



VERMONT MAPLE SUGAR MAKERS' ASSOCIATION

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT

September 6, 2017

PRESENT: Pam Green, Jason Gagne, Arnold Coombs, Brad Gillilan, Dave Folino, Rick Kobik, Sam Cutting, Kerry Sedutto, Emma Marvin, Arnie Piper, Ted Young, James Buck, Jason McFarland, Mark Bigelow, Don Bourdon, Sam Cutting, Paul Palmer

Staff Present: Matt Gordon, Amanda Voyer

The meeting was called to order at 9:06 am by Board Chair, Pam Green.

Minutes: Sam Cutting made a motion to approve the minutes for the September 6, 2017 meeting. Emma Marvin seconded. Motion approved.

Financial Report: Mark Bigelow and Matt Gordon reported on the Association's Financials. They noted that the bulk of product revenue comes in the 4th quarter from Eastern States. The expenses were tracking at 50% at the time of the report. VMSMA received \$24,500 in royalty income from Sugarhill after June which was the highest royalty year yet.

In comparing January – June in 2016 and 2017, Matt highlighted some of the reasons for differences in numbers between the two years.

- The Big E syrup was purchased later in 2017 compared to 2016.
- Work on the website in 2017 was the reason for an increase in tech fees.
- Shipping fees were up, but postage was down in 2017.
- The travel expenses for the 2016 IMSI meeting were paid in January 2017, accounting for that increase in expenses in 2017.
- A \$10,000 check was paid to the Research Fund from money raised at the IMSI conference in 2016.

Emma Marvin made a motion to accept the financial report. Paul Palmer seconded. Motion approved.

Membership Report: There is a decrease in numbers in lower tap membership levels and an increase in higher tap levels. Discussion was held on pooling data from counties to get more accurate depiction of how many producers and taps there are in each county and the state. Dave Folino had done some of that work in Addison county. Through his informal research he found about an 8% tap increase in Addison county.

Brad Gillilan said it would be helpful if VMSMA could produce a flyer that equipment dealers could display on their counters outlining for potential members the benefits of belonging to VMSMA.



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ACER Grant Proposal Update: The grant is specifically for either marketing promotion or land owner education. VMSMA was excluded from being able to apply directly, however VMSMA wrote a letter of support for UVM Extension. The applications are in and we are now waiting to see what gets approved.

Container Committee Report: The current members of the Dealership Committee (now the Container Committee) are Jacques Couture, Dave Silloway, Matt Gordon and Emma Marvin. The committee presented a proposed updated contract that container dealers would need to comply with to sell Association branded containers. Going forward, the Container Committee would have the responsibility of recommending to the Board a plan of action for addressing issues that could arise with individual dealers as well as presenting potential new dealers, or recommending the termination of current dealers. The Board would have the ultimate vote on final decisions.

A motion was made to add language into the dealer contract that would address having a specified amount of sales volume to remain a dealer with additional language that allows VMSMA to request audited sales records from dealers to ensure compliance. Don Bourdon seconded the motion. The record-keeping by the dealers would allow us to audit who they're selling to. Motion passed.

The Container Committee will continue work on addressing topics including the exclusivity of selling only to current VMSMA members.

Website Update: The homepage design is in the 2nd iteration and there will be additional pages to look at soon and looking to launch mid-October.

IMSI Presentation on Social Media Project: Brad Gillilan led a PowerPoint presentation about IMSI's social media initiative which includes launching a Facebook page and posting regular content in both English and French. These posts will be organized around monthly themes and include the creation of hashtag phrases. The intention is for maple producers and businesses to either share these posts or use the themes and hashtags to generate their own posts within each month's theme. The Board supported VMSMA participating on the association Facebook page and getting the information out to members.

Market Order Study Group: Arnie Piper introduced the members of the committee and reviewed the authority and scope of the group, highlighting the work conducted to date. Jason Gagne discussed the estimates for fees levied from the marketing order frameworks that exist (state & federal). Conversation about how imported syrups could be involved, be it levied a fee per a marketing order or as some partnership to involve the funding that Quebec is already spending in the US. There was discussion about the fairness of Quebec syrup being charged a fee as part of a US marketing order program when they are already spending heavily to promote their syrup. The group was divided on this subject.

Arnie Piper discussed the pros and cons of state-based and federal-based market order programs. Generally, it is felt that a state program would be easier to implement; under such a program VAAFM handles administration and enforcement and can charge no more than 5% for administration. Federal market order programs would be more difficult because of the regulatory burden associated with those as well as the costs to implement.



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Andy Aldrich spoke about his experience with the recently formed Christmas tree growers market order and how that started. It was created chiefly to combat the rise of fake trees as opposed to real trees. They have reviewed their marketing efforts and social media was a large component of their marketing and it was very successful. A fee of \$0.15 per tree is charged at the time the tree is cut and in the first year they exceeded income projections by about 25-30% than originally estimated. Dave Folino asked if the program had to be sold to producers? Andy Aldrich replied that there was an educational component to it at the beginning and it helped to sway his own opinion. This education campaign was done concurrently with the voting process. Other growers seemed to mirror his own feelings, moving from ambivalence to possible optimism to definite support. Since the implementation, VT farmers have seen the average price go up \$2 per tree to \$40 (choose-and-cut) and the wholesale price also went up (from approximately \$25 to low \$30s).

Marketing Committee Report: Arnie Piper reported the committee is working on a cookbook. The Maple in Every School program proposal as originally designed for Orleans, Bennington and Lamoille counties was not approved. There is a group outside of VMSMA that may go forward with another program in the end of September that could include a maple in every school component.

Membership Committee Report: The committee will work on getting more feedback from surveys distributed at the equipment dealers, fairs, open houses to gather accurate data why members join VMSMA and perceived value of benefits.

Financial Committee Report: Mark Bigelow thanked Kerry Sedutto and Dave Folino for joining the committee. They are scheduled to have a meeting with the bookkeepers. Mark will be retiring in July 2018 at which time VMSMA will need to find his replacement.

Governance Committee Report: Don Bourdon reported the bylaw review needs to be looked at as well as a review of the delegate concept and the policy book.

Education & Research Committee Report: Jason reported that the committee met to discuss Maple School information. Mark Isselhardt is working on getting speakers/presenters. The conferences will be

held at SIT on January 20th and at Lamoille Union High School on January 27th in 2018. Hands-on classes will be held in the tech center at the high school.

The Big E Report: Maple Grove is canning all the amber and dark robust.

Farming Magazine: Discussion was held on having a checkoff on membership registration form to receive the free publication.

Other Business: Matt will send a poll for scheduling the next meeting, looking at the first two weeks of December.

Discussion was held on producing a thank you letter with a gift certificate for the retirements of Henry Marckres and George Cook.



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Sam Cutting made a motion to adjourn. Arnold Coombs seconded. Motion approved.