

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION (DATCP)
WISCONSIN PRODUCE SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL (PSAC) MEETING**

MINUTES

Date: August 16, 2023

Time: 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams

DATCP Division: Food and Recreational Safety

Welcome and Introductions

Call to order: At 9:33, Josh Rimmert called the meeting to order.

Open meeting notice:

This meeting is a public meeting subject to public records requests and information was posted inviting public comments. No public comment was received, and members offered no objections to their comments being recorded.

Introduction of members:

Voting members present include:

Daniel Cornelius, Intertribal Agricultural Council; Steve Louis, Oakwood Fruit Farm; Josh Rimmert, Alsum Produce; Brandi Grayson, Supporting Healthy Black Agriculture/Urban Triage Inc; Jenna LaChance, Organic Valley; Sara Ecker, Ecker's Apples; Wayne Geist, Wisconsin Apple Growers Association and Bushel and a Peck Market; Susan Quam, Wisconsin Restaurant Association

Voting members not present include:

Hsing-Yi Hsieh, Festival Foods; Jay Ellingson, Kwik Trip; Lavern Zeiset, Zeiset Farm, Communities and Cultures Coordinator; Venice Williams, Fondy Farms; Jeffrey Mears, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council

Non-voting members present include:

Jill Cholewa, DATCP (*ex-officio*); Joanna Kahvedjian, DATCP (*ex officio*); Kevin Leroy, DATCP-USDA (*ex-officio*); Krystal Martin (*ex officio*); Troy Sprecker, DATCP (*ex officio*); Lisa Wipfli (*ex-officio*)

Guests include

Eric Scheftgen (DATCP, Division of Trade and Consumer Protection) and Stefan Boerboom (DATCP, Division of Food Safety and Recreational Businesses)

Agenda

Steve requested to make an agenda change. He requested to move D. Member update and issues before C. Good Agricultural Practice presentation. A motion to amend was called. With Steve motioning and

Approved November 15, 2023

Jenna seconding, the motion carried. Steve motioned to approve the agenda with changes and Wayne seconded. The motion carried.

Josh requested a motion to approve the minutes of the February meeting. Steve motioned and Susan seconded the motion. The motion carried. A motion was called to approve the May 17 minutes. Josh motioned, and Steve seconded the motion. With none opposed, the motion carried.

Council Membership Management

Standard Guideline reviews are done this time of year. A copy was sent to everyone, if there are any changes that need to be looked over, this will be assigned to a subcommittee group. Josh announced that Chris has left his position with Wescott Agriculture and resigned his position on the council bringing the total open seats on the council to two positions: (1) produce business and (2) non profit, education organization. Get information to Josh or Joanna if you know anyone who might be a suitable candidate for a council position.

Subcommittees: We want to move the next quarter subcommittee meetings to November 7th, with the general meeting remaining on the 15th of the month, as usual.

Troy informed the council that there is a state statute and policy review taking place at the department level that will bring the agency councils up to date with state statute, starting with the retail advisory council. Changes taking place there will be a road map for us. We anticipate the review taking place probably the first quarter next year. Josh noted that this project will likely be assigned to the Rules, Statute and Compliance subcommittee.

Agency Reports (DATCP)

Program Updates (Troy Sprecker)

Troy informed the council of Krystal's return from family leave; introduced Lisa Wipfli, our newest Produce Safety Inspector, and announced Ex officio member, Amy Millard, has moved to the Department of Veterans Affairs. We still have the secretary office leadership level, but the division administrator and deputy division administrator positions are vacant. There is no intent to fill the deputy position until the time the Division Administrator position is filled to allow the administrator to be the key person to fill that role. We continue with the work of food safety and recreation safety with our group. Our second newest member, Jill, is well on the path towards being well qualified and trained. We have been integrating our Manufactured Foods team with produce safety activities. Stefan is the first person, a food scientist, who has been deeply involved as one of the first to go through produce safety trainings. Jill is taking Train the Trainer with Produce Safety Alliance. The National Produce Safety Consortium is coming up this late fall which all team members will attend. The next step is that we are slowly stepping into produce safety inspections, have identified our inspectors and will be integrating them into inspections with the intent to get them much deeper in spring. Jill and Stefan will be blazing the trail before that. We have 49 inspections to complete this project year, expecting 25 to be completed before the end of the calendar year.

A celebration for us, we had a chance to work with Kristin Esch, the FDA subject matter expert for our region, to meet and go over a lot of detailed items. In our discussions with Kristin, we addressed the

issue of technical assistance needs, which have proved difficult to meet due to lack of resources and partners (as other states have found) and also our challenges connecting with farm markets. As an outcome of that meeting, by Kristin's recommendation, we met with the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist for Wisconsin to discuss how to connect and leverage people around the state to connect us with farm markets, technical assistance and help us understand unique and common practices taking place in Wisconsin. The meeting was a positive engagement, and we continue to build upon that foundation.

Dan noted that NRCS can fund and have a lot of support for walk in coolers and would encourage getting connected with resources for that. He also noted that the state still needs a fair amount of training.

Krystal jumped in to say hi and ask to connect with her if anyone needs anything.

Outreach Update (Jill Cholewa)

Jill had an opportunity to attend the Apple Growers Association Field Day in July. They had a full day of activities, education opportunities with extension specialists, talking and sharing resources and question and answer. The numbers that attended that event were high, over 85. The focus of what we were able to share at that event when connecting with farmers, was "What's new? I know all about what's happening with DATCP, what's new for me?" It was great to see how simple a lot of the pamphlets are to give them, let them go home, read and digest it. Now their questions are flowing in. That was a great event. Jill was also able to go to a sanitation conference where there were people who had not even heard of us. She was surprised and wanted to think of different ways of doing outreach, while still great that we could attend and give materials. Extension offices are great, farmers groups are great. Being able to connect with them so they can have specific materials is helpful. For Jill, having a background with Extension is a good segue to send boxes of materials to those partners so that they can hand out those materials. Jill also wants to go to County Fairs and recognizes that is a niche. The biggest thing is making connections with people, letting them know this is a partnership, what we do and how they can reach out. Jill noted that she, Stefan and all of us are doing continual training. It is great to attend these events, take them in and be able to learn from all of the colleagues. Another highlight was Lisa joining our team, and being able to attend some of our OFRRs. Joanna added that several OFRRs have been completed this summer; the spring newsletter was sent out in early June to approximately 3,000 produce growers and surveys are mostly done with a few slowly trickling in. Joanna highlighted the importance of annual renewal of a farms' exempt status.

Member Updates and Issues/Further Discussion

State of the Industry

Sara: Ecker's Apples crop is coming in strong. It was great to see DATCP at the field day and thinks all associations have this type of meeting so talking to associate meeting heads to give DATCP ten minutes to get in front of growers is a good idea. She emphasized the benefit of getting a Wisconsin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable growers conference booth that helps the conference and serves as an opportunity to get in front of every one of those associations to plug for growers that in the fall everyone should be taking three hours to take some training on making food safe.

Josh: Alsum started their potato harvest, harvesting what we need to run through our pack house and wash facilities and then will start in late September through October. Irrigation costs increased due to drought. As we start harvest, we will get heat and lots of rain. Farm near Arena got 3.5 inches of rain which slows us down. Potato season has been well but will see how we do in fall harvest. In next couple of weeks we are looking at audits and trainings. Like Sara said, making sure employees are keeping hands washed and using good worker hygiene.

Wayne mimicked what Sara said. The crop is coming in fairly strong. We have a pretty good storm coming through tonight. Some have received hail, but most growers/everybody is looking good so far. DATCP is going a great job of getting out there and we can always find new and better ways to spread the word.

Steve: fellow apple grower, geared up and started the first day of picking and processing packing line. The crop looked good.

Susan: Restaurant industry is in the height of tourism season for hospitality. The issue that continues to plague the restaurant industry is inflationary costs. Aside from employees, average consumer season in the grocery store, we are not able to raise the menu prices high enough to account for that. We are seeing closings of restaurants for old folks not able to make up costs. We will see a strong season and no shortage of both independent and multi-unit restaurants coming in. They just wish they had more staff so that they could meet that demand.

Dan: There is some exciting work with the regional food business center. Increasing land capital market access grant, a lot of technical assistance within that. At some point might be an avenue for continued education.

Jenna: Vegetable industry for our farmer members has been pretty steady. The spring rains helped with the early season crops, but as it continued to get drier and drier, the squash and beets took a hit with germination. We are starting to see the repercussions of that. Otherwise, par for the course here. The lack of rain has significantly helped with disease, a blessing in disguise. Huge difference in yield loss associated with disease. Overall it has been a good season for vegetable things.

Brandi: Of course, things are steady for us as well. Harvesting was a little slower for us at the beginning of the season. And now we are seeing an increase.

Subcommittee Updates

Outreach and Education Strategy Subcommittee

Wayne: there was a documentary called Poison on Netflix, that had an impact on industry and is recommended to watch. Traceability: we talked a fair amount about grocery store industry required to keep a lot more records. If something bad did happen it could have a lot of impact on the business. We discussed large farms as required to have harvest/postharvest water testing in 2026. We discussed the produce safety rule as a law in Wisconsin, there are a lot in favor of it and against it. It wouldn't be a bad idea to hash out along with the conversation about who we are missing in the inventory.

On an additional note, Wayne added his concern from a meeting with the Farm Bureau about a huge acreage of farmland getting auctioned off and bought by corporations.

Krystal explained that with water that the preharvest agricultural water is going to be implemented in a tiered manner.

Josh added that Hsing-Yi stepped down from the committee leadership and called for interest in replacing her role.

Compliance, Statute and Rules Subcommittee

Steve provided an update that members would input goals and thoughts, and we did not receive any, but we sent it back out to the group to ask for goals we need to realign or adjust. One of the things we talked about the meeting before was how to reach the different stakeholders and the last ones dragging their feet to come into compliance and had a good discussion over who they are, how we identify them and reach them. We talked about DATCP putting together a white sheet with some bullets saying I am not a covered farm, they need to prove that they are not covered. And send out to past people that have attended those meetings and try to reach those last people through that association as a good starting place. The committee also talked about what other groups we need to get that last message out to and how important it is. We talked about a regional group putting together a buyer's guide.

The white paper should include: How to prove a farm is exempt? What things can be done to come into compliance if there was anything egregious. If they are not a covered farm there is not a lot that can be done. If not, maybe do an on farm readiness review to get things started. Action items, get the white sheet done to get out to growers to winter meetings. Steve will work with Joanna to get it out, but if there are any other groups that members can recommend to send it to, that would be great.

Introduction to How GAP Works (Kevin Leroy, Trade Practices Section Manager)

Kevin introduced Eric Scheftgen, the current auditor for all GAP programs in the state, to provide a description of the types of GAP, what DATCP's role is and basic steps to obtain certification.

The Standard GAP audit is formerly known as GIP GAP. It adheres to best practices. Harmonized GAP Plus is the equivalent to GFSI regulations. Depending on what needs to be required for buyers, the growers may choose these. The Group GAP allows a collaboration of growers to manage their own audits. They have an internal auditor and present that to the USDA and they do a certain percentage of audits on the farm to ensure the program is working as intended. The GMP is part of an overall growing systems program focused on distribution centers as well as food processing facilities. The reason we are able to perform work in Wisconsin is that we have a cooperative agreement with USDA AMS Specialty Crop Inspection Division. The Wisconsin office is contracted with USDA, performs USDA work managed by Wisconsin inspectors, is staffed by one program manager, three full time inspectors, one operations program associate, and several short term inspectors. The process to apply is through filling an application, then coordinating the expectations and inspection with the grower. The inspection has to take place during the operation activities the audit covers in order to make observation that the policies set up by the organization are being done. On the day of the audit, policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure regulations are being followed. The auditor goes through the food safety plan, ensures it is followed, makes sure interviews are conducted with employees to ensure they understand what food safety expectations are and are doing them. Once they have the checklist confirmed and presented, they determine if the growers pass or fail the audit. If not met, they work with the grower to fill out corrective action reports to ensure they meet practice requirements. The program also conducts unannounced audits

to make sure the operation is still compliant. USDA AMS sends a bill and DATCP sends a bill for their auditor's time.

Jenna asked, did I see correctly that you do not have any auditors that are trained to audit? Kevin responded that Eric is currently the only DATCP employee certified to do audits. I am working with the USDA to bring in more auditors that are certified and to train our auditors to be certified. Kevin clarified that audit requests cannot be turned down, and that USDA will provide auditors when we have shortfalls. Late September, Eric was certified. To get certified, the auditor needs to take the food safety alliance class, followed by auditor's school, a four-day online learning course; observe two or three audits and then be evaluated on two or three as leads. Three or four have been through the school partway, and are waiting to get the evaluation experience. We expect by the end of this year we will be in good shape. We are happy about how we will be going forward.

Josh asked about how many people are requesting GAP audits in Wisconsin? Kevin responded, around 90-100 per year, and commented that he does not know what drives buyers to decide GAP versus other certifiers, but we find it interesting that some buyers require it and others do not. Buyers drive our work. Josh requires all farmers that grow potatoes to have GAP because of who they are selling to. The big markets drive the force. If you are buying potatoes, every one of your growers is required to have GAP or higher to sell potatoes to us. That is how that works.

Jenna added as Joanna mentioned with the work from Iowa that will be collecting information for buyers, I think that is important because buyers do not understand the differences with food safety certifiers. They pick the highest one without knowing why they would choose one over the other, especially from the growers' perspective. GAP versus Plus, is it really that much safer? In the end, it's just a really expensive audit for the farmers. How to reach the last farmers that are not getting audited to have the buyers understand the differences between those standards and what they are getting is going to help meet those last farms, that is where it is actually making a difference. Organic Valley is one of them. Josh said leafy greens are going to have a lot higher risk than other commodities. When you start dealing with the bigger Walmarts, Costcos, they have everything outlined, they are basing it off of risk. That is why USDA has those different steps. The higher your risk, the higher the USDA audit you are required to do by that buyer because like GAP Plus requires quite a bit more about your water, your sanitation, digs a little deeper than standard GAP.

Josh thanked Kevin and Eric for stepping in and giving a broad view of the GAP program.

Summary of action items:

The next quarterly Subcommittee meetings will take place on November 7th.

The next quarterly Advisory Council Meeting will be on November 15th.

Josh reminded the group they had talked about doing November or February as in person meeting. Right now our tentative plan would be to host the in person meeting at Alsum in Friesland; have a tour in the morning for anyone that wants to come in early, and then the meeting after that. Josh will send out a request for feedback on if November or February works best, but is leaning toward November.

Action items,

Approved November 15, 2023

- Newsletter feature, asked for members to reach out to be featured.
- The council is looking for new member subcommittee lead for Outreach and Education Strategy.
- Steve would like to remind that if they feel strongly about goals, or refocusing in a direction, please let Joanna or I know so that we can talk about that in another subcommittee meeting about addressing those goals.
- Josh will include these items in his email.
- Steve will work with Joanna to get the white sheet out in time for winter meetings, but if there are any other groups that members can recommend to send it to, that would be great.

Josh called for a motion to adjourn. Wayne moved, and Susan seconded the motion. With none opposed, the meeting was adjourned at **10:59**.