

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT (AG) COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES**

December 21, 2023

EDC Board Room, Willmar, and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Erik Hatlestad (via Zoom), Noah Hultgren, Kim Larson, Dan Lippert, Keith Poier (via Zoom), Nate Reuss and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Dustin Kortba

Absent: Larry Konsterlie

Guest: Kevin Friesen, RBS (Rural Business-Cooperative Service) Loan Specialist, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Willmar Office

Media: Levi Jones, West Central Tribune

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Services, Inc.

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:32 a.m.

[Kim Larson joined the meeting]

AGENDA—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Nate Reuss, to approve the Agenda as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Kim Larson, to approve the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee and Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee combined meeting Minutes of November 13, 2023 as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

Chair Halvorson welcomed Noah Hultgren as a new member of the Ag Committee representing the Joint Operations Board and introduced guest Kevin Friesen of USDA Rural Development.

USDA Update. Friesen provided an overview of USDA programs and programs beneficial to the community: 1) Community Facilities direct loans and grant program for fire trucks, ambulances, city hall, museums, etc.; 2) Single Family Housing Programs for low-income families; 3) Rural Development

Business Programs that contain 16 different programs; 4) Rural Development Energy Programs, including Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Loans & Grants for solar production, wind turbines, grain dryers, LED lighting, etc. This is the most popular quarterly USDA program in the area; and 5) Value-Added Producer Grants.

[Dan Lippert joined the meeting.]

Townships are eligible to apply for USDA programs. Friesen shared the dollar amounts available for loans and grants. There are revolving loans for communities or small and large businesses. Friesen mentioned a unique \$12M guaranteed loan fund project for industrial hemp on which he has been working and that should be operational in Minnesota in February 2024. Friesen distributed handouts to committee members. Friesen shared there are approximately 55 employees at 11 locations in Minnesota with 5 at the Willmar office.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Regional Food District Center (RFBC). Reuss shared an update on the RFBC and mentioned it is a six-year program. Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) turned in an action plan to the USDA, which was accepted. Initially, the program will focus on projects that require a great deal of paperwork. The rules for the RFBC will be more detailed in the future. Next steps include clarity on funding, which may not be known until February 2024. Funding will be administered through the Minnesota Farm Bureau with the USDA being the overall umbrella. Reuss feels grants could total \$50,000 and shared an idea of using excess garden products or grocery store products that can be preserved and delivered to food shelves, etc.

Healthy Earth, Healthy Kids Community Eco Fair Sponsorship. Swedburg shared she has not received clarity on the details for a potential sponsorship request for a new sustainability award between the Kandiyohi County Area Family YMCA and a local stakeholder group for an Eco Fair scheduled for April 2024. This topic will be placed on the January agenda.

NEW BUSINESS—There was no new business.

REPORTS

Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Swedburg reported she, Nate Hultgren, Harold Stanislawski and others traveled to the Netherlands in November to visit the Dun Agro facilities. They visited sugar beet plants, a methane digester, and met with farmers. Dun Agro produces a variety of hemp products, i.e., matting for cattle, hempcrete panels, insulation mats, etc. The EDC continues to build a relationship with Dun Agro.

2024 Ag Goals. Swedburg shared a schedule of possible presentations for 2024 committee meetings (see attached) and asked for input/changes to the schedule. Suggested changes included:

- Move Agriculture Utilization Research Institute (AURI) to January

- RFBC will be added along with the University of Minnesota (U of M) Mid-Central Research and Outreach Center (MCROC) for February
- Move Zak Rada's presentation to April
- Add Simply Shrimp and MB Rail/Nexyst360 to August
- Move New London-Spicer/Willmar High School Greenhouse and Ridgewater College visits to September

Tepfer inquired if there are other renewable energy opportunities to explore, i.e. energy storage opportunities, hydrogen generator, etc. A lengthy discussion was held regarding the hydrogen concept.

[Erik Hatlestad joined the meeting.]

Hatlestad shared information on a hydrogen hub and green hydrogen and suggested visiting with other agriculture cooperatives in the area regarding domestic fertilizer production. He offered to contact Pete Wyckoff, Assistant Commissioner with the Department of Commerce to attend a future committee meeting. Swedburg suggested placing this discussion on a future agenda; she will speak with Hatlestad and Tepfer.

Swedburg will send out a revised presenter schedule for January-April 2024 prior to her departure from the EDC. The presenters for January-April will be the following:

- January—AURI
- February—U of M MCROC and RFBC
- March—Jamey Cline
- April—Zak Rada

Farmtastic. Swedburg reviewed the event plans discussed at previous meetings. A contract has not been signed (for 2024 and 2026) and inquired if the committee wants to see the event move forward for July 2024. If so, one or two committee members need to take the lead for the event until Swedburg's replacement has been hired by the EDC. Responsibilities would include: communication with sponsors and organization of events/activity booths. She is awaiting notes from the Kandiyohi County Corn and Soybean Growers regarding past Farmtastic events. Hultgren suggested contacting Sarah at the Corn and Soybean Growers. Larry Konsterlie will assist with some of the event planning. Committee members felt it is important to have Swedburg's position filled to assist with the event. Swedburg commented a decision is needed to either table the 2024 event or sign a contract and move forward. Committee members support the event, but feel they do not have the time or experience in event planning to move forward. Swedburg mentioned the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce may be willing to assist or there may be other key partners who can assist during the transition.

IT WAS MOVED BY Kim Larson, SECONDED BY Dan Tepfer, to opt out of the 2024 Farmtastic Stingers event due to Sarah Swedburg's resignation from her position with the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission. MOTION CARRIED.

ATTENDANCE AT AG EVENTS

Farm Succession Education Event. Swedburg stated the EDC sponsored a farm succession planning event in November at Max's on the Grill in Olivia (two identical sessions were held). Lippert felt it was an interesting and useful event. Swedburg was pleased with the turnout and felt having a regional approach rather than a county approach brought in a larger audience.

Willmar Poultry new hatchery tour. Swedburg was unable to attend, but Chair Halvorson, Lippert and Reuss attended the tour of Willmar Poultry's new hatchery, Nest One. They shared the hatching process and automation mechanics of the new hatchery. Life-Science Innovations created two new companies with this expansion, Next Nest Hatching and Head Start Hatching.

Ongoing ag-related EDC work. Swedburg reported on the following:

- The childcare grant is being finalized. The EDC distributed nearly \$400,000 in forgivable loans. She will prepare a video as to the distribution of dollars, which will be sent to EDC committees.
- Three additional broadband grants were submitted to the state on December 7th.
- She will contract with the EDC to continue coordinating the Elevate Business Community Academy. The EDC recently received a \$203,000 grant for this program.
- She requested committee members complete and return the questionnaire (see attached) from Kelsey Olson for the new EDC website and submit a headshot as well.

Olson received information from Cooperative Energy Futures about the Community Solar Garden in Clara City. Xcel Energy customers in Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Renville and Yellow Medicine Counties can participate. They inquired if the EDC would partner and co-host an educational event about community solar/energy assistance/utilities. Hatlestad shared he has been working with this company for a few years and shared an overview of the Community Solar Garden. It is a program to reduce energy costs for lower-income families. He encouraged the EDC participate in the program. Swedburg shared the EDC will not provide financial support for marketing or social media. Committee members recommended the EDC move forward with partnering an educational event with Cooperative Energy Futures.

Swedburg invited the committee to attend a farewell party for her on December 27th, at Intuition Brewing from 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Ag and renewable energy opportunities.

- MN Ag Expo, Mankato, January 17-18, 2024, <https://mngexppo.com/>

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Dan Lippert, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to adjourn the meeting.
MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is 7:30 a.m., Thursday, January 18, 2024, at the EDC Board Room and via Zoom video conference.



Harvesting the Past, Cultivating the Future: A Farm Succession Event & Dinner

Join us for an educational event focused on navigating the complexities of passing on your family farm. Discover the key strategies for a seamless transition of assets to ensure a prosperous future for generations to come. Our expert speakers, David and Samantha Nelson, are certified farm succession coordinators deeply rooted in the farming community. They are dedicated to guiding you and your family towards a successful farm transfer.

Between the two identical information sessions, we invite you to enjoy dinner with us. Additionally, during dinner, we offer a unique breakout session dedicated to exploring the topic of ambiguous loss, providing you with a deeper understanding.

Let us help you leave your legacy!

Learn more at ultimateag.online/legacy.

Questions?

Call 507-637-8139.

Your hosts

Thrivent Community – Redwood Financial Advisors
Pages of our Communities
Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar - EDC



Event details

Farm Succession Education Event

Tuesday, December 5

Two identical sessions available.

4:30 p.m. & 6:45 p.m.

Dinner and optional breakout session will be provided for everyone in between the information sessions.

Max's Grill

2425 W. Lincoln Ave.
Olivia, MN 56277

Reserve your spot

Register today at
bit.ly/farmlegacy
or scan the QR code.
RSVP by Nov 22.



Scan to
register.