



State of Wisconsin
Jim Doyle, Governor

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary

Wisconsin Organic Advisory Council Meeting

10 am to 3 pm

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

WI Department of Agriculture

Board Room, Room 106
2811 Agriculture Drive, Madison

DRAFT MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 am by Jerry McGeorge.

Present:

Council members: Tricia Bross, Chris Malek, Rich Lange, Mike Schulist, Jerry McGeorge, Bob Wills, Harriet Behar, Margaret Bert-Mittelstadt, Bonnie Wideman, David Engel, Christine Mason, Jim Munsch
Interagency Team: Jenni Heaton, Jean Stramel (NRCS), Terry Hippenbecker (FSA), Kevin Shelley, Carla Wright, Irv Possin, Val Dantoin Adamski, Perry Brown, Erin Silva, Jed Colquhoun, Laura Paine
Guests: Will Hughes and Lora Klenke (DATCP), Jack Kloppenburg and Randy Jackson (UW CALS).

Agenda review. Laura asked that the Council provide input on a question regarding the organic cost-share program. It will be taken up during agency/committee reports.

Minutes approval: One change was identified. Jenni Heaton said that she was among the attendees that should be listed for the March 18th meeting. Motion to approve minutes as amended by Harriet, seconded by Bonnie. Motion passed.

Review meeting dates for next meetings: July 15 doesn't work for Jerry. Laura will poll council members to determine a suitable date. Bob Wills still plans to host the meeting at Cedar Grove Cheese. Fall dates with Minnesota? Jerry suggested 10/21. He will check on facilities at Organic Valley for that date. Laura will check with Meg on MN task force available dates.

Preparation for discussion with Sect. Nilsestuen. Jerry led the council in a discussion of possible topics to discuss with Sect. Nilsestuen. The executive committee (Jerry, Harriet, Christine, Erin and Laura) came up with several possible topics including anything he'd like to discuss with the group, GMO issues: thanks for allowing OAC to submit comments to APHIS and why this is a critical issue for organic farmers, collaborating with neighboring states with Organic Councils, getting WI organics into the Chicago market, Working Lands Initiative: Can the ag enterprise zone program be used to encourage organic & grass-based farms near urban areas, and promoting a registry of organic farms like the DATCP lawn registry (why this is important not just to organic farmers but also to custom applicators, utilities with rights of way through organic land).

Other issues raised by the Council:

Dave shared a new publication by Union of Concerned Scientists on GMOs and their true values and costs and expressed his support for discussing this topic with Secretary Nilsestuen.

The Council discussed the topic of education on organics. Dave Engel commented that the Farm Bureau does an Ag-In-The Classroom program (read about it in Agri-View). He asked if they would be willing to include organic materials in their program. Harriet and Christine said that they've been in contact with Farm Bureau and they are interested in organic materials, but they need us to supply materials to stuff into the 20,000 bags they give out to students.

Agriculture generates \$51.5 billion for Wisconsin

Jed Colquhoun brought up several marketing issues including Local Foods Efforts (how do we avoid duplication among all the groups working on this currently) and Grower/processor networking. Harriet said that she and Christine asked the Ag board for additional funding/staff time to develop and print a pamphlet explaining what 'organic' is and dispel some misconceptions out there.

Conversation with Secretary Nilsestuen.

Perry informed the Council that Sect. Nilsestuen has been called away to an emergency meeting with the Department of Financial Institutions. Will Hughes, division administrator for the Division of Agricultural Development, filled in for Rod in the discussion.

Jerry welcomed Will and thanked him and the department for their support.

Jerry described the first issue: GMOs are an important issue to organic farmers. The council appreciates that the department was willing to approve the Council's comments for submission to APHIS last month. Jerry shared that GMO is one of the major threats to organic agriculture. Harriet praised DATCP on their actions on the seed law and the removal of the pre-emption issue.

Some comments from Will Hughes:

- Will said that Rod is very supportive of the organic industry and apologized for his absence.
- On GMOs: Rod is a consensus builder and he has a broad industry to represent. He is not going to take a stance opposing GMOS, but he is willing to listen and understands the issues.
- Will is currently chairing a committee that is focused on tapping into outside funding to accomplish more with the limited state appropriations.
- Will suggested that Steve Ingham be asked to speak to the OAC on food safety issues/topics.
- The new federal food safety act that has been discussed as a potential threat to small farmers is something that their team is working on. Steve could talk to the group about this.
- DAD is working on several issues related to the meat industry. They're working on helping the interstate meat shipment legislation rule writing and they're launching a meat industry initiative like DBIC.
- DATCP is launching a beginning farmer program. It is a collaborative effort among several agencies and organizations.
- Will commented that the Council has put organics on the radar of ARM and Food Safety and this is moving them toward greater understanding of organic issues.

What does OAC need? Will asked the Council: What are two or three things that the council would like from the department? Approaching appropriators for funding for OAC projects?

- Jerry suggested that parity would be a good goal—that organics would be allocated a budget at DATCP comparable to the percentage of economic activity represented by organic versus the rest of agriculture.
- Will commented that Steve Deller, who did the original calculations for the Economic impact of agriculture, is working on an update. Can we incorporate some research on organic economics in the state? Laura will contact him and see if this is possible.
- It was pointed out by several people that OAC can garner additional funding through grant programs (Perry—ADD program has funded several organic grant projects).

Global Climate Change. Will: Global warming is an issue that's important to the department and there's a lot of activity in state government in this area.

- Bob Wills said that global climate change is an issue that is growing in importance to agriculture. Will agreed that the drive is on to measure carbon footprints. Bob observed that many waste to energy projects will only benefit very large operations. For example, among cheesemakers, the technology they're developing is too large scale for typical Wisconsin cheese plants. This is true of a lot of the new farm energy saving or generating technologies. This will give the large players more of an advantage.
- Harriet: organic views things as a holistic system. The 'efficiency' of large scale operations doesn't take a lot of other issues into account (e.g. effects on rural communities).

- Does the organic community need to establish a carbon footprint for organic farming?
- Jed described several UW projects whose goals are to document energy use in organic and conventional cropping systems. There is an NRI project on crop rotation and energy use (Jed) and one on energy generation from waste in vegetables (A.J. Bussan). This project will put a digester on campus which will digest the waste from dorms.

Working Lands Initiative. Will commented on the Working Lands Initiative and the fact that Rod was very interested in the organic farmland summit that OV hosted and is interested in incorporating it into the working lands program.

- Harriet is interested in the Working Lands Initiative. The program seems to be geared toward larger farms, and the fact that the ag enterprise zone program requires large acreages and contiguous farms. This will be difficult for small and non-contiguous.
- The ag enterprise zone program will solicit proposals and Will encouraged the council to submit a proposal (Paul Dietmann was volunteered to help the council put together a proposal for the organic community to do a project).
- Will said that the Department would let the Council know when it is soliciting proposals.

Registry of organic farms.

- Perry shared that the ARM division may be willing to establish a voluntary registry of organic farms. This would be accessible to commercial applicators and other utilities whose projects cross or are adjacent to organic land.
- The difference between this and the lawn registry is that the lawn registry is legislated and there is a requirement for applicators to notify neighbors of applications. This would not be a requirement of the voluntary registry.
- Harriet pointed out that there are state run application programs (e.g. gypsy moth) that the organic community would like to have input into with regard to what materials are applied.
- Laura, Perry, and Will are working on how to move forward on the registry. We need to get approval from DATCP's IT folks first.

Bob Wills: upcoming meeting on emergency management. Is someone from the organic community going to be there to represent our needs? Laura suggested that Paul Dietmann might be going—she'll check with him.

Tapping into urban markets for WI organic farmers.

Jerry asked how can DATCP partner with OAC to promote getting products into larger urban markets (Chicago, Milwaukee, Twin Cities)?

Will responded with examples of some of the work the department is involved in: the meat initiative, CIAS projects, Michael Fields, DBIC, etc. Brandon Schultz, exec. Dir. Of WI Grocers assn. promoting funding for buy local. He suggested meeting with the other players already in the industry and plugging into their efforts.

Other observations

Will made the observation that the Council is still learning how to work with DATCP to accomplish their objectives. Sometimes issues need to be tackled from several angles. If he were in the organic industry he'd be thinking 'what's my presence in the legislature? Are the things we are doing the most important? Have we made friends in the legislature? DATCP is not the OAC's lobbyist and cannot bring OAC issues up to the legislature.

Jerry expressed concern about OAC members approaching the legislature, will this be inappropriate activity for an advisory council? Will agreed that the council must stay in the role of advisory to the department, but individuals and the groups they represent can do this lobbying.

Margaret stated that the OAC could be influential when elected officials are considering legislation that would change rules that may impact organic farms. Trust in organics among consumers can be negatively impacted by these changes and cause serious misinformation and damage to the consumers' trust in organics. The department should keep organics in mind when they consider changes in legislation and rulemaking.

Harriet mentioned the incident with Wal-Mart that the council brought to the department's attention. It was handled by Consumer protection. This was an example of a very appropriate positive response to an issue that is of importance to the organic community.

Harriet pointed out the fact that there are organic gardens at the White House and at USDA. She asked Will to ask Rod if DATCP will consider a garden here on the grounds. Will shared that Rod believes in share-cropping and would probably consider partnering with someone to establish a garden on DATCP grounds.

Committee and Agency reports

The council only had time to deal with Laura's cost share question.

Laura has received a request to waive the deadline for organic cost-share applications, which was March 31. She has 5 other applications that came after the deadline. The person making the request had been sent an application in January but had not yet sent in her application. She was not aware of the deadline when she called to ask for help getting her invoice from her certifier. Laura told her that she really couldn't do anything with regard to the certifier and informed her that the deadline had passed.

Perry suggested that one option would be to let the late applicants know that we will add them to the list but we can't guarantee that we can pay these last few. Some others also felt that we should be lenient, since this is the first year of the new program. Others felt that people had plenty of time and that it wouldn't be fair to waive the deadline for this group while others may not have bothered to send their application in since the deadline was passed. Since there was not a consensus, Jerry suggested that the Council vote.

Voting:

Suggestion to allow the 5 or 6 applications that came in after the deadline to be paid. (6 votes)

Proposal to stick with the hard and fast deadline. (6 votes)

Separate issue:

Carla suggested that Laura go back to the one person who called to ask for the waiver and get information from her certifier verifying what the problem was (6 voted yes) (6 voted no)

The council agreed, since it is split on this issue, that they would let Perry and Laura make the final decision.

Update: Laura and Perry decided to stick with a firm deadline of March 31 and send a letter explaining the deadline to all those applicants whose applications were received after the deadline. The ultimate decision was made based on an interest in being fair to the large number of applicants who did get their applications in on time and the need to be fair to those who may not have sent in applications because they saw that the deadline was passed. Laura called the person whose request for a waiver triggered this discussion. She was very unhappy, also talked to Perry about it, and informed Perry that she would be speaking to Secretary Nilsestuen and the Governor about it.

Report on Ag Board presentation

Christine and Harriet reported on the Ag Board report. No difficult or confrontational questions. Questions on milk oversupply. Ag Board members expressed interest in the statistics from the Ag Census. Rod said that they are impressed with how our council works and said that they will use it as a model for other councils.

Working with policy makers to promote organic initiatives.

Lora Klenke, DATCP Ag Marketing director will describe the coalition that successfully campaigned to get the Buy Local program funded by the state.

Lora Klenke described several programs that she oversees. These include the Alice in Dairyland program, Buy Local, international marketing, Something Special from Wisconsin, state and County fair programs, market order programs.

Lora described the process they went through to establish the Buy Local program. Her internal team gathered together a group of stakeholders, about 70 individuals. The 70 members developed a list of hurdles that were impeding progress in getting local food into consumers' hands. The larger group broke into small subcommittees and each committee tackled each of the hurdles.

At the same time, Lora's team received specialty crop block grant \$\$ to pay a consultant to investigate the local market and develop strategies for development. The consultant's report was given to the larger group for review and responses.

With the information from the two above efforts, a small team of about 6 or 7 people took on the task of developing a comprehensive proposal with the DATCP staff. This smaller group went through 17 drafts before they completed the proposal.

In order to receive support from legislators, Lora said that it is imperative that this kind of proposal have an economic impact. The one they developed was a 10% by 2010 goal for sales of local foods ("10 by 10"). This is the kind of thing the legislature is looking for. The economic impact is key.

Their group developed benchmarks that were attractive to legislators but they found that the benchmarks they set up were difficult to verify. There is no data available on local food purchasing and no one is collecting or tracking this information. Local food sales are thought to generate somewhere between 2 and 7 times the economic impact in communities compared to buying from national chains.

Tricia asked if the ag statistics service could collect data to document the amount of local sales? This is a possibility.

Margaret asked if the Buy Local proposal would be available to the council. Lora will get it to Laura to distribute electronically.

Among the projects proposed, a couple have not been practical to develop as yet. One is the Agriculture tourism trails project, another is a local branding project (similar to Something Special from Wisconsin).

They are continuing to work on Regional food system development, through a competitive grant program, sponsorship of workshops and trainings, individual technical assistance, and development of resources like the 'local food marketing guide'.

Strategies. Lora suggested the following strategies that worked well for the Buy Local Initiative:

- Talk with legislative liaison at DATCP. That person will help you identify people in the legislature to approach. They went to some senior legislators for suggestions.
- Dual path funding/outreach approach. They worked through DATCP to put it in the department's budget. They also worked with Senator Lassa to introduce the legislation through the legislature.
- Identify likely legislators, identify producers within their district and have them make calls. Also especially joint finance members (All of the current joint finance members are supportive of Buy Local, for example).
- Here's what they received. First year: \$165,000 in year one, \$110,000 in year two in staffing and operating funds. \$225,000 in competitive grant funds.
- Keys to make it happen
 - Identified need in the industry.
 - Need to have someone in DATCP who can dedicate 100% of their time to this (they hired an LTE to do this job). To get funding for the LTE....Begging helps..
 - Coalition supporters: need one or two key lobbyists among the coalition to execute some of the political things that DATCP employee can't do. (Michael Fields stepped in to do this—Jeanne Merrill).

- Jeanne set up meetings with key legislators, sent out action alerts, coordinated activities.
- Economic impact evidence is a key component.

Lessons learned:

- Don't be afraid of the price tag—if you can demonstrate an economic impact, ask for what you need.
- Inviting industry in, invite critics to the table, so you can hear what their criticism is going to be and prepare your group and agency reps to respond to them. They may also bring some good points that will strengthen the project.
- Be willing to compromise on some of your passions, be broad and inclusive.
- Don't position organics as being superior to other types of production (this would not be palatable to DATCP or the legislators that you seek support from).

A question was posed regarding the dichotomy between local and organic. Lora said that DATCP has backed away from making statements about health or environmental benefits of 'local' versus any other type of production or marketing. This type of promotion and the actual definition of local are both left to stakeholders.

Specialty Crops Grant opportunity.

Lora also talked about the specialty crops block grants program. This is some funding through the 2008 farm bill which will be allocated competitively. Organic crops are considered a specialty crop and would be eligible for a grant.

Listening session on the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (WISA)

Jed Colquhoun, Randy Jackson, and Jack Kloppenburg

Jed started the discussion by identifying that there are two separate issues here. One is the issue of personnel and other changes with regard to CIAS and other centers within CALS. He said that they are not here to discuss that issue. They are here to gather input and feedback on the planning for a possible WISA.

Jack Kloppenburg talked about the fact that the issues with CIAS have brought about a rethinking of the University's response to sustainability. Initially they looked at existing institutions: CIAS, IMP, NPM, but now they're looking much more broadly, wiping the slate clean and think what sustainability should be. Jack reviewed the questions that they'd like the Council to respond to:

1. Does CALS need to develop a revised approach to food and agricultural sustainability and what should be the role and structure of WISA in particular? Maybe IMP, NPM, and CIAS should just be a platform for a much broader program.
2. What processes might be used to develop that approach? Who should be at the table, how should the program be developed, established, carried out?
3. What resources need to be mobilized to develop and support this initiative?

Framing the discussion:

- The WISA team encouraged Council members to think big--what can WISA be well beyond what CIAS is or could be? (Erin)
- One of their broader goals is to bring all of the organizations at UW that work on sustainability issues together to link their common sustainability themes (Nelson Institute, Institute for Environmental Studies, CIAS, etc.).
- Jack commented that money is the resource that they need to move this forward. They need to create a grand enough vision so they can attract large contributions. Even the people with whom you feel that you don't have anything in common could be brought on board to support the activities of the WISA.

- Jed observed that some of the ideas they're considering involve changes in how they educate, not just how they do research, e.g. an experiential graduate training program based on input from stakeholders, professional development for agencies, real life labs.

Jerry observed that this notion of inclusivity is a challenge as well as a strength. The problem is potential for the process to be co-opted by mainstream interests. He feels that radical change needs to happen. He asked what do you see as the purpose of this process, how far can this be pushed?

Defining sustainability

Dave asked the panel what their definition of sustainable is.

Jack quoted Mathias Wafernagel and William Reese who define sustainability as living peacefully with each other, with material comfort, within the means of nature. Jack sees it as a variety of principles, a compass direction not a destination. Jack doesn't see a need to specifically define it.

Suitability of university structure to address the needs of organic and sustainable farmers:

- Jim observed that the algebra of conventional agriculture is a top down math. The government dictates what's safe and what isn't, what's produced and how it's produced. The organic community (from consumers to growers to processors) is a much more bottom up system.
- Bob added that the university also functions as a top down organization and he feels that a sustainable entity within the organization should be a bottom up system. If faculty are asking the wrong question, it doesn't matter what the answer is.
- UW doesn't do systems well. How can you get beyond the silo syndrome? There is a lack of a systems perspective that impedes the study of organics.
- Val said that this is hard for the university. She referred to a comment by Jack about the university being where knowledge is created, and disagreed, stating that the organic community doesn't agree with that statement. She encouraged them to use the resources that are already there, which are your farmers.

Specific roles/topics for WISA suggested by council members:

- Harriet would like to see organics integrated into all departments—interested in an organic degree, but also education on organic systems within all departmental degrees, e.g. a required course on organic animal health for dairy science majors.
- Carla suggested that economic models need to be integrated into the program, also natural resource issues need to be addressed.
- Jerry is interested in a revised approach to food and agricultural sustainability, and suggests an institute for organic studies.
- Harriet observed that when you have smaller institutes within CALS, it's easier to focus on specific issues.
- Margaret suggested that a program on sustainable agriculture must include a focus on human health and nutrition, consumer interests, finances, etc.
- Carla encouraged them to keep the culture in agriculture—make sure we keep culture as part of the focus.

CIAS Strengths. A number of comments related to what CIAS was/is and why it is worth establishing the new WISA using some of the same principles:

- Bob commented that many changes coming out of a crisis situation, but many ideas and issues have been brought to the fore by the advisory council and other citizen input. Responding to crises is still an internally driven decision process. He encouraged them to institutionalize what you're doing now (listening to the public) so that the process of gathering public opinion remains a strong part of the process.
- CIAS is/was nimble and able to respond to new, cutting edge ideas.
- Access is key to making it responsive. CIAS is the place where alternative, organic farmers had a voice.
- The problem with CIAS was that the issues and information did not penetrate into the departments.
- The university works in enclaves—there is no place that looks at the big picture. That is the role of these types of centers. CIAS, when it had a grant program, was able to bring faculty together.

- Bob pointed out that what the three faculty are being asked to do is what the CIAS administrative council used to be tasked with.
- Dave talked about the connection between this presentation and the one we had at the last meeting with Dean Molly Jahn. He observes a diminishing or waning of CIAS and WISA coming on. This same listening process may have happened when CIAS was originally set up.
- Laura observed that there are several key features of CIAS that are very effective, including integration of disciplines, input from stakeholders throughout the process, and outreach, 'translation' of research results into information that farmers can use.

Wrap up. Next steps, how the information gathered will be used:

- Bob and Laura wanted to know if there is a charge from Dean Jahn to make recommendations once their fact finding is completed or is their responsibility just to report what they hear from stakeholders? Randy responded that they are beginning to think that they will probably come up with some recommendations. There have already been some themes that have emerged.
- Jim said that he hopes that Jack, Jed, and/or Randy would remain involved after this phase is finished. Also that they should bring the public input in the form of some sort of advisory group.
- Laura will send out the listening session dates and contact information for Jed, Randy, and Jack, as well as a link to their website.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn by Rich Lange, second by Bonnie. Motion passed. Adjourned at 3:10 pm.