

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

MINUTES

Date: May 17, 2023

Time: 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams

DATCP Division: Food and Recreational Safety

Welcome and Introductions

Call to order: At 9:37, 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; Hsing-Yi Hsieh, Festival Foods; Steve Louis, Oakwood Fruit Farm; Jeffrey Mears, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council; Josh Rimmert, Alsum Produce; Brandi Grayson, Supporting Healthy Black Agriculture/Urban Triage Inc.

Voting members not present include:

Jenna LaChance, Organic Valley; Christopher Fasching, Wescot Agri Products, Inc; Sara Ecker, Ecker's Apples; Jay Ellingson, Kwik Trip; Wayne Geist, Wisconsin Apple Growers Association and Bushel and a Peck Market; Susan Quam, Wisconsin Restaurant Association; Lavern Zeiset, Zeiset Farm, Communities and Cultures Coordinator; Venice Williams, Fondy Farms.

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*); Amy Millard, DATCP (*ex officio*); Andrea Northwood, DATCP (*ex-officio*); Troy Sprecker, DATCP (*ex officio*); Eleazar Wawa, DATCP (*ex-officio*).

Quorum: With a greater number of members absent than present, no quorum was established. As such, approval of the minutes from February is postponed until the next official meeting as is any decision-making or voting.

Membership Management

Nomination Status: Josh will send out the request concerning attendance.

Agency Reports (DATCP)

Benefits and Requirements of the Restructure

Troy highlighted recent changes concerning staffing. Bridget moved on to her own business and Amanda has taken another opportunity within our own agency. When we think of staff out in the field performing inspections, we think of Krystal who will be coming back. The group is short on people doing inspections. While we miss them, it does not put the program in a negative position in regards to action moving forward. Project positions are FDA under FDA authority. With having a sustainable program being one of the efforts Safe Wisconsin Produce (SWP) has aspired to, SWP looks to move the work to staff who already have authority for funding and under the manufactured food work. Produce for a long time, Troy noted, I have viewed is the beginning step of the manufactured food process. Our mandatory work due June 30th this year is done. A significant number was done in the fall and more in the spring so the next contract inspection plans will start July 1st this coming year and not be due until June 30th of 2024. That allows time to complete these requirements with assistance of staff from Manufactured Foods staff with some background or interest to learn. In regards to the food scientist position, it was already linked to Manufactured Foods, to someone who had done all of the prerequisite training. This person has years associated with the program, though it is not his primary focus. He is now getting back out and refreshed. The assurances are that we have a plan to develop our staff so that they are well qualified and prepared, and we have time to do it, without rushing. Though not set in exact direction, we still need to discuss and explain our work through the secretary's office, and we have a couple of years to move in that direction.

Krystal added, the reason we wanted to bring this up is it has been a topic for the last few meetings. The ultimate direction we decided to go which has been accelerated through staffing changes, is a long term success for the produce safety team. From this council, produce safety is continuing to be a big topic. Krystal referenced Jay, who in the subcommittee meeting, said produce is for Kwik Trip a big topic and continues to be. By training those staff and utilizing resources to maintain that same importance to the bureau and agency hopefully it will be [important] long term.

Hsing-Yi gave credit to the direction DATCP is going as creative and moving towards a more sustainable model that will give the state more ability to have a sustainable program. At the Food Safety Summit, what you hear is that produce is going to be the next big issue. Hsing-Yi is excited to move forward with this direction. Troy expressed that there are lots of hurdles to get over, moving forward with the secretaries' office, we will have to have our staff credentialed so that there is still someone in the state with authority. The Wholesaling Rule of ATCP 70 is something that may be an area we can work. The ultimate desire is that we are moving with a belief that produce safety for Wisconsin is essential.

Troy noted the historical input in the discussion around sustainability in guiding planning for moving forward.

Concerning the timeline, Stefan Boerboom is the one noted above who has joined SWP from Manufactured Foods. Jill continues to train. We are trying to rehire one new staff member. There are challenges with hiring this position because of the short period of time, since they will be project funded staff. Kristin Esch will be also assisting from FDA. There is lots of activity coming up: Farm Days, the Wisconsin State Fair and a lot of efforts Joanna leads within our translations and providing materials as diverse as we can. By August, we will know who all of the volunteers from Manufactured Foods are. For August and September, we will be back at field work. Either way we will have qualified individuals. We

would like to have a fall session of getting inspections out. The requirements for the number of produce farms we have to get done has decreased a little bit so that makes it easier. To get credentials, our staff have to get specific training. That training will be obtained over the next six months. We are methodical, intentional, and moving on in a timely manner. We want to be successful; we anticipate we will be for our aggregate metrics reported to the FDA.

Our outreach shows we are doing a lot, getting both requirements and desires met. Our metrics are moments in time where the program stands. We are on a good pace if we are not there; and in many cases we are there. Inventory metrics are on track. Covered farm metrics are nearly there. That has been a fluctuating number for us, the key is that the team is on top of those metrics and staying informed. Krystal reiterated that for outreach and inventory total, we are sitting in a good position, able to report on May 1st that we are above our goal already with a lot of outreach still to go by the end of the year. (Our end of year report is due in May though our year ends in June 30th. Then we have a chance to report in September our actuals.)

FDA has acknowledged that the prescribed goal for inventory may not be accurate. This year, it has dropped more than we liked but it has not put us in any position where there are problems moving forward with our program. We know that by reporting a lower number, we are able to hit the marks we need to and even go beyond. Troy shared that feedback from FDA is that they continue to be happy with the results. Krystal added from our last meeting, the person dropping off of the meeting early from FDA said, “nothing to add, Wisconsin always does a good job.”

Inspection Program

Krystal said she feels very confident that we will meet our training plan where we identify a few farms for inspection in advance which help us be more successful. We give them a heads up they are likely to be inspected this year. We have identified 20 farms already for this season. They will be inspected likely this fall. These include farms with previous issues, and leafy green farms inspected 2 years ago or more. We continue to have success with those. Our goal is to complete 50% of total inspection prior to winter. 49 is our annual goal and we think we can do the full amount by beginning of next year.

Changes to harvest and post-harvest water are now in effect with testing to prove water compliance of no e. Coli. Those inspections are educational this year. All other parts will be reporting both egregious and significant observations. Members have said in past that it is time to start to write the things that are being seen. This aligns with other inspectional areas: Dairy, Manufactured Foods, etc. We will wrap up next year’s inspections with Jill, myself, and three cross-overs from Manufactured Foods. By next spring, six individuals will be eligible to do inspectional work. It may be busy, but it has been successful before and can be again. Troy commented on the 4056 observations submitted to the FDA his perspective, although he is not sure the produce industry has experienced this yet, but when those come out, he wanted to inform this advisory council, he strongly recommends that it is an opportunity for the producer, how they can show that they have active managerial control. Other industries with the FDA already do this. This group may not have experienced this yet, but it is commonplace for anyone familiar with FDA inspection programs in other areas. Troy encourages sharing that with growers to help develop healthy conversations. Also, as subpart E kicks in for large farms, only egregious reporting, he would like to be aware of what typical concerns we might have with water sampling. There is a capability for a dead-end ultra filtration device, he wants everyone to be informed. While we are tapping into regulation for the large farms, it might be helpful to know how to do water sampling. As in lab work and analysis, there is

development of procedures and analysis. Going forward we might be reaching out to a few that have water supplies that we can have our staff come and test so that we are prepared to learn how to do things right and learn for future enforcement.

Josh thanked the team for promoting safe food and recommended to let the council know if the council can help.

Outreach Update

Joanna shared a slide with a graph and provided a summary of grower survey results and outreach. Joanna also shared an update on recent Farmer's Market outreach efforts.

She attended the Dane County Farm Market Managers annual meeting in Madison in which she set up a table where attendees could ask questions and browse through our educational and SWP materials. Joanna also received an invite from Milwaukee Farmers market coalition and gave a short overview of SWP program to venders and Farmer's market managers that attended this monthly virtual meeting.

Jill shared how recently she and Joanna were able to attend auction house meetings visiting three different regional auctions, all very distinct. Jill is learning through attending inspections with Amanda, Bridget and Krystal, and has been taking notes of what she can communicate and improve. Highlights this quarter include:

- Bridget and Andrew with DATCP delivered two hygiene and sanitation workshops in a Hmong community in Eau Claire focused on handwashing and one on pos-harvest handling/washing.
- In April, many requests to attend meetings and present to various groups came up.
 - All-day seminar at Midwest Food Products Association that covers MI, MN, OH, WI. Some of the attendees had not heard of Safe Wisconsin Produce program and so look forward to bridging that gap through more materials and outreach. That was in WI Dells.
 - The strawberry School was another event where we were able to share trainings we offered. Krystal made a presentation into a jeopardy game the growers enjoyed learning, and it was a connection opportunity with Professor Brian Smith that wrote a guest article for our newsletter.
 - Krystal was able to be a guest speaker for a horticulture class at UW.
- We also were able to train over 200 growers this winter season.

Member Updates and Issues/Further Discussion

State of the Industry

Josh asked members to share about their industry.

Steve shared that apple industry is in bloom season. With last few years of extreme weather, most have come through and potentially set up to have a nice crop here in the Midwest. The fluctuating weather makes it hard to manage the wholesale market. Supply chain issues remain tight, but mother nature has been a lot more friendly this year.

Hsing-Yi reported our biggest project we are focused on is how to comply with traceability. One of the weakest areas regarding information received is produce and fresh cut. Look forward to gleaning your knowledge to see how at retail level the traceability rule is going to affect us. Josh added that traceability will be a big thing in the produce industry especially with the bigger players (Alsums, Kwik Trips, etc). Smaller growers know it came from a field, but do not have written documentation. Not tagging each piece so no proof of positive tracking of that is an issue.

Jeff had some updates: Maples syrup learning exchanges with extension have been taking place with Menominee Red Cliff tribes in MN in March. Tribal produce safety training on the Model Food Code developed and provided training in March by Lac Courte Oreilles Objibwe. Next will be June 13th.

Josh shared with potatoes grown primarily in his operation, he did get potatoes into the ground. The overall weather makes for a cooperative spring. He started strip tilling for pumpkins that will go in the ground about second week of June. He has experienced supply chain issues with packaging, due to a shortage of pallets. He is wondering if others are seeing that also. The trucking market has been up and down also but have overall had good luck. The industry in general will fare through a majority of everything because everyone needs to eat. We may have our struggles, but at the end of the day everyone still needs safe food to eat and we all do our best to communicate and work together to provide safe food.

Committees

Hsing-Yi: we met a week ago, it was the first since the committees merged. One of the things we need to work on is attendance. We did have four of us. Most of the group other than Lavern was not regularly attending. We want to know how we can help with outreach. We got updates from DATCP and are excited how we can help with the different activities and maybe add some more to it. Josh will also write to stress the importance of attendance at those subcommittee meetings.

Steve shared that this subcommittee was much better attended than in the past. A lot of new people were on the committees, it was nice to get to know more members on a detailed level there. Our homework is taking time to get back to the subcommittee about goals: what we thought as a whole and send in goals, to form some more formal goals at the next subcommittee meeting. We had an update on the new inspector training and onboarding discussion; buyers and growers perspectives sharing and interesting differing points of view. We all lined up on needing to provide safe produce no matter where you are on the chain. Providing information to all parties and sharing information was a topic we discussed. We also discussed moving from education to enforcement on some the updated rule portions.

Further Discussion

Troy asked what kind of pallets are difficult to get so he can share it with Leadership. Josh answered that all pallets are. As he gets ready for Alsum's big season, the company is only allowing them to keep a five-day supply on hand. We used to get five or six loads coming into pumpkin season. Now it is all we can do to keep up with loads because they just do not have enough.

Steve saw that last fall as well. It seems like the buyers are getting much pickier on what they are accepting and that has put a strain on the supply. What used to be good pallets will not pass inspection anymore.

Summary of Action Items, Person/s Responsible

Josh will send out email to council members to encourage greater attendance at all meetings.

Next meeting Wednesday, August 16th 2023, 9:30-noon.

Adjourn 10:46