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Chester, Clinton, Cromwell,
Deep River, Durham, East Haddam,
East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Kill-
ingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Mid-
dletown, Old Lyme,
Old Saybrook, Portland, Westbrook

LOWER CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

April 21, 2022

Members:

Chester: Luc Bouffard
Clinton: Richard Martin
Cromwell: John Whitney
Deep River
Durham: Warren Herzig
East Haddam:
East Hampton: -----
Essex: -----
Haddam: John Halfinger
Killingworth: Walter Adametz
Lyme: Bill Farrell
Middlefield:
Middletown:
Old Lyme:
Old Saybrook:
Portland: Alan Fenrow
Westbrook: -----

Staff:

Sam Gold
Janice Ehle/Meyer

Guests:

Meeting

The meeting was a Zoom call.

1) Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order by John Halfinger. A motion was made by Walter Adametz and seconded by Richard Martin to accept the minutes from the March 17, 2022 meeting. Richard Martin asked that a revision be made to 5-G-4 Richard said that when he talked to

Commissioner Hurlburt, the Commissioner said that “he liked the idea of farmers sharing equipment and that he didn’t want to see equipment sharing program to come to an end”. Janice will make that revision. A vote was made, Warren Herzig and Luc Bouffard abstained from voting. Motion passed.

2) Public Comments

No public comments.

3) Website-

Warren and Richard asked about access to the minutes from the last RAC meetings on the RiverCOG website. Janice will check the RiverCOG website. John Halfinger asked everyone to check the Knowyourfarmers.org website to make sure that the information is correct concerning their farm.

4) Access to Agriculture on Local Busses

Janice Ehle/Meyer explained that the access to Agriculture program is to give people riding on the buses access to local food by advertising local farmers markets, local farm stands and local grocery stores. There is also a link to knowyourfarmers.org

5) Old Business

DECD RiverCOG Grant – Sam Gold

Sam joined the meeting and all farmers introduced themselves.

Sam explained that River COG had applied from US CT Department of Economic and Community Development for a grant from the US Economic Development Administration for COVID recovery. The idea is to support farmers in our region to sell more of their products through the internet, online through websites or Apps, to existing services and to help farmers navigate internet sales. To figure out how best to help farmers with basic or sophisticated things with the sales platforms out there and what are the best deals for farmers.

At the least this would be to update existing knowyourfarmers.org website. At the most it would be to take steps to help farmers to sell more online. This could be using existing platforms or working with individual farmers to help grow sales online. The grant is until September 2023 for \$47,341.95.

- A discussion followed concerning delivery services taking a large part of the cut for delivery services.
- Developing a platform where people could order food from home.
- Change in App where third parties can not back information.
- Do an online campaign to direct customers to local farmers. Collect data from online messaging.

- Help individual farmers to develop their websites to do more. Do a survey to ask farmers their challenges.
- Delivery from restaurant to customer takes a lot out of the cost. But, Mom's with kids that can't get to the store. A delivery service of local farmers goods. An additional delivery premium must be added to the price of the product.
- 85% of maple syrup comes from Canada and it hurts the US market, Label Laws for shelf stable foods.
- How different influences affect costs. Availability hurts costs and some of the influences are favorable for local farmers.
- Farm to Door is an option and Cromwell is using it. Farm pick-up.
- Enable premiums and valued added processing. Cornell has a Food Venture Center that helps with food value products.
- Task 3 is working with Middlesex Chamber of Commerce and working online with entrepreneurs. The Chamber might be encouraged to lean toward programming directed to area farmers to venture into more value-added goods.
- Next steps to create a survey for farmers to explain their ideas on what types of projects they would like to see. Then a ranking system will be devised, and a project will be selected.
- Do a program to help local farmers learn about the different options and set up their websites.
- Step back and see how farmers would engage in new ideas to see if it is worth it. What does a farmer want to sell online? Add packaging, pick-up, delivery, FedEx.
- Do farmers want to sell more products or sell more at a higher premium. How to increase margins? Develop a combination of product that could be sold for more ie. in a basket or make risotto with the dried mushrooms to create a product.
- Bill to send a Washington State website where they sell all Wash State products. Madeinwashington.com
- Some farmers are looking to have more people come to their farm and not have to go to markets all of the State to sell products.
- Work with legislators to make a law that prohibits retailers from selling products at a loss as local farmers must compete with them.

Farm Viability Grant

- A. John Halfinger announced that the transplanter has arrived. It is in two boxes and will have to be somewhat assembled.
- B. The other two pieces have been ordered and will arrive in June.
- C. The Sub-Sub Committee to organize the program is underway. The vetting process where farmers are signing an application will be worked on, a calendar will be made.
- D. There was a discussion about getting a fact sheet to explain the equipment so farmers could get an idea as to what it is. There will be directions that are attached to the drill. There will also be a training program, open house day. Hopefully there will be info that the machine comes with.

- E. A suggestion to invite Tom Moreguard, CT State Conservationist from USGA to explain program. Also, to invite Willie Delcameron from Northford, CT who has been doing no-till.
- F. The RAC would like to go to a LTE meeting to stay in contact with them.
- G. Having the schools involved would be a good idea. Rebecca Isaacson said possibly something could be arranged.
- H. A discussion about students doing a sustainability analysis to measure amount of carbon sequestered, carbon footprint, tillage, or tilling vs no-till etc. Luc is going to see if Yale Forestry might be interested in doing something with this. Also, school of Management at Yale University, Richard has a connection.
- I. Need to set a date to assemble the transplanter.
- J. There was a question about the results of the last COG meeting. Janice explained what happened at the COG meeting and how all of the questions were answered, and the transplanter was approved to order.
- K. Might there be a possibility of having ag students work on the equipment to get them interested in it. Liabilities are an issue at schools. Maybe 4H can do it.
- L. An exit strategy needs to be worked out at the end of the grant. The new committee will need to address this issue.

7) New Business

- A. There was a discussion about the letter concerning getting an exemption for taxing farmers. The letter needs to go to the Governor. Janice talked about who the letter had been sent to. It all needs to happen quickly as there are only about two more weeks in the session. This can also be to get ideas rolling for later.
- B. SB 243 –climate smart agriculture practices and payment for them – waiting for a vote in the senate
- C. HB 5295 – Agriculture development innovation – both parties have come together to modify the bill.
- D. SB 228 – Pipeline for CT programs for availability of Tech. Education, career schools and regional technology and Ag centers. Referred to appropriations committee from Senate and can now be voted on.
- E. A suggestion was made to revise the letter to make what want in the first paragraph – request to carve out a program like dairy.
- F. Any increases will be a pass through, and prices will increase.
- G. There was a question about any available maple trees to tap in Higganum.
- H. There was a discussion about trees on the sides of the roads and salts etc. changing the maple syrup. Trees are being tapped in New Mexico. A new market is maple sap that is being carbonated to make a drink.

8) Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:22 pm. A motion was made by Luc Bouffard and seconded by Richard Martin. Motion passed unanimously.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, May 19, 2022, at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice Ehle/Meyer

Draft