

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

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, May 21, 2025

Time: 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Location: Microsoft Teams

DATCP Division: Food and Recreational Safety

Welcome and Introductions

Call to order: The meeting began at approximately 9:36A.

Open meeting notice: This meeting is a public meeting subject to public records requests, and information was posted inviting public comments. No public comments were received.

Introduction of voting members

Present: Dan Cornelius, Intertribal Agricultural Council; Sara Ecker, Ecker's Apples; Joe Ferguson, Ferguson's Orchard; Wayne Geist, Bushel and a Peck Market; Mike Klemp-North, Hsu's Ginseng Enterprises Inc, Hsu Ginseng Farms; Jenna LaChance, Organic Valley, Steve Louis, Oakwood Fruit Farm; Jeff Mears, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council; Corey Miller, Organic Valle; Josh Rimmert, Alsum Produce

Not present: Jay Ellingson, Kwik Trip; Brandi Grayson, Supporting Healthy Black Agriculture/Urban Triage Inc.; Hsing-Yi Hsieh, Festival Foods; Susan Quam, Wisconsin Restaurant Association; Venice Williams, Executive Director of Alices Gardens, Fondy Urban Farms and Food Center; Lavern Zeiset, Zeiset Farm, Communities and Cultures Coordinator

Introduction of ex-officio (non-voting) members

Present: Ryan Bennett, DATCP (DFRS); Karl Doyle, DATCP (DTCP); Krystal Martin, DATCP (DFRS); Eric Scheftgen, DATCP (DTCP)

Not present: All were present.

Introduction of guests

Valerie Dantoin, Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems Educator, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

Quorum: While a quorum was not in place at the start of the meeting, it was achieved at 10:06 AM-prior to which no formal voting occurred. The voting on agenda and minutes, as described immediately below, took place after the quorum was met.

Approval of the agenda as presented: Steve called for a motion. Josh made a motion, and Corey seconded it. With none opposed, the motion carried.

Approval of the minutes of the February 19, 2025 meeting: Steve called for a motion. Josh made a motion, and Mike seconded it. With none opposed, the motion carried.

Council Membership Management

Addressing inactive members at term expiration

Krystal and Steve introduced this topic by providing an overview of PSAC practices to-date, namely that members serve up to four two-year terms with terms renewing automatically (i.e. without vote) at their transition. This means that once voted onto the council, members can serve eight years without their membership being re-evaluated by the group. That said, Steve also shared that leadership has made direct contact [via both phone and email] to members not adhering to Council expectations-those made even more clear through the revisions and resending of welcoming letters to which language outlining the requirements of attendance to at least 50% of all meetings over each 12-month period was added. Krystal asked the group if now would be a good time to change this practice to not guarantee renewal and instead remove inactive members, noting that the upcoming transition to formal council will require a stricter voting process and also approval of members at a much higher level. Krystal added that this would then also allow the opportunity for members who have served their time and have other priorities pulling them elsewhere to professionally step down without feeling locked in for extended periods of time. It is more important than ever that members want to be present and bring value to the group. Mike agreed that attendance is important and pointed out that the struggle to obtain a quorum during this meeting is evidence to the effect of inactive members. Jenna and Josh agreed, followed by the reminder of the group. Dan expressed that representation is critical in council settings. He wants to make sure that is maintained but also that those seats are filled with engaging individuals. Steve called for a motion for this, to which Corey made a motion to remove any inactive members attending less than 50% of meetings and to reevaluate all members at term transitions. Mike seconded the motion and with none opposed, the motion carried. Steve, Corey and Krystal will take follow-up actions on this matter. In the meantime, it was suggested that other people who may be interested in serving on a council could attend PSAC meetings. Krystal reminded the group that changes are coming, so it is unlikely that those seats will be formally and immediately filled; however, it would be good for individuals to first get a sense of what the group is really about. Dan also encouraged people to find other ways to come together, such as a monthly community call Corey participates in and/or other outreach activities.

Status of subcommittees and task assignments

Krystal shared that coming out of the last round of subcommittee meetings, she saw significant differences in the groups and wants to make sure that these add value to the main council, DATCP and the members themselves. A member also reached out to Krystal with similar concerns. Corey and Steve chimed in that perhaps the Education, Outreach and Strategy group is struggling because of the changes FDA is making to minimize those specific efforts. Mike added that Statute and Rules is easy because it is fact-based whereas the other group is more subjective and difficult to navigate. Ideas for moving forward may include canceling the subcommittees altogether or consolidating/shifting. Wayne suggested a shift from ongoing subcommittees to ‘Special Committees’ or ‘Task Committees’ as needed to accomplish a specific goals. Members really took to this idea recommending that members volunteer to serve as they are available, interested and/or relevant to the topic at hand. Krystal and Ryan reminded that group that once a formal council is in place, this will need another level of approval. For the time being though, Steve called for a motion for this, to which Wayne made a motion to eliminate subcommittees and move to special committees as needed, comprised of volunteer members confirmed by the Chair. Jenna seconded the motion and with none opposed, the motion carried.

Education, Outreach and Strategic Improvement-partner and/or H2O resource(s)

The Council spoke only briefly at this meeting about possible projects; however, Wayne reiterated to the group that the members should lead this charge (i.e. members should as often as possible present agenda/project ideas to leadership and DATCP as that has more impact on the big picture than DATCP simply creating an agenda).

Agency Reports

Program administration update

Program funding status

Krystal reported the status of funding for the Produce program, sharing that funding was reduced by more than 40%, with reductions focused on cutting education and outreach, whereas Inventory and inspections remain a priority. Krystal shared that unlike some other states, WI is in a relatively good position based on decisions made previously (i.e. the restructure of Produce from an independent section to a specialized area within Manufactured Foods). The cross-training of permanent staff to conduct regulatory activities, as well as education and outreach projects (e.g. Technical Specialist managing an email box, producing the bi-annual newsletter, moving towards Lead Trainer status, etc.) have all helped during this transition. Full-time project positions will not be requested at this time but most of the work can still be accomplished.

Possible change to FDA-conducted routine inspections

While not impacting the produce program and industry, recent announcements have suggested that FDA is moving away from conducting routine food processing and warehouse inspections and instead contracting more with states to ensure completion of that work. Produce has always been conducted by states with nearly 90% of all produce work nationwide being lead by state programs; this set-up has been described as a successful examples of what is now being proposed for other food regulatory areas. WI is already confident in the work they do for food safety and do not see this affecting that.

Hiring of PPA-LTE and continued cross-training of Produce staff

Krystal shared that an offer has been extended to a PPA-LTE, who would be filling a role similar to those previously held by Joanna Kahvedjian and Veronica Kesner. This person will likely be a main PSAC contact in the future so watch for a new name to be introduced in the next few months.

Outreach updates

Krystal shared that while outreach is being minimized, DATCP has committed to the following activities: at least one PSA training per year, at least once conference event per year [likely the Growing Wisconsin Conference], biannual newsletter mailings both physically and electronically, maintenance of a technical website, email box and phoneline, etc. While the group will no longer be able to complete OFRRs, Jill was able to complete the highest number in a single season last year-completing all requests the program had received. They will continue to identify and share other resources with growers and voice concerns with this reduction to FDA.

Inventory updates

2025 Produce Survey Renewal returns

This year the program adjusted their survey process to only send to select statuses (i.e. those needed for inspection planning and most-likely to change statuses based on sales volume, markets and/or commodities). Similar to previous year, the program saw about a 15% return rate. While the group would like a much higher rate, as a voluntary form, this percentage is fairly typical.

Inspection updates

Krystal provided a very brief update on the 2025 growing season inspection plan, noting that more agricultural water enforcement will be in place, continued sampling will occur and all initial inspections will be completed.

Member Updates and Issues/Further Discussion

State of the industry

Steve reported that mother nature has been a bit rough this spring, but that his operation has taken a close look at the agricultural water requirements and feels prepared for upcoming inspections/audits.

Josh reported that the rain and hail this spring made it challenging to plant which set things back about one week. He stated that he is coming off a busy audit season with MOSA, USDA, PRIMUS and a 2-day FDA inspection all completed this spring. He's happy to be maintaining a solid workforce.

Corey reported the Organic Valley (OV) has transitioned from a 3rd party auditor-Quality Fresh back to USDA after a couple of years. They initially made the change due to DATCP's bandwidth to conduct the GAP audits; however, based on buyer requirements and what is best for growers, they are changing back. This, along with ongoing H2O discussions, has resulted in a lot of educational visits and revisions to internal requirements/documentation.

Mike reported that the ginseng industry is being drastically affected by recent tariffs-some operations seeing double tariffs due to processing locations. He shared that what was once a 1000-farm strong industry could be down to single digits in the near future with many mid-range farms getting out. Those remaining have put out their shade cloth for this year and while the current weather is not ideal, he believes they'll pull through just fine.

Wayne reported a beautiful bloom and celebrated the fact that many storms missed his farm. He has his irrigation on, tested and is addressing any mitigation activities needed. He is also reducing the overall size of his operation by more than ½.

Jenna reported her gratitude for the rain and shared that kale and cabbages are out, with summer crops needing to get out ASAP. Unfortunately, the season was rough for asparagus and also staffing as OV is down one sales person with Jenna having to assist in that area.

Jeff reported on all the great work being done in his area, from tractor safety and high-tunnel workshops to sugar bush and PSA trainings to advancements with the Tribal Elder Food Box program.

Dan reported that federal funds have also had a negative impact of some of the things he's involved with, such as the Food Hub and their work with LFPA growers. Those dollars were critical for maintaining weekly shipments. He himself also planted 15 acres of corn.

Joe reported that Ferguson's was hit by bad storms but that some netting was in place and helped. They are two weeks out from planting pumpkins and intend to focus some attention on their kitchen/retail activities for this summer.

Sara reported that 2024 was a success with a good FSMA inspection and continued diversification (i.e. downsized orchard but increased retail).

Valerie then chimed in that she has attended many council meetings and that this group was one of the more engaged groups she's observed.

Compliance, Status and Rules subcommittee report out/updates

Collaborative efforts between industry and regulation during resource shifts to ensure food safety

Education, Outreach and Strategy subcommittee report out/updates

Having talked at length about subcommittee meetings already and to respect all members' time, Krystal simply reiterated some of the main messages from the recent subcommittee meetings: communication, collaboration, and a focus on food safety!

Summary of Action Items, Person/s Responsible

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, 2025.

Let Steve, Corey or Krystal know if you have an agenda item to add for a future meeting and/or resources to share.

Adjourn

At 11:32 AM Corey motioned to adjourn, Mike seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.