

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
HELD JUNE 11, 2025 AT 3:00 P.M.
IN THE BOARDROOM OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

PRESENT:

Members: Chaplain K. Santucci - Chairman
 Ms. Suzanne Mayall - Deputy Chairman

 Mr. Sam Fraser-Smith
 Mr. Daniel Renaud
 Ms. Toni Butz
 Mr. Scott Tucker
 Mr. Warren Brown (Farmers' Association (FA) Chairman
 Mr. Roger Pacheco

Government: Dr. Geoff Smith - Director
 Mr. Tommy Sinclair – Agricultural Officer
 Mr. Stewart Swanson – Consultant Agronomist
 Ms. Claire Jessey –Principal Plant Protection Officer

ABSENT/APOLOGIES:

Members: Ms. Julie Greaves
 Mr. Albert Swan
 Mr. Joey Weeks
 Mr. McLaren Smith

Government: Dr. Jonathan Nisbett – Chief Veterinary Officer

The Deputy Chairman welcomed the members.

1. Confirmation of Minutes:

The previous Minutes were accepted with no objections. Confirmed: Daniel Renaud, Seconded Sam Fraser-Smith.

2. Matters Arising/ Action Points

Agriculture Strategy

It was reported to the Board that the Farmers Association wished to put the Agriculture Strategy on hold in favour of progressing more urgent issues at this time, such as the embargo and a chill room out of action at the ASC. The Agricultural Officer confirmed that new chill room equipment is being installed and is expected to be in place by the end of the following week.

Alpha-Chloralose Pilot

It was also noted that feedback from the Board members on the issues related to (i) the definition of private property and (ii) confirmation of how long the sedated birds were symptomatic and noticeable to the public was clarified and amended in the Alpha-Chloralose proposal. There was general conversation on the potential for negative publicity with off-catch birds that are alive but unable to defend themselves against predators and ants, and also the risk to the health of any predators (e.g. cats) that eat the sedated birds. The Director noted that he had raised these types of liability and publicity issues with the Attorney General contact for their input. It was discussed that the pilot study should not be extended to additional areas or additional farmers so that it could be controlled and monitored. Expansion to additional areas and farmers could be considered in later stages of the program if determined to be successful.

The Board was reminded that in a previous meeting a Alpha-Chloralose presentation was given, the proposal document was supplied for review and a unanimous vote was taken by the Board to

support the proposal at that time. The Director noted that the Department is supportive of the proposal but noted the scale of pilot program should be controllable.

It was agreed that the proposal with the incorporated amendments would be supplied to the Director for him to forward to the Attorney General's chambers for their review and feedback. Members were instructed to supply any final feedback within a week. There was discussion that the final proposal version should be sent officially from the Board with a cover letter from the Chairman. The Director offered to provide a template letterhead that could be considered for use. It was noted the Department of Health would be included in the consultation after the Attorney General's feedback had been received.

S. Fraser-Smith was thanked by the Farmers Association for his work on the Alpha-Chloralose proposal.

ASC Staffing

It was reported that the ASC Manager's post was expected to be advertised shortly. The Porter's post is expected to be advertised shortly after the other post is filled. The Director noted that he is trying to pursue a Trainee Agricultural Officer to shadow the Agricultural Officer who is due to retire in a few years. Updates will be provided next month.

It was noted that a copy of the Agricultural Strategy was provided to the Farmers Association to be used for their review. The Board requested that the same version be sent to them so everyone is working from the same version.

Feral Cats

No update.

Feral Chicken

It was noted that the Department will be releasing a preview of the feral chicken management software (discussed later in the meeting) with an advertising campaign and that feral cats will also be mentioned as cat feeding stations are supporting the feral chicken populations. It was hoped that the cat conversation can progress from there.

Glufosinate

It was reported that there were no glufosinate updates from the Department of Health at this time.

Farmers' Fees

Fees for farmers had been identified related to pesticide applications and BCD processing. The paperwork for a proposal to eliminate those fees will be prepared for the Director's consideration and progress.

It was noted that there is no application fee for environmentally friendly and/or non-toxic pesticide products and BCD processing fees for those same products are much reduced.

3. Policy and Legislation.

It was suggested that all related DENR policies should be made available for review, noting that that this could reduce confusion and disagreement.

It was also suggested that there should be a list of pesticides and threshold concentrations to assist potential importers to reduce guesswork when researching potential pesticides. An example was noted where farmers incorrectly presumed that an active ingredient was not permitted for use, but the Dept referred to a product that might be part of a weed control solution that did contain this active ingredient. The Director will review policies internally and agreed that they could be published.

4. Farmers Association

ASC Facility

The progress on the chill rooms at the ASC was noted and appreciated and will be important for the current carrot and potato crops.

It was noted that chill room #3 has been used for dry storage whilst out of action but that these items will be relocated if necessary but lifting boxes without an operational lifting equipment limits this activity. It was reported that another motorized forklift and pallet jack are funded and a battery pack will be sourced for the pallet jack.

It was also reported that the chemicals are in stock currently and the farmers will be contacted to confirm which other products are needed. It was suggested that a list be sent out of the basic products in stock, particularly those less toxic. It was noted that farmers like to have the buffer of products available at the ASC in case of emergency need.

Embargo

It was noted that this year was good for local potato and onion production and it was reported that when a large number of local onions was available and on embargo, another type of onion was imported by a retailer. This was suggested as a method of an avenues to get around the embargo. It was suggested that the embargo could be broadened such that all table potatoes could go on embargo. Otherwise local red potatoes go into storage, take a long time to sell and are an older product when they finally do sell. There was some discussion on the availability of choice by the consumer and the nutritionally quality reduction after storage. There was also discussion on whether importation of organic products increased when a particular item came on embargo.

It was noted that in previous years 300-400 bags of potatoes would sell in the week before a holiday, whereas now less than 100 bags sell. It was noted that expanding the embargo to prevent all table potatoes would mean that only red flesh would be available in the stores and that yellow flesh potatoes are very different from red. It was noted that yellow flesh and russets were grown locally and were good but they don't produce as much as the red skin variety. There was lengthy discussion on types of potatoes, yields, sales, promotion and demand.

It was suggested that the Board write a letter to the Minister stating the issues with the embargo and that the importers appear to be trying to find a work around to the system. There was discussion about how all the issues are linked and efforts towards increasing yields are supported by the embargo system behind the sale of local produce but the demand needs to be present and the storage needs to be available etc.

It was noted that any changes to the embargo may produce negative fallout from the public to the Minister. The Director confirmed that a letter from the Board would assist him in consulting with the Minister and that the Department is supportive of local food production. It was also suggested that the Farmers Association could provide a letter on the issue as well.

It was suggested that other embargo issues could be explored as well such as definitions of produce, packaging, sizes etc. There was concern noted that restricting the consumer's access to food varieties might lead to resentment of local produce and it was agreed this was not the intention.

Strawberry Plants

Strawberry plant importation was discussed with concern regarding the quarantine entry conditions. It was confirmed that nationally certified strawberry plants are accepted so that additional testing could be avoided. The USDA was included in the discussion of the entry requirements. Non-certified plants would still be accepted but would require testing. There was discussion of varieties that would be suited for Bermuda and a concern was noted that shipments must arrive in time for scheduled planting.

Agriculture Strategy

There was brief mention of the agriculture strategy and it was reported that the Farmers Association will review the document again.

Water

Water was raised as an issue but farmers had not had the opportunity to follow up with the Hydrogeologist to progress their specific matters. There was brief discussion on water access, well opportunity, lenses and water extraction rates. The Director noted that he would support funds for a pump and salinity switch. It was determined that communication by any interested farmer is required with the hydrogeologist, he will carry out assessments to determine if the location is appropriate and then water could be extracted into storage totes.

Growy.

Updates were requested on the Growy issue and the Director confirmed that two PWC reports have been obtained and sent to the Permanent Secretary for review. Nothing else had progressed since the last meeting. The Director indicated that the Department is not supportive [because the business case specifically for the Growy operation (*i.e* not Kalera) has not been made]. The Permanent Secretary and Director visited several local hydroponic growing operations with DENR staff and will visit others. It was reported that Cardinal Farms is progressing with hydroponic lettuce production and the Agricultural Consultant is exploring trialing new varieties of lettuce for the shoulder months to help extend the growing season. It was expected that if successful these efforts could increase production by 15 percent per year. Concerns were noted by the Farmers Association related to disruption of local produce, being uneconomic, and using taxpayers money. The Director noted that he had not seen anything yet to be supportive of the proposal and he had advised the Permanent Secretary similarly. It was reported that the Bermuda Farmers Association wanted the Board to know that they had a lawyer who will put an injunction against them but that this was not their preferred action.

It was also noted that some Board members had not seen the letter sent from the Farmers Association to the Premier and BEDC or the prior proposal and suggested it be shared with them if the Board needs to progress this further. The cross-ministry conflicts were also noted. There was discussion about the original letter and proposal and that basic elements had been already shared with the Board. It was reported that the Bermuda Farmers Association had been approached for another meeting with Growy but the BFA was not keen to meet with them as their preference was for dialogue through the Board with the farmers for them to understand what is happening in Bermuda and that the Bermuda Farmers Association should be pushing for farmers to increase their own production particularly in the summer. They noted problems with planning for new greenhouses and the mental health of the industry.

5. Director's Report

Nutritional Testing

The Director reported that he would like to see a government funded campaign to promote consumption of local produce and discussed some of the components that could be included but focused on the nutritionally beneficial compounds that would be in local produce compared to overseas produce which presumably be picked much earlier and older. He discussed an opportunity

to partner with Utah State University for food very specific testing for chemical compounds including: antioxidants, anti-inflammatory, anticarcinogenic, vitamins, flavonoids etc. The testing for pesticides was mentioned as possibly being included as well. He was hoping that this data could be used to be part of a campaign for public awareness, after Board discussion, on promoting local produce. It was noted that growing techniques may also affect the data but other members disagreed. There was more discussion on the quality of both locally grown and overseas produce, the beneficial nutrients and the proposed project. It was noted that the public feedback via forum could be solicited regarding local produce, food nutrition, food variety choice, etc. The Director also noted that an outcome could be a sticker promoting local produce.

6. Agricultural Service Centre (ASC) Report

Chill rooms discussed earlier in the meeting. Shortages of boxes have been noted but orders including cowpeas were due to be arriving shortly. Another chemical order would be placed to keep stock up whilst noting the limited budget of the ASC.

A good supply of local potatoes were being stored (between 4000 to 4500 bags). Carrots were being harvested and stored. The hot, dry weather was noted. Bananas are on the upswing for numbers for ripening, but also thefts were being reported.

The security cameras were discussed but noted that images had not been clear and there are multiple ways to get into fields. It was noted that previously any farmer interested to try the cameras could have access to the cameras provided by DENR and several were still available and could be made available to farmers. It was discussed that sellers of stolen bananas may be selling them to neighborhoods or at their own side stalls. Further general discussion took place around theft, licenses of sellers of produce on the road (farmers versus non-farmers) and stalls selling local and imported produce took place. A member asked if the DENR could facilitate a sting with the police and farmers with tracking devices. It was discussed whether images of offenders and vehicles could be gathered but it was noted that this information was already on the farmer group chat. There was also discussion on defamation and PIPA. The Chairman offered to look into the privacy violations. The Board was encouraged to provide decisions and letters to the Director/Minister to properly progress these types of issues. The Director confirmed that he will keep the matter on the agenda and he will review which legislation could be used for these actions.

7. Agronomy Report

The Agronomist referred to his last newsletter noting recent zoom meetings he had attended on tropical fruit tree preparation for hurricane damage. He also discussed his notes on pressure valves for calibration and articles on food safety for human pathogens. He discussed irradiation of sweet potatoes to eliminate quarantine insect pests and recommended importing irradiated whole potatoes to produce cuttings for propagation and suggested yields would be higher. He discussed that the timing of taking vine cuttings can impact yield. It was noted that local sweet potato plants can acquire viruses locally and yield can reduce year over year and that adding new genetic material is helpful.

It was noted that the legislation prevents the importation of sweet potatoes but that for scientific purposes the Minister could consider exceptions. It was also noted that farmers currently are already granted an exception to import sweet potato cuttings under Import Permit from the DENR after testing and inspection at origin has been carried out and some hand carry those shipments to Bermuda to reduce shipping delays.

8. Plant Protection Report

It was noted that staff have researched more environmentally friendly pesticides to broaden the options for the ASC to stock alternative products for farmers. It was noted that shelf life may be shorter and refrigeration requirements would need to be considered. Farmers can submit to the ASC products that they may be interested in having in stock for purchase. The Farmers Association will develop a list of recommendations for stock pesticides for the ASC.

9. Veterinary Services Report

No report.

10. Planning

No planning applications.

11. AOB

Payment of Board Members

The Board was asked to provide proper names to determine if members are in the government payment system. Any new members will need to be added as vendors to enable payment. The DENR will email members for their full names to begin the process.

New Feral Chicken Reporting System

The Director mentioned the limitations of the existing chicken reporting system and presented an updated reporting system, which allows for immediate and more specific reporting to the chicken management team phones. The system can also allow for the public to see areas where chicken management is taking place. Specific properties and individuals reporting chickens will not be identifiable. The management team will also upload the team's output measures to the system. Although the system is still in testing, in one-month 1200 chickens were shot, 94 sedated, 1 trapped and 327 sites visited by the team. Reports can be easily generated from the system. The Director congratulated the officer involved and the Board commended the officer and the system. Limited team staff was noted but agreed the Alpha-Chloralose proposal could help and the Director noted that he may discuss the possibility of collaboration with the gun clubs. Farmers discussed the continuing damage and losses from chickens. There was a question regarding whether legislation would prevent people from feeding feral chickens. The Director agreed to look into it.

Planning Application

The Agricultural Officer mentioned a planning application that he had received for a goat pen on a piece of agricultural land that had not been farmed in recent history. He was not anticipating a problem with goat use but other non-agricultural uses would have to be clarified and stipulated.

Members indicated their approval in theory but it was noted this was the pre-consultation stage and the Board did not need to make a decision at this time.

Agricultural Reserve Audit

The Director noted that he expected to be able to share a copy of the Agricultural Reserve Audit with the Board in the next meeting.

Pricing in Grocery Stores

There was a question to the Board whether to discuss further the publication of prices of produce as a guideline for consumers. There was some discussion on the benefits and aims of publishing a price with note that it could be more difficult now to determine a singular price as there were less importers years ago and now many different product grades, economies of scale, crop yields etc. so the price may be more of a range.

Meeting Adjourned

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.

Chairman: 

Date: June 11, 2025