

## **ALAB MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday – March 6, 2023**

**SLO County Farm Bureau, 4875 Morabito Place, San Luis Obispo 93401**

**Members and Alternates Present:** Lisen Bonnier, Sarah Kramer, Seth Scribner, Jeff McKee, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Brent Burchett, Kaylee Ellis, Dan Rodrigues

**Staff Present:** Marc Lea and Ian Landreth – San Luis Obispo County Department of Agriculture

**Absent Members:** Craig Pritchard, Jerry Diefenderfer, Randy Diffenbaugh, Butch Yamashita, Mary Bianchi, Claire Wineman, Mark Battany

**Guests Present:** Patricia Wilmore – Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, Matt Merrill – Mesa Vineyard Management, Tom Ikeda – Pending District 3 Representative

- I. **Call to Order, introductions, quorum determination:** The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Lisen Bonnier at 5:07 pm. Chair Rodrigues joined shortly thereafter. There were enough members present to have a quorum.

- II. **Open Comment:**

- Jean-Pierre Wolff is now a committee member on the USDA Farm Service Agency District committee (FSAD). The committee reviews all FSA Applications. There are about 400 applications associated with the recent flood damage within SLO County. Additional assistance was requested from The Farm Service Agency at the State Level to expedite the field evaluations to avoid any undue delays.
- Brent Burchett asked Wolff if there was a new acting director for the USDA Farm Service Agency. Wolff confirmed the new acting director is Robert Parks.

- III. **Previous Minutes – November 7, 2022**

**November 7, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

- **Motion to Approve:** Brent Burchett
- **Second:** Sarah Kramer
- **Approved:** Unanimous decision **Abstained:** None

- IV. **ALAB Governance Membership Updates**

- Marc Lea updated the ALAB on membership updates:
  - At our first meeting in 2022, we elected Dan as Chair and Lisen as Vice Chair to serve through the end of this year. There is no limit on how many terms the chair and vice-chair can serve, however, please let us know if you are planning to step down by August/September of this year so that we can plan ahead for potential chair or vice-chair replacements in January 2024.
  - Board of Supervisor (BOS) Appointments: the BOS voted to temporarily loosen the

- geographic requirements for their district representatives, which directly affects ALAB and other county boards and commissions. The districts that were used for the 2022 election are currently undergoing a legal challenge, and the BOS recently voted to withdraw the County's defense against that legal challenge. In light of the ongoing redistricting lawsuit, it's difficult to know exactly what the district boundaries will be in the next year or two. Due to that uncertainty, the BOS voted to relax the usual requirement to live within the district that you're representing on a board or commission.
- Bruce Gibson appointed Lisen Bonnier as the District 2 ALAB Representative. Bonnier's term ends January 1, 2027. Ortiz-Legg and Paulding have not yet appointed ALAB representatives, although it sounds like Tom Ikeda will likely represent one of those two districts. Terms for those ALAB members representing supervisorial districts automatically expire at the beginning of January when the appointing supervisor's term ends.
  - Lea mentioned that the ALAB by-laws include language that allows for vacant seats to not impact a quorum determination, e.g. seats that are officially vacant are not factored into the quorum determinations.
  - Tom Ikeda asked a point of clarification as to whether he could act as a voting member for this particular meeting. Lea confirmed that Ikeda was a guest until he was officially re-appointed by the Board of Supervisors.
  - Lea discussed other vacant ALAB membership seats. Because Lisen Bonnier was re-appointed by Gibson – Lea stated he would reestablish communication with CCOF and Farmers Market Association to assist with finding a representative. Anyone with a potential candidate is encouraged to provide that information to Lea.
  - Jeff McKee with Cattleman's Association will be the primary representative and Seth Scribner will be the alternate. Lea recounted that Farm Bureau and Cattlemen's pre-date the BOS adoption of ALAB, and that their nomination and approval rules are different than everyone else.
  - Jean-Pierre brought up the fact that there is still no Strawberry Representative despite it being the number one economic crop in the county.
  - Lisen Bonnier explained the idea behind the creation of the Direct Marketing/Organic Rep 20 years ago. The direct marketing portion was based on it being one of the agricultural industries that has a direct link between the farmer and the customer. The organic portion was a result – in Lisen's estimation – of the Farm Bureau's hesitancy at that time to invite an organic concept into their umbrella. Now things have changed at the Farm Bureau and organic farming is something they report on and update their members on. Bonnier did not believe the seat was as crucial as it was back when it was first adopted. Wolff concurred. Dan Rodrigues asked how many ALAB members were currently growing organic in some capacity? Lisen clarified that it is so much more represented in the current ALAB member seats that it may no longer be necessary to have. Rodrigues stated that the acres that he manages are approximately 30% organic or biodynamic.
  - Lea recounted his experience with the two groups (CCOF and Farmers Market Association) who nominate this seat, and explained that they are typically open to nominees outside of their organizations as long as they are generally in philosophical alignment with those

organizations.

- Tom Ikeda suggested Byron Talley who has organic lemon orchards as a potential nominee.

**V. Presentation/Discussion:** ALAB Environmental Representative: an examination of the ALAB Operating Guidelines for determining the Environmental Representative. Potential ALAB recommendation to the BOS for either bylaw changes in the nomination criteria or suggested elimination of the appointment.

- Lea provided background and dates on the creation of the Environmental Rep.
  - The position was created in 2001. ECOSLO's positions and overall focus have changed over the years.
  - Richard Hawley was the environmental rep for many years and was consistently and regularly involved with ALAB. He stepped down in 2018, and the environmental rep has not had the same level of involvement since then.
  - Krista Burks had a term that ran from 2018 – 2021.
  - Camilla Posson was nominated in June 2021. She never attended a meeting and her seat expired January 1, 2023. An environmental representative has not attended an ALAB meeting since 2021.
  - In anticipation of this ALAB agenda item, Marc Lea contacted ECOSLO to notify them of this discussion and the potential removal of the Environmental Rep seat. They did not respond with any questions or concerns.

Lea mentioned that ALAB could vote to amend the bylaws to make the nomination requirements for the environmental representative more general, or ALAB could vote to remove the position entirely. After ALAB's vote, it would need to be brought to the Board of Supervisors for final approval.

- A motion was made, but subsequently withdrawn, to remove the Environmental representative entirely.
- Further discussion from members present indicated that the Direct Marketing/Organic representative position should also be discussed. With the potential to loosen those nomination requirements as well, or potentially consolidating those two positions into a single sustainability representative. Since the discussion on the Direct Marketing/Organic representative was not agendaized for this meeting, no formal action can be taken on that item, and it was agreed to discuss this issue again – for both the Environmental rep and the Direct Marketing/Organic rep.
- Lea also explained that if it was decided to remove both the Environmental rep and the Direct Marketing/Organics Rep that the Board of Supervisors would likely have some questions, and possible concerns, about that decision and that we would need to bring the BOS up to speed on the reasons for the changes, and rationale behind voting to potentially remove those positions.
- Lisen Bonnier provided additional background on ECOSLO. There was a time when ECOSLO was very involved with local agricultural issues, primarily regarding pesticide use. Since then, there have been a lot of changes in both the overall regulatory environment and with ECOSLO itself. She is unsure of their primary focus right now. She was open to keeping the Environmental Representative seat but

recommended opening up the nomination requirements to a broader range of environmental interests.

- Sarah Kramer asked what other environmental groups are out there? From her brief search, it didn't appear that there were that many environmental groups who are routinely active in our county.
- Tom Ikeda asked if it would be more beneficial to move toward a sustainability representative, instead of an environmental rep.
- Bonnier brought up the Land Conservancy as a land stewardship option. Bonnier would be more prone to keeping the position open to other groups.
- Marc Lea – If you changed the bylaws instead of eliminating the position, you could open it up to a broader range of environmental groups or sustainability concerns.
- Seth Scribner used Sierra Club as an example stating there is very little in common between the Sierra Club and many agricultural entities. Scribner was concerned there would be friction if a Sierra Club member was on the board and moved ALAB from its core focus on agricultural issues.
- Bonnier countered that sometimes that friction can have benefits and lead to positive outcomes, as in the case of the local Land Conservancy that has become a large organization within the county, covering a lot of agricultural space.
- Jean-Pierre Wolff pointed out that having a Land Conservancy rep would be duplicative to the RCD representatives.
- Tom Ikeda said what about something like the Central Coast Vineyard Team. They are an organization that focuses on sustainable agriculture and could have more to offer in the discussions common to ALAB. The perspective that you bring in with groups like the RCD's or the Vineyard Team, will include an agricultural angle and a certain level of agricultural understanding and often leads to better working relationships.
- Bonnier asked if the group wants to fold the environmental rep seat and the organic and direct marketing seat into a single position? She also mentioned the importance of having a diversity of viewpoints and opinions within the ALAB membership.
- Dan Rodrigues recommended to table this agenda item until the next meeting. We should consider these two positions collectively and really figure out who would best represent them and the best path moving forward.
- Marc stated if ALAB wanted to consolidate the Direct Marketing/Organic Rep and Environmental Rep into one position, one that is focused on sustainability, then that seems like a fairly easy argument to bring back to the Supervisors themselves, who will ultimately be needed to decide on any official changes.
- We will add this item to the next agenda, including a discussion on the nomination process and overall need for both the Environmental Representative and the Direct Marketing/Organic representative. Marc will reach out to the Strawberry Commission as well, to revise discussions about finding a viable ALAB Strawberry representative.

**VI. Updates/Discussion:** Updates from AG Department Staff - January 2023 Storm and Flooding Damage – Discussion of various programs that may be available to assist affected growers and ranchers. Brent Burchett, San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau and Marc Lea, County of San Luis Obispo Department of Agriculture.

- Marc Lea provided an initial overview of the storm recovery status, and the department’s role in providing crop loss information to the Farm Service Agency.
- Brent Burchett provided detailed information on the specific requirements to qualify for aid, and the various FSA and/or USDA programs that may be available to impacted growers.
- Seth Scribner stated that cattlemen had been on some site inspections. Explaining that there was not any official direction following those inspections.

**VII. Updates/Presentation:** Overview of Board of Supervisors Updated Priorities List to Planning & Building Department  
Ian Landreth, County of San Luis Obispo Department of Agriculture.

Ian Landreth provided a quick overview of priorities given to the Department of Planning and Building by the Board of Supervisors. A full detailed report can be obtained by visiting the following link: [Staff Report](#) and [Item Documents](#).

**VIII. Updates from Ag Department Staff**

- The Paso Basin Land Use Management Area Planting Ordinance was rescinded before it could take effect, and the existing Ag Offset Requirements have been extended to 2028.
- Marc Lea discussed the AG Pass Program that will be taken to the BOS April 4, 2023. The program exists to facilitate access to an agriculturalist’s livestock or crops during a disaster, typically a wildfire event. Even with the training and possession of an ag pass, it does not guarantee entry into their property and will still be handled on a case by case basis by emergency personnel.
- Lea gave the ALAB members a brief review of recent complaints from local residents regarding the use of wind machines in vineyards and citrus/avocado orchards. Lea discussed the potential idea of developing a list of “accepted customs and standards” for the use of wind machines, much like has been developed for the use of bird frightening devices (aka, bird cannons). The ALAB members agreed that the development of a set of accepted customs and standards for wind machines was needed and agreed to add that item to the next ALAB meeting.

**IX. Future agenda items/meeting dates, adjournment.** - Chair Dan Rodrigues.

- Further discussion on both the Environmental Representative and the Direct Marketing/Organics representative.
- Development of “accepted customs and standards” for wind machines.

**Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion to Adjourn:** Brent Burchett

**Second:** Dan Rodrigues

**Next Meeting:** April 3, 2023

Respectfully submitted by Ian Landreth, San Luis Obispo County Department of Agriculture