

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
HELD AUGUST 13, 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
 Ms. Julie Greaves
 Mr. Sam Fraser-Smith
 Mr. Daniel Renaud
 Mr. Roger Pacheco
 Mr. McLaren Smith

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

ABSENT/APOLOGIES:

 Mr. Scott Tucker
 Mr. Albert Swan
 Mr. Joey Weeks
 Dr. Jonathan Nisbett – Chief Veterinary Officer
 Mr. Tommy Sinclair– Agricultural Officer
 Mr. Warren Brown (Farmers' Association (FA) Chairman)
 Ms. Toni Butz

The Deputy Chairman welcomed the members.

1. Confirmation of Minutes:

The previous Minutes were accepted with no objections. Confirmed: xxx, Seconded: xxx

2. Matters Arising

Alpha-Chloralose Pilot Proposal

The board member preparing the 'Sleepy Chicken proposal' confirmed that the final version of the document is completed and is ready for the signature from the Chairman of the Board. No additional feedback had been received so the proposal can be signed and submitted to the Director for his presentation to the Minister. The Director requested confirmation of the number of farmers

proposed for the pilot. It was discussed that the Minister may determine how many farmers will be included. The Director reported that he had discussed liability issues with an insurance provider and noted that farmers would be expected to self-insure and cover all costs if any damages occurred to pets etc. Once the Chairman signed the cover letter the Director agreed that he would forward it with his recommendations.

Feral Chickens

The Director reported that the shooter is back on island in September. He was hoping for a press release mid-September when staff is at full strength. He noted the reporting app is ready and that funding had been secured to hire two contractors to work on the feral chicken problem, primarily with the alpha-chloralose but they also could be gun-enabled to double chicken control staff. The Director noted a new gun procedure in place from police. He also reported that potential suitable collapsible cages have been identified for which quotes were being obtained. The intention would be to import cages and sell at cost from the Agricultural Service Centre.

Agricultural Service Centre

Staffing at the Agricultural Service Centre was discussed. The Director advised of HR Department delays and that he is waiting for confirmation from HR on the Trainee Agricultural Officer and confirmation of the Manager's position. The Director noted that the Department is going through a management review and staffing needs are being reviewed and that his suggestions were for more support staff at the Agricultural Service Centre.

Embargo System Review

A member identified a need to identify minor changes and modifications towards improvements to the embargo system. It was reported that the Farmers Association will solicit ideas from farmers. They would identify problems and propose solutions to present to the Board.

Voting by the Board

There was a proposal made to request online voting by Board members on certain issues that arose. It was noted that there was often discussion on a topic but no proposal or vote actioned. It was suggested that the board develop online voting rules to follow. The Director reminded the members that the Board is advisory. It was discussed that voting must be related to the mandate of the board. PATI requests may ask for names of voters. Members noted the necessity of clear and specific proposals and commented that previous board meetings had been more informational only. It was discussed that a motion could be proposed for a vote by email on matters that may arise.

It was proposed by S. Fraser-Smith that a formal motion could be circulated via email from the Chairman with a deadline of 3-5 days and that a quorum response would be required in order to be valid. The outcome of the vote would be recorded in the next meeting. It was also noted by another member that it must be a clearly articulated proposal. All administrative effort would be

undertaken by the person making the proposal. It was also noted that an email vote would be for an issue urgent enough that it could not wait until next meeting. This matter was seconded D. Renaud with no opposition.

DECISION: Email voting would be allowed under the agreed rules.

Growy Proposal

The issue of support for the Growy proposal was raised and members questioned whether there should be a vote in the current meeting on whether the Board supports the BEDC proposal to invest in Growy or not? It was decided to consider this after the Directors comments on Growy.

The Director summarized the Growy proposal and noted that he had reviewed all reports and had sent a memo to the Permanent Secretary with feedback on the PWC reports. The Director noted that he was concerned that not enough studies appeared to have been done for decisions that they proposed. The current reports focused on the pervious company and that this was different from Growy with have different yields, area, etc. He had suggested another study be done with Growy specific data. He also noted a concern with the customs tariff data not taking into account the growing seasonality. He also suggested an additional study on the competition impacts on existing farmers. He also noted that he made responses on the proposed Memorandum of Understanding to the Permanent Secretary. The Director reported that he could not confirm support based on the data presented, more studies need to be done and that he could not confirm that it would not put other farmers out of business. He noted that he questioned the operating costs as well.

There was more discussion on whether to vote on supporting the BEDC proposal to invest in the Growy vertical farm initiative as presented to the Board at this date. There was discussion about the opportunity this presented to advocate for the specifics of what support farmers need. There was brief discussion regarding the agriculture strategy and how it related to this proposal and that things that are not a priority should be removed.

S. Fraser-Smith agreed to prepare a formal proposal with more details for the next meeting in preparation for voting. They suggested voting by email. It was noted that the Farmers' Association is already against the Growy proposal.

3. Policy and Legislation.

It was noted that staff are still working on policy documentation.

Farmers' Fees

The PPPO noted that staff are finalizing the policy document to request that DENR fees be waived for registered farmers for the Director's review and submission to the Permanent Secretary.

4. Director's Report

New ASC Facility.

The Director reported that the new Director at the Department of Public Lands and Buildings had requested an updated quantity survey of the ASC building. This had been completed and tendering was expected in September with the expectation that a contract would be secured in January. He noted that the chill rooms were all working and the ASC had received a new truck.

Groundwater Access

The Director noted that the Hydrogeologist had met with one farmer and determined that his location was not suitable to carry out an abstraction experiment and that costs were high to drill for a new well. There was discussion on water abstraction rates to avoid sucking up brackish water and he explained that slower rates would collect more fresh water. A salinity switch would stop the pumping when it became too salty. He noted that a prototype was under development to fill totes to provide access to water. Members asked about activity under drought condition and there was more discussion about lens abstraction versus salt water reverse osmosis and relative costs of production and rates of pumping. The Director offered to do a pilot study on a well to prove the principle if any farmer can provide a well that is suitable. A farmer member (D. Renaud) agreed to get back to Director on this. It was noted that water costs also impact the end cost of produce.

Nutritional Testing

The Director noted that equipment was being collected in preparation for data collection to compare local fresh produce, local stored produce against overseas produce to look for anti-inflammatories, antioxidants, vitamins etc. to determine if local produce is fresher and better than imported. He noted that this could be used to support a government funded promotion of local produce. A forum could be held to make the public aware of the ways how imported produce could be used to work around the embargo e.g. importing different varieties/colours or produce to out compete local produce. It was noted that this is a disservice to local farmers and potentially less nutritiously valuable. This project is still at the very early stages of development.

Embargo System

The Director noted that some importers have raised complaints about the embargo system in place and asked the Board if they would like to issue a statement on how well the system works, where it could be improved etc. He noted the seven day produce prohibition or revocation notice period in place can be difficult to predict. He had received a complaint related to holding prohibited produce until local supply is sold out. He also noted that an importer said they had to place their order more than seven days in advance.

The Director noted that the Department may also include the notice in the official online gazette as well as by email but this will likely incur a small delay. The Agricultural Consultant noted that historically this had been worse in past as he published the notice in the newspaper two weeks in advance but also that at that time there were more ASC staff to actually visit fields in person. He noted that crop harvest predictions could also be inaccurate due to weather, growing rate etc. There was some discussion on price setting of produce and how this varies by farmer and his costs. The

Director noted that there is current scrutiny on this issue in the context of the cost of living goals by Ministry of home affairs.

Agricultural Reserve Audit

The Director presented the spatial summary of agricultural reserve zoned land in 2023 carried out by D. Dickinson. He noted there are 1126 parcels of land in Bermuda designated as agricultural reserve. He noted that government owned 123 acres of agricultural reserve and 630 (613?) were privately owned. He shared breakdown data by crop (bananas, vegetable private versus gov owned) etc. The Director also noted that the system showed which fields are in production and which are overgrown. 218 acres are currently used as lawns.

The Director drew reference to the Department of Planning 'Grow Local' proposal under development to link up potential private land owners with interested farmers to use currently unused land. There was discussion of lack of penalties for not using arable land for production, limitations of small parcels of land as well as zoning feedback that the Board is able to provide to the Planning Department.

5. Agricultural Service Centre (ASC) Report

The Agricultural Officer noted that the boxes one farmer needed arrived and were provided but there wasn't enough of an order to make a full container to obtain more at this time. All other boxes for other produce for farmers are well stocked. He noted the chill rooms are running well. Due to the drought conditions, many of the expected carrots were never harvested. He noted a pending chemical and seed order and a bag order is on the way.

6. Agronomy Report (Agricultural Consultant)

Sweet Potatoes

The Agricultural consultant discussed the potential exemption to the legislative importation prohibition for sweet potato roots and whether irradiated roots could be evaluated for importation for research purposes to increase diversity and yield. The PPPO noted that cuttings /slips are already allowed an entry exemption in order to increase genetic diversity and that slips are considered less of a sweet potato weevil risk than importing roots. Concern was noted that irradiation sterilizes the insect pest but does not kill it so live beetles may still be seen upon arrival. The irradiation treatment would have to be 100% accurate otherwise live pests would be imported. She also noted that USDA paperwork has been not correct in past with regard to freedom from pests. The issue was raised as a motion for further evaluation/discussion in the future.

Sulphur

He noted availability of sulphur for sale at local plant nursery.

Feral Chicken Repellent

The Consultant also noted his interest in a bird repellent for feral chickens and is hopeful that this works to repel chickens as it is reported to do so with wild geese. He noted reports of problems at local dairies with pigeons. He is interested to trial how effective the bird repellent is at different rates and at different timings. The outcome would be shared with all growers and then possibly the ASC can import the product for sale to farmers.

The Board dairy member reported that he traps pigeons successfully and feeds his cows at night and had switched to a different style of feeding to reduce bird problems. The Agricultural Consultant agreed to find out how to use the repellent effectively in a dairy setting and whether it would cause any concerns with the dairy production. It was noted that the product could protect some fruit crops if effective.

7. Plant Protection Report

No report.

8. Veterinary Services Report

No report.

9. Planning

No planning applications.

10. AOB

Bermuda Police Representative

It was discussed that if a local police officer could be appointed to receive reports of agricultural theft this could make it easier for farmers to report incidents and waste less time going to the station to make a report. There was discussion that police need information on thefts to develop an intelligence picture and statistics in order to help. There was general support by members but it was noted that persons were generally not caught and incidents reported are not being progressed to court etc. and they don't seem like a priority.

The Director offered to reach out to the Commissioner but he needed specific information and data to share with them. There was discussion on how the GIS reporting application used for the feral chickens could be used for reporting of theft. The Director suggested public and police education on costs, high risk fields, cost or lost produce etc. to educate police. He suggested the app could be used to collect data for 12 months. It was noted that cameras were not clear or thieves wear helmets etc. The Director will speak with the GIS officer to see if the app can be used to collect data.

Board of Agriculture Secretary

There was brief discussion around the need for a secretary for the Board to prepare motions/proposals etc. to present to minister etc. It was agreed that each person raising an issue for proposal/motion would administer their own issue.

Meeting Adjourned

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:57 pm.

Chairman: 

Date: Aug. 13, 2025

