

MOCAC Meeting Minutes

March 13, 2008 8:30 – 5:00

Department of Agriculture

Conference room #225

Helena MT

Council Members

Greg Thayer
Sharon Lindquist
Rob Forstenzer
Mark Bruckner
Jill Owen
Andy Sponseller
Laura Garber (absent)

Department Staff

Ron de Yong - Director
Andy Gray – Commodity Bureau Chief
Doug Crabtree – Organic Program Manager
Cort Jensen – Department Lawyer
Ann Bay – Organic Program Assistant
Greg Ames –Administrator ASD
Virginia Harrington –Special Projects ADD

This meeting was called to order by Ron de Yong at 8:30 am.

The Advisory Council acknowledged former member co-chair and organic farmer Jonathan Myse, who was killed in an automobile accident last May for his input and support of Organic farming.

The council had an in-depth discussion of organic terminology and the need for clarity of terms such as ‘natural’ and ‘grass fed’. Members recommended consumer education and ad campaigns to aid in clarification on all levels. These suggestions could be tied to a value added campaign for organic products in Montana. The council members stated a need to promote organics on a wider level with help from the marketing division and possible media campaigns.

A proposal was made for Director de Yong to recommend an organic grower as a nominee to be placed on the Wheat & Barley Committee. Director de Yong clarified this is a Gubernatorial appointed position with advisement from the Director of Agriculture. Because the position involves travel and commitment on a National level this would be an extensively involved appointment. The Director discussed promoting Steve Baril as a possible nominee due to his strong association with organics and his knowledge of governmental procedures.

Sharon Lindquist moved to approve the minutes of the April 11 & 12, 2007 meeting and Rob Forstenzer seconded, motion was approved unanimously.

Discussion by the council regarding how the department handles changes made by the National Organic Program (NOP) involving Administrative rules and how the standards are adopted: Currently each individual change made by the NOP is handled as and when proposed. Administrative rules wording would be changed to adapt to the ‘current’ certification criteria of each certifying body without individual changes made as they arise. Director Ron de Yong proposed to have the Department’s administrative rules changed to adopt the NOP standards including current and future amendments made by the USDA. Such a rule would prevent the department from having to amend administrative rules whenever the USDA changes the NOP standard. Any revisions to the USDA NOP standard would be “Automatically” adopted by the department’s administrative rule. Jill Owen moved, Sharon Lindquist seconded, unanimously approved.

The council entertained nomination for council co-chair position: Jill Owen nominated Sharon Lindquist, Greg Thayer seconded, motion approved unanimously.

The council entertained a discussion regarding quorum and consensus. Currently, the council has a quorum of the majority of those present which is easier to change in case full council is not present. A motion was made by Director Ron de Yong for quorum to be four members, seconded by Rob Forstenzer, approved unanimously. *This Motion later nullified due to state statute; majority of those present.* Director Ron de Yong subsequently made a motion to stay with the previous decided majority for both consensus and quorum. Members approved unanimously that no change would be made on this topic.

Additional procedural issue was addressed with regard to proxy votes. Mark Bruckner made a motion to not allow proxy votes, Greg Thayer seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

There was a discussion of the program's stability and a request was made for Director de Yong and Governor Schweitzer to put out a press release regarding organics in Montana and the ongoing viability of this state's organic program.

The council discussed the issue of compliance in regard to organic labeling at farmer's markets, i.e.: Would additional inspections/regulation or education increase the compliance at farmers markets? Doug Crabtree addressed the programs limited ability to monitor farmer's markets with our limited staff and budget. Educational opportunities were again encouraged for consumer awareness and vendor clarification.

The program review process was outlined with the following areas of concern to be addressed: timeliness, consistency, and thoroughness. The subcommittee for the program review was selected as follows: Jill Owen, Andy Sponseller and Greg Thayer. The date was set for March 24th all day or as long as needed to complete a random review of 13 files representing a variety of producers and handlers as well as crop types and producer sizes.

Additional discussion by the council of the program's fiscal picture with questions as to the impacts from incoming grant funds. Andy Sponseller suggested acquiring funding for a consultant to address customer service and duplicity issues. Director Ron de Yong suggested Growth through Agriculture, Specialty Crop Block Grant and funding through the new Farm Bill. Andy Sponseller suggested Rural Development Growth funds as an additional funding source for possible consultant.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm by Director Ron de Yong.