of the text throughout the report.

Cindy Steinbeck wants to make sure the distinction is made between the 2007 Paso Robles Wine County Alliance's economic study and to not forget the economic contributions made by ag tourism.

Dick Nock felt the consultants did a good job overall and felt we should continue to build on the report so agriculture has solid data to defend itself with the decision makers in Sacramento.

Richard Hawley noted the diversity scale in trending downward. Marc explained new strawberries plantings displacing historical vegetable production acreage may be affecting this.

Joy Fitzhugh asked if there were plans to update the report on a 3-5 year cycle, for example.

Martin Settevendemie answered the report is only a snapshot in time, only good for a few years and it could be updated in a few years with additional funding.

Chuck Pritchard suggested tapping into Cal Poly students in need of Senior projects to update the report in the future at a 2-3 year frequency.

Cindy Steinbeck pointed out as more counties complete similar economic studies, the data will become more useful.

Marc Lea asked ALAB members for permission to list their names in the Acknowledgement section. No objections were voiced.

Martin Settevendemie informed members the report will be presented to the Board of Supervisors on July 16. **(NOTE: actual presentation date to Board of Supervisors was changed to August 20, 2013)**

7. Future Agenda Items: Next meeting: August 5, 2013

- Information on fracking from Jean-Pierre Wolff, with presentation by the Regional Water Quality Control Board
- PRAAGS group update
- Update from Mark Battany on vineyard water usage

Meeting Adjourned: 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Brenda W. Ouwerkerk, County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures