

Montana Organic Certification Advisory Council (MOCAC)

March 17, 2006

1:30 – 3:45

Helena, Montana

Conference Call Minutes

MOCAC MEMBERS:

1. Steve Baril – present in person
2. Laura Garber
3. Mikel Lund
4. Nancy Matheson
5. John Hoffland – present in person
6. Andre Giles
7. Nancy K. Peterson

DEPARTMENT STAFF:

1. Doug Crabtree
2. Darlene Ramage

ABSENT:

1. Mark Bruckner

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

1. Judy Owsowitz (Organic producer; ex-MOCAC member)

MOTIONS:

Steve Baril made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2006 meeting, seconded by Nancy Matheson. **Motion to approve the minutes with the correction carried unanimously.**

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Every council member** will write a short Bio, including email, phone numbers, location and nature of their (organic) businesses, **to Steve by March 22, 2006.**
- **Steve Baril** will submit the final letter (Council Member introductions) to the department and to MOA and AERO for publication in their respective newsletters, **by March 31, 2006.**
- **Ron Zellar** will review the Council letter, **by March 31, 2006.**
- **Doug Crabtree** will email the council a draft of the survey, **by July 15, 2006.**
- The **Council** will review and the submit comments (on the survey) **to Doug by August 1, 2006.**
- **Doug Crabtree** will draft an agenda for the next meeting and send it **to Nancy K. Peterson and Nancy Matheson, by May 12, 2006.**

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- **Ron Zellar** will publicize the next meeting on the State Meetings Calendar.

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Nancy K. Peterson

Nancy K. Peterson opened the meeting with a warm welcome to those present at 1:35 p.m. John Hoffland and Steve Baril were in attendance.

Doug welcomed Sean Mulla on board as an official staff member with the organic program.

Review of Previous Meeting Minutes

Nancy K. Peterson asked if there were any amendments to the minutes from the February 22, 2006 MOCAC meeting. She had a correction - that the date of February 22, 2006 be added after "Motion to Approve Minutes of last Council Meeting." Steve Baril made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2006 meeting, seconded by Nancy Matheson. **Motion to approve the minutes with the correction carried unanimously.**

Mikel Lund asked if we could move the ISO accreditation project update to be discussed first, due to the fact that he would have to leave the meeting early. Nancy K. Peterson agreed and the first item discussed was the **ISO 65 accreditation update as new business.**

New Business: ISO Accreditation Update

Doug Crabtree reported that the ISO 65 internal audit was completed on March 10, 2006. Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) officials conducted a desk audit in Washington, a witness inspection, on-site program audit and interviews of program staff. The WSDA lead auditor, Miles McEvoy, will be submitting a formal report to us by March 24, 2006. Based upon that report we will then develop a corrective action plan to address any and all issues revealed by the audit. We will apply to the USDA for accreditation with an eye towards having a site visit here in late May or early June. We will respond to the audit findings, develop and implement necessary corrective actions and have the ISO 65 accreditation in place by this summer.

Nancy Matheson asked if, assuming all goes well, does that enable the entities certified by the state program immediately to come under that accreditation? Yes, per Doug, it is retroactive. So anyone and everyone that we have certified will be certified under an ISO accredited program.

One thing identified in the exit interview, as lacking, is adequate documentation of qualifications, training, conflict of interest disclosure and Confidentiality Agreements for all of our staff, contractors (which includes inspectors) and council members. This documentation has to be in place and updated at least annually. Council members submitted this documentation last year, but, will need to update the documents. We will be sending out forms. Steve Baril asked when Doug projected submitting the application for ISO accreditation to the USDA. Doug stated that he planned to do so by the first half of May, 2006.

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Old Business: Improving communication between organic constituents and the Department

Laura Garber said that there have been requests to look at the program by small farmers with different concerns from the cost to “it doesn’t really fit what organics is all about”, to other concerns. The Department should have received a letter from the Montana Home Grown Growers Coop. Doug indicated that he had not received a letter. This was drafted by the “Missoula group” [members of the Montana Home Grown Association] that did not certify and explains why they did not wish to maintain organic certification. Mikel Lund asked why are we losing these small farmers? Laura replied that some feel that some of the rules in the National Organic Program are pushing them in a way that they don’t want to go. There was discussion on this stating that compost was an issue. John stated that Pam Clevenger mentioned that they wanted to save some of their money to use locally instead of paying the cost of certification, and that she didn’t like the record keeping required by the NOP, especially since we have run out of money in the cost share program. Steve Baril also stated he has heard a lot of comments that there is too much record keeping involved.

Laura Garber asked if we wanted to send out a letter to all growers, stating that the council is following what growers do and are here to help. John Hoffland mentioned that this is probably like a newsletter. Mikel Lund asked if we need public press on this, to list the council members and indicate that they represent all organic growers. Judy Owsowitz said this was a very good idea and that we should be working on a mentoring program.

Nancy K. Peterson asked if a couple of people would volunteer to put together a one page letter, front side only, describing what we are doing on ISO, introducing the council members, who they are and maybe a sentence about operations, so that we get a flavor from the folks in the field rather than “downtown Department of Agriculture, Helena, MT.” This letter could be in both the Montana Organic Association (MOA) and Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) newsletters. It should also be sent directly to certified operations along with their upcoming inspection notification letters. Mikel Lund asked if we might be duplicating efforts (sending to the same people) by using the two newsletters and also the direct mailing? Steve Baril indicated that the MOA newsletter goes out to legislators plus all MOA members, roughly a 700-person distribution.

Doug Crabtree asked if the council is comfortable with this letter going out with council members’ names and contact information so that the people in your area could call if they have questions about what they are trying to do. There was no objection by anyone on this. Steve Baril said he is all in favor of sending this information out, and that the council should act as a conduit for information from the community. This should encourage open communication that would then come back to Doug or a council member.

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Nancy K. Peterson stated she is hearing a couple of things on the council article. Start with the “one pager,” make it friendly; introduce the council and provide a little bit about what our program is all about. Put this one pager article in the MOA and AERO newsletter and send the same insert along with the inspection letters. All members were in consensus. **Every council member should write their own short Bio, including, email, phone numbers, location, and nature of their business (organic) and provide it to Doug by March 22, 2006.** Nancy K. Peterson asked for volunteers to then compile this information. This should not be on the department letterhead. The letter should indicate that it is from your council. **Doug will then have Ron Zellar review the letter.**

Steve Baril was the only volunteer, so the **members are to email this information to Steve instead of Doug by March 22, 2006.** Steve will then email this information back to the council. He needs a firm reply from them by March 31, 2006 and if he hasn't heard from you by then, silence will be presumed as consent. **Steve will submit the final letter to the department and to MOA and AERO for publication in their respective newsletters.**

Nancy K. Peterson asked for discussion regarding a survey letter. Andre Giles stated that the survey should be worded carefully, so that it doesn't send out “warning bells.” Nancy Matheson stated that there will be three vacancies on the council coming up in August, and asked, “do we make reference of this?” This will be asking “What can we do for you” and “How are we doing?” The survey letter could be sent out with the certification letters that will start going out in August or September. Nancy Matheson stated that the first letter should be somehow distinct, stating this is from the council (not the department) and they will start to identify this “friendly” group of people needing feedback because we share their interest. The Council agreed on the color green for the letter and the survey and that each time a mailing from the Council goes out it would have the council member's names and contact information listed, possibly in a header or footer. Nancy K. Peterson stated that **Doug would email the council members a draft of the survey, by June or July. The Council will review and the submit comments to Doug by August 1st.** All members agreed.

Item #2 – Program Outreach

Nancy Matheson stated that a lot a people are buying farmland and the land trust people and realtors have related to her that we could provide material about the organic program so that they could share the information with their clients. This will be put on the next agenda.

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Small Grower Concerns

Steve Baril had a comment on small grower concerns, that the biggest issues they have are the record keeping requirements. We need to determine if any other states have the same issues and how are they addressing them. He suggested that when the department goes to the National Association of State Organic Programs (NASOP) meeting that it would be an opportunity to put this question on their agenda and determine how other states are handling this issue. Doug Crabtree stated that other states are having the same problems.

Nominations for Upcoming Council Vacancies

Nancy K. Peterson brought up nominations for upcoming council vacancies. Those appointments are due by August 19, 2006, and there will be three (3) appointments to make. The council puts forth names of prospective nominees. This will be on the next agenda for further discussion. Steve Baril asked if Council members had to be certified by the department? Doug Crabtree stated that he would like to suggest that at least one, if not a couple of the council members, be new growers, since the majority of certified operators are relatively new to organic production. Nancy K. Peterson read from the department's rules – that the Director will appoint seven members as follows:

- 1 consumer from the public at large;
- 4 certified organic producers (it doesn't say that it has to be within the Montana Department of Agriculture certification program);
- 1 certified organic handler representative who must be an owner or employee of a certified organic handler; and
- 1 certified organic producer or handler representative appointed at large at the discretion of the Director of the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Steve Baril asked Nancy K. Peterson, since she has the final decision on the members, is it better that the council put together a recommendation or would she, for example, want independent submittals or submittals from MOA that are endorsed by MOA? Nancy K. Peterson stated that she would welcome "all of the above."

Public Comment

Judy Owsowitz said that last year the council made the decision [recommendation] to eliminate the \$20,000 exemption from the assessment fees, on the premise that there was a cost share last year that would cover the cost of the fee increase. According to Judy, the Council had assured growers that it would revisit the fees, that it was a temporary one-year assessment, and the issue would be revisited before the upcoming year's [2006] fees were due. Judy stated that she just wrote her check and there was no exemption for the first \$20,000. She thinks that this ties in with some of the other issues with small growers, of certification being too expensive. She said that the assurance went out in the letter [from the Council] to everyone in the program that it was a temporary one year fee increase and would be revisited the next year. Judy believes that the Council has now not stuck to that promise and that this did not represent the community well. Nancy Matheson stated that the Council did not make a formal decision to maintain the fee, but that it passed by default. Nancy said that we are obligated to revisit the fee issue and we didn't do it in the timely manner that we should have and we had better get it on the next agenda.

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Agenda and Schedule for next meeting

Next meeting will be a conference call, May 23, 2006, from 3 – 5 p.m. originating from the Department of Agriculture's conference room 225.

Items on agenda:

- Outreach
- Record Keeping
- Fees
- Council Vacancies
- Public Comment
- Program promotion

Doug will draft an agenda for the next meeting and send it to Nancy K. Peterson and Nancy Matheson. They will review, give back to Doug and he will send it to the council at least 10 days before the meeting (May 12, 2006). **Ron Zellar will also place this on the web.**

Nancy K. Peterson adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.