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MEMORANDUM

To: Agricultural Advisory Committee
From: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director
Subject: Committee Meeting Minutes – June 8, 2023
Date: June 22, 2023

The sixth Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting was held on Thursday, June 8, 2023, at 1:00pm at the NJ Highlands office in Chester.

The following were present:

Committee: Highlands Council Vice Chair/Committee Chair Alstede, Jamie Bourgeois (Riamede Farm), Adam Furlong (B.W. Furlong & Associates).

Highlands Staff: Benjamin Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, Neda Hartman, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Corey Piasecki, Carole Dicton, and Karen Castanhas.

Present via Zoom video/audio: Michael Beneduce (Beneduce Vineyards), Dr. Brendan Furlong (B.W. Furlong & Associates), Tom Boccino (Somerset County), Katelyn Katzer (Somerset County), Marc Saluk (Hunterdon County).

Committee Chair Alstede opened the meeting at 1:05pm.

Introductions

At this time the County Economic Development Representatives introduced themselves, Marc Saluk from Hunterdon County, Tom Boccino and Katelyn Katzer both from Somerset County.

Committee Minutes of March 23, 2023

Committee Chair Alstede asked the committee if they had any edits to make on the March 23, 2023, minutes. There were no edits.

Non-profit Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program

Mr. Humphries gave an overview of the Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program. The Highlands Council staff has developed a sustainable agriculture grant targeted to non-profits and public institutions of higher education to advance innovative sustainable agriculture projects. The purpose of funding is to promote innovative agricultural activities in the New Jersey Highlands Region in keeping with the principles of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. Any nonprofit organization or public institutions of higher education shall be eligible to submit an application for Highlands Council Sustainable Agricultural Non-Profit Grants. The grants will be for up to 3 years, for a maximum of \$100,000 per state fiscal year, per awardee. The Highlands Council staff would like to distribute the grant information throughout the region by Monday, June 12, 2023, with an application deadline of August/September 2023.

At this time there was a discussion about how the Highlands Council could help coordinate information to young/new farmers. It was mentioned that it would be helpful to have access to technical services for new start up agricultural businesses. It was also noted that the help from Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), which are organizations that promote a location as an attractive travel destination, would increase the economic contribution to municipalities.

Mr. Beneduce addressed how economic impact studies help regions assist businesses. At this time Mr. Beneduce shared his screen to show WineAmerica, the National Association of American Wineries in Washington, which commissioned a 2022 National Economic Impact Study of the Wine Industry by John Dunham & Associates. The study shows that the American wine industry generated over \$276 billion for the US economy in 2022. All 50 states produce and consume wine. In addition to the national data, this study includes detailed data for each state. The production, distribution, sales, and consumption of wine benefits many sectors of the United States economy and will generate close to \$276.07 billion in total economic activity. This ultimate value-added product preserves agricultural land, provides American jobs, attracts tourists, generates taxes, and enhances the quality of life. See link below:

<https://wineamerica.org/economic-impact-study/>

Ms. Gallagher left the meeting 1:57pm.

Rutgers Technical Assistance

Mr. Piasecki spoke about the Agriculture Technical Assistance Contract with Rutgers Cooperative Extension:

- Develop a comprehensive list of all Agricultural Support programs, services, and grants available to current, new, and multigenerational farmers.
 - Identify program leads and make introductions where possible
 - Identify eligibility requirements
 - Identify key contract terms and conditions
- Produce a list of key permitting agencies, permit types, departments and contacts at County, State, and Federal agencies for agriculture related permits.
- Provide technical assistance to Highlands staff to develop an internal capacity in permitting, grants, programs, and services available to the Agricultural Community such that Highlands Council staff can assist, navigate, and facilitate the above for any interested farmer. Council staff should be able to identify the appropriate assistance strategy, coordinate meetings with program leads, and facilitate execution through issue resolution.

- Develop alternate methods of both executing and valuing agricultural land preservation methods that are appropriate for the NJ Highlands region. Incorporate resource values into preservation transactions and identify sources of financing.
- Take necessary steps to establish the Highlands Council as a resource for the region's agricultural community.

Mr. Spinelli added the Highlands Council would like to add personnel, possibility an Agricultural Specialist who could assist, navigate, and facilitate the above for any interested farmer.

Committee Chair Alstede asked if the Highlands Council staff has or would be looking to add a grant writer position.

Mr. Piasecki stated that the Highlands Council does not have a grant writer on staff at this time.

Next Steps

Committee Chair Alstede requested the next Agricultural Committee meeting be held on September 14th at 1pm.