

Minutes – CEC Meeting – Cotton Town Hall, November 20, 2019

Present: Jim Takala, Keith Nelson, Gary Rantala, Doug Hoffbauer

Others: Jim Gottschald, Troy Salzer, Shirley Lantz, Nicole Baxton

Chair Jim Takala called the meeting to order. Minutes from the October 16th meeting were approved as printed. Pledge of allegiance at 9:32 am.

Program Update – Troy Salzer, Extension Educator

- Traditional agriculture – NEFGC Tour de Forage will have their winter meeting on December 3rd in Floodwood and is expected to have @ 120 participants. There is a lot of work with the Midwest Forage Association. This meeting is significantly different than others in the state because of the programs requested by our farmers. For the last three years milk prices have been low. Beef prices have been taxing on the farmers due to the price of forage production. Ag has a big impact on helping through financial challenges and there is a lot of collaboration to give ideas to other farmers to work through these challenges. Troy has been working with 4-H youth to process and teach about harvesting vegetables. There is a need for locally processed food (meat). Keith mentioned lobbying for extra money to finish the St. Louis County butchering facility, but it is approximately two years away from processing. In the meantime, two butchering facilities are trying to get out of the business.
- Troy mentioned data collection on liver flukes and collecting samples from sheep. The earliest open processing date is March 3rd at the closest USDA facility.
- The community has helped Troy make connections in working with youth alongside Nicole Kudrle. He's done presentations on soil, growing and feeding grain to livestock, and identifying different varieties of plants for an edible food forest (rhubarb, asparagus) that are local to our area.
- Troy had the opportunity to go to Cherry School to present to 9-12th graders on agriculture and agriculture careers. Troy is working with Bob on a rutabaga project in relation to the small fruits conference in the North and South. Doug comments that Bob hit a home run with Garden Fest and that is the direction these events should go. We should not solely focus on the specific vegetable of the year. Gary asks if we've seen an increase in locally grown/organic. Troy responds that the dynamic is changing and farmers' markets (in the North specifically) are the avenue being used to purchase locally grown. There is a lack of growers in South St. Louis County to sustain the farmers' markets in that area. Troy states that is one of the components we're trying to address. Suzanne Driessen, Extension Educator in Food Science has been asked to come up to do a Cottage Food Safety training. Doug suggests it has traditionally been done in Cloquet, but two trainings with one on the Range would be ideal. Keith points out that we should gauge trainings on impact, not on who will attend, to have the greatest impact on small farmers. Keith also states that we're lucky to have Troy. We need to engage the University to get those resources here. It's a matter of getting it out to the right communities and is up to us to promote. We have good programs that will bring newspapers and reporters. Schools/youth are going to have the most impact going forward. Specifically Cherry, Northwoods, and South Ridge in relation to Agriculture.
- Troy wants to educate people who are bringing food/food products to farmers' markets. Patrice Bailey, Assistant Commissioner of Minnesota Department of Agriculture, came to Lake Superior College to talk about emerging issues of agriculture. Commissioner Jewell invited him to participate in the CEC meeting as he recognizes the issues we're having here are significantly different than the rest of the state. He plans to attend the February 19th meeting. Troy would also like to invite young aspiring farmers. Gary asks if he has a perspective on what we can do up here in the Northern part of MN. He highlighted the wolf prevention grant with several other examples. He's trying to address those sorts of things. Jim Takala comments that the average age of the audience is 60+ and how do we impact young people in Ag? What are the barriers? (Capital is a barrier and the driver is profitability.) We need to

think along those lines. Troy gave an example of one farmer in Southern MN who had revenue generated from a CSA and farmers' markets that was stagnant even after 7 years in business. It traditionally takes 10 years to establish. Keith Nelson mentions that there has been identification of old Ag land, a lot from tax-forfeiture, but there is no plan to get it back out as farmland. Jim Gottschald brings up resources to help farmers: economic levers that can be implemented, recognizing mental health issues, and challenges/struggles with the next generation of farmers. Troy is aware and is trying to help with the mental health struggles. He has taken mental health first aid and is certified. He has asked farmers (regardless of age) directly – what can I do to help you? The needs are different – some are liquidating the business and moving away, while others are looking to quit their day jobs to farm full-time. In one example Troy gave, the farmer wanting to farm full-time thought if the business was bigger there would be more revenue – but the profits just weren't there. The best advice he was given is to just keep talking to people about it and to make sure they're not alone. One farmer sold his dairy business and wished he'd done it sooner. Troy wonders how he decides or advises them on when to hang it up? Jim Gottschald questions if we need to look for resources to help farmers? What do we need to make available and is Patrice in a position to help us advocate for penalties? Troy states he does have some ability to make the right people hear about it.

County Extension Budget Update

\$7,000 was added for an intern position. Jim Gottschald asks where that position will be? North, South, or both? Keith responds that Bob and Troy agree to work together and share that position so the intern receives a full experience. He also points out that this opportunity will help promote and advocate for a pool of candidates if a position becomes available in the future.

Jim G. states the Civic Center Farmers' Market is self-sustaining. It has one anchor, but would benefit from having another (or more) growers. Doug thinks one or two (5-10 acre) growers would be ideal.

Jim G. mentions the Youth in Action Conference is moving to Duluth and we've had lots of contributions so far. Keith says he really pushed for the Conference in Duluth and is working to get the DECC cost reduced. He also believes the Conference should alternate between North and South.

County Extension Committee Terms and Appointments Update

Two CEC members will have terms expire this year. Gary Rantala and Roger Sabin. Gary states he is interested in another term. Roger is not interested. Roger represents district 7. Jim G. asks if we feel we have adequate representation from all areas. Jim Takala does not feel South St. Louis County is very well represented. Keith would like to see district 7 picked back up. Doug asks if maybe we should be looking for someone with 4-H experience. Jim T and Keith suggested that Mike Helstrom, a beef farmer from the Little Swan area would be a great choice.

Topics for January meeting

What do the by-laws say about having alternate members? The potential topics listed on this month's agenda will be on the January agenda: review by-laws; election of officers; review MN Extension statute; review Extension committee roles; 2020 Extension committee goals; 2020 Extension budget; Feature program schedule.

Meeting adjourned at 11:06 am.

Next meeting is Wednesday, January 15, 9-11 am at Cotton Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Baxton