

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT (AG) COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
February 16, 2023
EDC Board Room, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Dustin Kotrba, Kim Larson, Dan Lippert, Keith Poier, Chris Radel, Nate Reuss and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Larry Konsterlie

Absent: Abdulcadir Gaal

Media: Shelby Lindrud, West Central Tribune

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager (via Zoom)

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (via Zoom)

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 a.m.

AGENDA—

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

MINUTES—In regard to the information relative to renewable energy in the January 19 minutes, Dustin Kotrba informed Chris Radel that Christianson PLLP has lots of data relative to renewable energy and he will give a summary once it has gone through the legislature.

IT WAS MOVED BY Keith Poier, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to approve the minutes of the January 19, 2023 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Farm Bill event. Nate Reuss reported on the Farm Bill event, which was attended by most sections of agriculture. Three of U.S. Senator Klobuchar's staff attended. The event was very well done; two-thirds of it was very technical. All of the special interest groups were very well prepared. Discussion included making a change on how food shelves and their transportation are handled. It was recommended to treat transportation for food programs the same as schools, which would be helpful. Reuss noted there was a good article in the *West Central Tribune*. Childcare and broadband were also included in the discussions.

Soybean crushing facility. Kim Larson and Sarah Swedburg had a conversation about the proposed meeting with two businesses and whether it should be joint or separate. Swedburg noted the first meeting would be a very preliminary conversation, but they want it to be open and robust. Larson suggested Harold Stanislawski and Mike Youngerberg attend the meeting to explain the crushing process as it may not be known by the poultry industry. Kotrba commented that crude soybean oil coming from the crush facilities is the major driver right now. Local

soybean prices will increase as basis strengthens to draw in soybeans. Soy crush expansion like we are seeing doesn't typically decrease the price of feed over time. A number of plants have been announced to be built nationally with markets for the oil but meal will need to find markets. Poier questioned if there is a need for a crushing facility, but noted Stanislawski may know that answer. Kotrba commented it is important to understand supply chain costs and get a temperature gauge on the topic as everyone is looking to lower their carbon scoring. He noted tax credits are all different for carbon scoring.

EDC Fast Facts flyer. Swedburg noted the flyer is still being developed. They are attempting to find the calorie count on the edibles grown in Kandiyohi County, as well as renewable information as to wind, solar and ethanol. At this time, the 2017 ag census will be used for the other fast facts. It was suggested to include the types of edible products grown rather than just vegetables. It was questioned if sugar beets should be included as they themselves are not edibles; focus on food rather than ingredients.

NEW BUSINESS—There was no new business.

STATUS OF 2022-2023 GOALS—Swedburg noted it is six months since the committee's goals were determined and it is a good time to review them and determine how they have been going. The committee indicated appreciation for the structure, the way the goals are laid out and who is assigned to each goal.

6-Month Goals

- As to Goal 1, completing a feasibility study of industrial hemp, Swedburg had a conference call with the European industrial hemp processing facility to find out what information they have available to incorporate into a feasibility study; she is making good progress.
- Goal 2 as to using the committee's budget in 2022 was accomplished.
- Goal 3, having the schools speak about their greenhouses still needs to be done, maybe this could be done next month and have them attend virtually, if needed.
- Goal 4, update the agriculture flyer is being done and may be completed by next month.

12-Month Goals

- Continue Partners in Ag Innovation Conference is being done.
- Swedburg and Reuss are working on the resource folder and have found the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has some resources. They are trying to figure out how to package the information and have it available locally.
- Swedburg will follow up on the farm transfer planning classes.

Swedburg questioned if additional brainstorming should be done at the next meeting or wait until more progress is made on the current goals? It was noted new ideas can always be brought up at any future meeting. The committee decided to leave the goals as is for now. Swedburg will review the original list of goals discussed to see if anything may be missing.

Partners in Ag Innovation Conference. Kotrba stated the theme is "Together Towards Tomorrow" and the conference will be held Tuesday, July 25, 2023. The planning committee is trying to find a forward-looking keynote speaker on technology. They have raised \$17,000 of the \$26,000 budget, which is further along than in the past. The University of Minnesota has committed to being a sponsor, but they are still waiting for Southwest Initiative Foundation. The same administrator to handle the website and registration is being used. The website banner logo has been updated. They have discussed doing a live stream on National Ag Day to get social media action. They are searching for a woman to moderate the conference. Speakers will include a panel on farm KPI (key performance indicators) risk and a representative from Christian PLLP. Zach Rada, Farm Business

Management instructor from Minnesota West Community and Technical College, will moderate the panel. There will be a fireside chat on human resources and mental health. The list of storytellers includes Foxhole Brewhouse, Grand Farm of Fargo, High Island Organics that creates fertilizer pellets and possibly Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway about rail. They are financially in a good position and are starting to market the conference.

REPORTS

Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Poier reported the subcommittee met last Monday and discussed the European company quite a bit. They are maintaining contact with the help of Stanislawski. They discussed that in advertising industrial hemp not to bring up a relationship between hemp and marijuana—just talk about hemp. They may prepare educational news articles explaining the different types of hemp and the advantages. Swedburg announced a couple of upcoming conferences subcommittee members will attend: The 2023 Industrial Hemp Conference by the University of Vermont will be held virtually on February 23; and a five-week course on Hemp Production: Science and Uses by the University of Maine at a cost of \$10 for the course. The Minnesota Hemp Association is looking at priorities in the farm bill, especially crop insurance, support for hemp to be an eligible expense for USDA and grant funding, and public/private partnerships. The subcommittee held a short discussion on Prairie PRODucers in Olivia; not much change at this time. Subcommittee member Jordan Zeller, Renville County Economic Developer will be attending the NoCo Hemp Expo in Colorado Springs March 24-26. Larson noted the European business requested a hemp grower. Swedburg identified and contacted three to four potential growers and shared them with the company; it is up to the company to make the contacts. She is working on an RFP for a feasibility study and had a good conversation with Kandiyohi County about the permitting process and how long it would take if a facility is in the municipality—an environmental review may be needed. Swedburg needs to have a conversation with Ridgewater College to see if it has any interest in small scale testing. Radel requested he be copied on any communications with the College.

Ongoing Ag-related EDC work. Swedburg continues to work with Nexyst 360 and the European company. She had a great conversation with Happy Halal on goat processing; the cost of the project has increased, but the lead financial institution is still onboard. She saw blueprints for the facility; the goal is to break ground this spring. The state opened the next round for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program; applications are due March 2nd. The EDC's Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee will submit two projects in partnership with Vibrant Broadband—one fiber-to-the-home to serve Harrison Township and the other for Lake Elizabeth and East Lake Lillian Townships for the Low-Density Pilot Program (five households per mile) where the grant would pay up to 75% of the costs, which is the first time the state has allowed this. Swedburg believes this will be a very competitive program. All three townships will be built out fully. Part of Diamond Lake is considered served, but it is not known if residents have access to Frontier Communication's services. Swedburg is also working on local childcare. She followed up with U.S. Senator Klobuchar's staff after the Farm Bill event, who were shocked to learn the number of childcare openings needed. It is exciting news that a provider moved into a new facility and was licensed.

Ag and Renewable Energy Opportunities. Reuss will be attending the 2023 Agricultural Outlook Forum on February 23-24; it is a free event and can be attended virtually (Radel requested the link). He will also attend the AURI New Uses Forum on April 11.

Renewable Energy. Radel reported that today information on the USDA Rural Energy for America Program will be provided as to how cooperatives can utilize federal money; he will give a report at the next meeting. Governor Walz signed legislation to make Minnesota energy green by 2024. Kotrba noted each state is trying to figure out a carbon-free date. Interest on the impact of the Russia/Ukraine war on fertilizer was questioned as those countries are the largest producers of potash. It is unknown how prices may change in the future; however, the price of nitrogen has come down. Kotrba noted tariffs have been placed on Russia. Tepfer stated anhydrous

ammonia is produced from natural gas and Russia is a big supplier. Committee members questioned if there is anything it should be planning for the future if the conflict does not get resolved. It was believed there will be permanent, long-term effects. It was recommended Stanislawski be invited to a future meeting to discuss the effects on commodities.

Reuss reported Willmar Bikes, Kandiyohi County and Mid-Minnesota Development Commission are doing a pedestrian and bike trail update for the county. He encouraged everyone to complete the survey and to share the [link to the survey](#); he will send the link.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED, SECONDED AND CARRIED to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:38 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, March 16, 2023** at the EDC Board Room and via ZOOM video conference.