



Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board

August 5, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Bedford County Extension Office
1257 County Farm Rd, Bedford, VA 24523

Present: Pete Fellers, Sam Gardner, Dorothy McIntyre (via phone), Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers

Absent: Matt Baumgardner, Don Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Chuck Grove, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Traci Blido (via phone)

Staff Absent: None

Transcriber: Julia Peters (via phone)

Guests: John Graham - Graham Bass Farm; Mickey Johnson, Board of Supervisors, District 1; Josh Powers

(1) CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order on August 5, 2020 at 7:30 p.m.

(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - July 1, 2020

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the July 1, 2020 meeting minutes.

A motion and a second were made to approve the July 1, 2020 meeting minutes, as presented.

Adopted unanimously

(3) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Mrs. Blido reported that on Monday night, August 10, there will be a Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting and a joint work session with the Bedford Regional Water Authority (BRWA). At the regular BOS meeting at 7:00 p.m., one item on the agenda will be the CARES Act grant that Mrs. Blido is creating and she hopes the board will approve it. The BOS has concerns that the right businesses should receive the grant money and felt that if a business already received funds from PPP or EIDL, they should not qualify for the County grant. Therefore, she will collect information and give a report to them on this matter. She asked the Ag Board members to call her if they have some input or thoughts about the program.

County Administrator Robert Hiss and Deputy County Administrator Amanda Kaufman are working very hard to make sure that the broadband project is ready to be rolled out in time for the deadline date of August 14.

(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Mrs. Blido reported that her office will have an article in *Virginia Business* this week entitled “Four reasons why businesses should look twice at Bedford County”. She hopes to share that article with the Ag Board at their next meeting. Economic Development staff also continue to work on the shell building and the Meade Road extension projects which are almost completed, and they also continue to work on selling lots.

(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

Mr. Baker said that as he has stated before, the USDA has a financial assistance program for farmers affected by COVID. He saw a report online that noted of the original \$16 billion allocated nationally, less than \$7 billion has been applied for. He continues to run across farmers that do not know about the program or have not applied. He asked the Ag Board members to spread the word because money is still available. He said the program covers several commodities, but unfortunately fruit growers won't receive much help because it is based on losses from January to April when they are not selling much fruit. Applications will be taken until the end of August. Mr. Graham noted that aquaculture was not eligible either.

The stream fence line weed control cost share program began on July 1, and 13 applications have been received so far. The original deadline to apply was going to be July 31, but the program will remain open and applications will continue to be accepted. The July special feeder calf sale was held with a total of 430 head, 300 in the barn and two full loads that were sold remotely. He has not run all the numbers yet, but the cattle did very well and beat the local market. Some producers sold early not knowing what would happen this summer due to COVID, but having over 400 head is a good sign that the sale has a good reputation.

Mr. Baker also noted an email he sent out regarding a hay feeding survey coordinated by University of Arkansas Extension. The survey is conducted throughout the southeast to find out the hay feeding practices among livestock producers. The survey results will help guide Extension research. It is a counterpart to the haymaking survey out this past winter where Virginia had the highest participation rate of all the southeastern states that participated.

Extension agents, local government people in Region 2000 and those in the Central Virginia Planning District have had conversations about the livestock processing capacity which has gotten worse since the Ag Board last met. Green Valley Meat Processors is no longer doing USDA level inspections which has put a crimp in an already difficult situation. The challenge is that there is not a good answer because it is a great undertaking to either expand capacity or to build a new facility and he does not know where we will go from here other than continue to look for opportunities for grant funds if some of the remaining processors want to expand. Discussion followed regarding the long wait times for processing.

Mr. Baker also noted that there will be a private water system (well water) testing program coming up in September through Virginia Tech. If anyone would like to get their water tested, he will send out the information next week.

Mr. Baker also has copies of a letter from Farm Credit and a bag of T-shirts for any Ag Board member who would like them. He also can send out to anyone who has not read the Bedford Bulletin article Chairman Powers emailed to Ag Board members.

(6) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

Sam Gardner reported that the Young Farmers are still working on the cookbook and getting it printed. They will have about 200 copies for sale and he believes the cost will be about \$20. The County Farm Bureau has cancelled its annual dinner meeting in October. They are working on how to facilitate the duties usually handled at that meeting.

Josh Powers said he went to the Young Farmer Expo and they saw some good producers in the Abingdon area and had dinner in Bristol, VA.

(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

1. Upcoming Events

See **School Ag Programs** below.

2. County Fair Update

Ms. Powers said the Fair Board voted unanimously to cancel the Bedford County Fair so it is postponed until 2021. They are working on some type of educational components that can be provided this year either by an online platform or in the classroom.

3. School Ag Programs Update

Ms. Powers reported teachers are trying to shift to virtual lesson plans. There are still many questions in particular for ag classes and a lot of adjustments that will have to be made.

Liberty High School was able to have their FFA banquet outdoors which was a good event and was well attended.

Ms. Powers spoke with Ann Jones from Staunton River who said they will be able to have some small group events if they follow FFA guidelines, but no field trips of any kind are allowed right now. The national FFA convention has been cancelled this year for the first time in their history and they are going virtual. Some students will still show livestock at the Virginia State Fair even though the fair was cancelled. The state fair is handled by the Farm Bureau and they felt they could safely hold a livestock show this fall. Virginia 4-H has allowed in-person meetings as of July 1 so they have been practicing and four students competed in the state contest yesterday.

Charlie Moser won a national level virtual contest this summer. Another team member, Brooke Adkins, won Oklahoma State's virtual Livestock Judging Camp and received an invitation to go to the campus and talk about scholarship opportunities.

They will try to travel this fall and have a chance to go to Nebraska, Indiana, or Georgia.

b. Marketing & Production

1. Farmers' Market Update

Ms. McIntyre said the Forest market is doing well. She has put a hold on any new vendors so that the vendors she currently has can continue to be spread out as much as possible. She started out with three meat vendors at the beginning of the season but now has none for this week, due to processing issues. There was an unsubstantiated complaint against the market regarding face masks. She contacted the Health Department and VDACS because she was told by a third party that she would be inspected. VDACS said if a complaint comes in, they would contact the market manager directly and would not do a surprise visit. She has sent a survey out about whether the winter market should be held outside at the regular location behind the library or indoors. If indoors, only 15 vendors would be allowed based on COVID rules. Many vendors would rather brace the weather and remain outdoors. Ms. McIntyre will make a decision soon.

The Bedford Market had a peach sale on July 31 and saw 561 people. An article was in the Bedford Bulletin in the Out -n- About section. The market saw 2,000 people in July and now has 20 vendors that set up regularly on Fridays. An indoor space is being sought for an off-season market once per month starting in November. Contact Erika McFaden with any suggestions of locations that are fairly close to the pavilion so customers can walk and have access to SNAP easier.

Chairman Powers said Mr. Gross sent him a report that stated he was very busy this year and was blessed with a good crop of peaches and apples and the market was doing very well.

2. Coyote Lottery Update.

Nothing new to report.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers reported that the President signed the Great American Outdoors Act so hopefully the Parkway will receive some money.

He also heard rumblings about the New London Airport again. Supervisor Mickey Johnson said they submitted a plan to the Technical Review Committee (TRC) last Tuesday. The best he could tell, it was not a favorable conclusion by the TRC for Liberty and the New London Airport for the new plan, the TRC did not recommend or approve it. He does not know where this plan stands. Chairman Powers said what he read about that meeting was that it was concluded and the New London Airport could either expand the runway or expand the facilities, but could not do both in the current proposal. They asked if they could modify the proposal and come back to the TRC again. They were told yes, but were not given any promises. A trimmed down version of the plan is what is expected, which is a compromise which may be the best solution and protect the landowners surrounding them. Supervisor Johnson noted that they can expand by 50% by right but anything above that would require a Special Use Permit, which seems to be the sticking point and would require a public hearing.

(8) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

In response to the news article entitled "Christianity and Vegetarianism" that ran in the Bedford Bulletin dated July 29, 2020, Chairman Powers said the article was disturbing and he would like to hear the opinions of others in attendance. He had sent an email earlier in the day to the Ag Board members and guests and provided the link to the newspaper article. Ms. Powers noted that the *Rolling Stone* article that was referenced was dated 2013 and was based on interviews of informants that were paid by the Humane Society and the language used was very graphic and disturbing. In her opinion, the author who wrote the *Bedford Bulletin* article doesn't know anything about agriculture. Discussion followed regarding how damaging generalizations of agriculture are to farmers and the young writer needs to be educated in the real agribusiness. Consensus was to reach out and show the newspaper the Ag Board's concern and use this subject as an educational opportunity. Ms. Powers will prepare a response to the article which will be reviewed by the Ag Board before the response is sent to the paper.

Supervisor Johnson stated Briscnet had a meeting this morning to give the BOS an update on the broadband project. He noted the road has been hard but is encouraged by the progress. The New London tower is key to six other towers and once it is done they can proceed. He believes the project is a week or two behind schedule with the deadline of August 14. With testing, the project will still need another 60 days, but it is getting close to completion.

Josh Powers reported that in June he participated in a virtual convention and had the opportunity to run for state office again where he was elected as the state Vice President for 2021. He is excited about encouraging others and teaching them in leadership in agricultural practices. He was able to attend the Young Farmers Expo in Abingdon where they talked about engaging the 9,000 members in the state and came up with virtual contests and opportunities for the members.

Mr. Graham reported that there are very few fish resupply vendors, which leaves a huge hole in the Virginia market and he has to resupply pond fish using a vendor from Arkansas because no one in the state is doing so. He is looking into the feasibility of helping in that market which took him to North Carolina where they are supposed to have a lot of people that resupply. Internet searches were difficult and took him nowhere with bad websites and bad phone numbers. He was able to contact the NC Extension office which gave him about 30 farms with contact numbers. Eighty percent of those numbers were not in service. He was able to contact only three people on the list and two of them did not even supply the species he needed. This is an example of the state of farms in general and that we are going in the wrong direction and it is tough to keep farms open.

Chairman Powers proposed that due to the COVID situation, the Ag Board could have meetings every other month until the end of the calendar year. Therefore, September would be skipped and the next Ag Board meeting will be October 7, 2020. November would be skipped and the Ag Board would meet again in December unless a pushing issue comes up and then it could be dealt with by conference call or on the normal meeting date and time. Consensus was agreeable.

(9) ADJOURNMENT

8:45 p.m.