

## **Ag Issue Committee Virtual Meeting January 6, 2022**

### **ATTENDANCE:**

**Committee Members:** Brad Taggart, Carolyn Scobie, Corrine Tompkins, Andrew Hinkley, Vanessa Merrill, Paul Cerosaletti, Rich Tobe, Joyce Gray

**Advisor:** Janet Beken-Smith

**Staff:** Carla Crim, Dale Dewing, Jeanne Darling, Jim Romack, Paul Cerosaletti, Rich Tobe, April Wright-Lucas

**Member Absent:** Kirk Fletcher

**Advisor Absent:** Chris Camann

### **INTRODUCTIONS:**

Staff and committee members introduced themselves. We welcomed new member Andrew Hinkley, from Sidney. He has a registered Angus farm and a few registered Kiko goats. He is in the farm insurance business, and farming is his passion.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

A roll call vote was held and it was unanimously agreed that the following would stay in their positions:

Chairperson: Fred Kuhn, Grand Gorge

Vice Chairperson: Kirk Fletcher, Walton

### **ELECTION OF SECRETARY AND CCE BOARD REPS:**

The following assignments were also unanimously agreed upon in the roll call vote:

Secretary to Ag Issue Committee: Carolyn Scobie, DeLancey

Personnel Committee: Carolyn Scobie

Finance Committee: Brad Taggart, Sidney Center

Long Range Planning: Joyce Gray, Middletown

### **AMERICAN RECOVERY PROGRAM FARM GRANT PROPOSAL:**

Corrine introduced a possible funding opportunity through Delaware County. County governments were given some funds to disperse in their counties for pandemic relief. At a supervisors' meeting it was mentioned that farmers were deserving of some funding. She along with Paul and Dale have been working on the idea of obtaining and distributing funding to farmers, especially those that did not obtain Southern Tier funding in the past. Grants would range from 5k to 25k and would cover projects that stabilize or improve farm operations. Wayne Marshfield, chair of the disbursement committee for the board, suggested that we write up our idea and submit it for the committee to review. Corrine shared a possible proposal requesting 500 thousand to a million dollars to be administered in a grant program to Delaware County farmers. They could request 5 thousand to 25 thousand to do a meaningful project on their farm that would stabilize or improve their operations.

Preference would be given to farmers who were ineligible to apply for Southern Tier Funds. Many deserving farms were excluded because of land ownership issues including rentals and estates in transition. Applicants would need to be 18, be a resident of Delaware County, and have a defined farming operation which is located in Delaware County. Paul described possible environmental stipulations such as having recipients agree to participate in the Watershed Ag Program or the Ag Environmental Management Program through Soil and Water Conservation District. Dale had spoken to Larry Underwood and he was supportive. There was a discussion about additional qualifications such as tax exemption status, income limits, years in farming, and access to other funding sources. It was agreed that the application should be simple to not cause stress for applicants or create excessive work for staff.

It was agreed that since the spirit of the funding is pandemic relief, the funds should support those who have experienced supply chain and/or labor issues. Eligible project costs were discussed. The Southern Tier program was used as a backbone, but it was more geared to building infrastructure and this is more for recovery. The term “permanently installed” was analyzed and it was agreed that things that could be removed, but not easily, are still technically installed and eligible if they could make a difference for the farmer. It was agreed that specific examples of eligible purchases should be included in the request for proposals. Installation costs are often more than those of the equipment and it was agreed that those could be covered by the grant.

The level of detail of the pre-proposal to the county and the funding request were discussed. Committee members agreed that we should apply as soon as possible so as not to miss out on the dwindling pool of funds. We should provide an overview of our ideas, and then focus on details once the general idea is approved. Corrine said that Wayne is in favor of us coming in at two funding levels – 1 million and 500,000k. The 1 million is the upper limit and more desirable, but if only 500,000k is awarded, perhaps we could come back and ask for more if the program is successful.

Delaware County Economic Development is supportive of this concept. Paul, Dale and Corrine will use committee input to continue to develop the proposal and hope to have something ready for the supervisors’ meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

#### **VACANCY OF EXTENSION BUSINESS MANAGEMENT POSITION:**

Dale opened the discussion by stating that this was the time to consider the position Mariane was hired to do 25 years ago and what the needs for the next 25 years may be. And although we want to fill the vacancy in a timely manner, we want to put thought into the process and consider all of the options.

A list of Mariane’s duties was shared with the group. Beyond farm business management, she covered ag plastic recycling, agritourism, and served on many committees, work teams, and boards. Many of her assets and interests developed over her career, and it was agreed that it is unreasonable to expect that we will find someone with her exact qualifications. A spreadsheet of her duties was then presented. It addressed short-term and long-term coverage of the

different roles. Carla is taking on many of her smaller roles and responsibilities for now. Depending on the interests/qualifications of the replacement, Carla may permanently take over tasks like Annie's Project, Family Farm Day, Ag Literacy Week, Lennox Forest Committee, Maple/Honey producer groups, and Small Farms PWT. Other responsibilities like Core Team, Clean Sweep, Dairy Tour, and County Animal Response team can be covered by WAC staff. We will all work together on compiling and editing newsletters. Emily Roach is taking on fleet vehicle oversight, and Valerie will take over technology purchasing.

The areas we cannot cover in-house were discussed. We will not offer Tax School as there are regional tax schools through Cornell. Dairy farm summaries will be handled by Jason on campus. Mariane suggested that we refer clients to FarmNet assist with farm transfers, business planning, and rental agreements.

The committee provided insight into the needs of Delaware County Farmers. Although there is less demand for farm summaries, there are other needs that have emerged, particularly in the areas of technology and management skills. Joyce, Vanessa, and Andrew all emphasized the importance of knowing how to use QuickBooks and making sound business decisions based on numbers.

The idea of possibly joining a regional team to help fill the void was brought up. April expressed concern that this might diminish our already declining infrastructure for dairy and livestock farmers in the county. Vanessa echoed that we need a person to advocate for farmers and educate the public about farming. It was agreed that it would be difficult to find a highly experienced person, and perhaps we should be flexible with qualifications and possibly advertise for both senior and entry-level positions. Jim brought up the fact that we are a very unique county, and our farmers might not be served well by a team. He mentioned that the larger teams to the north and west are likely spread thin because of their geographical range, and we have more in common with Orange and Sullivan Counties.

Dale explained that we have operated successfully on our own to this point, but this would be the juncture to consider joining a team. Dale and Paul went on to give further explanation of the regional team model. Most of the counties in the system offer programming via multi-county teams. Chenango Co. pays 35-40k per year to be part of an eight-county team to the north of us, and if we joined, we would be the ninth. The fee supports a team of specialists who visit with stakeholders and provide services. An option would be to join a team and hire a part-time educator.

We received very constructive feedback from the committee. Vanessa mentioned that she had experience with teams when she worked for CCE. She expressed hesitation to be lumped in with a team because, although other counties have deficiencies in ag staff/programming, here in Delaware County we have a lot to offer. Would they actually help us? Paul mentioned that we had partnered with Otsego Co. in the past, and asked Joyce for feedback. She said she wasn't impressed, and that we needed to realize that we had more in common with county downstate than upstate. She also spoke to the diversification and changes that our coming

about with a shift in population. Janet shared the same sentiment and thinks we should find someone qualified and then define their role over time. She described the things that make us unique – more downstaters, more dairy/traditional ag, larger fair, and a different farm-scape. She said “get the right people on the bus and then you get them in the right seats.”

Brad agreed that we should find a senior resource educator to replace Mariane instead of joining a team. Andrew mentioned that we need someone that understands how diverse our farms and people are so that we can stay sustainable and adapt to changes. Fred said that we need to find someone who will “live the job” rather than just collect a paycheck, and how important it is to receive a call back and get that personal touch. Joyce and Vanessa once again emphasized the importance of imparting technology and business skills to farmers. Joyce said the farmers needed to separate the “way of life” from finances to be able to survive.

Based on committee input, we will formulate a position description that includes prioritized responsibilities. Paul says that once we find someone, we will look at their skill sets and experience and see how they sync with Carla’s as far as leadership goes. Carla stated that she is willing to take on more responsibility but would need to be compensated. She also stated that she is flexible and just wants to serve CCE in the best possible way.

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

Corrine announced that we had 120 registered for the upcoming Catskill Regional Agriculture Conference.

**FUTURE MEETING DATES:**

April 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, 1 p.m.

July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 7:30 p.m.

October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.