**Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County**

**Board of Directors Meeting**

**May 29, 2025, 6:00 p.m.**

**Extension Learning Farm – Front Classroom**

**Board Members Present:** Lori Sheffield, Mark Berninghausen, Jim Nee, Patricia Hogle, Patty Gilbert, Larry Denesha, Lynzie Schulte (left early), Jared Ethington, Mark Akins, Loni Recker, Gavin MacKellar,

**Absent:** Sharon Poole, Tina Cobb, Paul O’Connor.

**Staff Present:** Tammy Hill, Patrick Ames, Erin Farrell, Casey Caswell, Badra Rouhi, Frans Vokey, Eric Antrim, Colin Hostetter.

1. **Call to Order:**

President Lori Sheffield called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

* 1. **Introduction of the Tri-County Regional Ag Team**

Colin Hostetter, Farm Business Management Specialist, introduced himself and spoke about the work he does with farmers and producers in the St. Lawrence, Lewis, and Jefferson counties including reviewing business plans, providing financial planning assistance, and more. Frans Vokey, the Dairy Specialist based in Lewis County, introduced himself and his work to the board and explained that he had worked for Extension years ago, left for the private sector for 13 years, and was excited to be returning to help farmers with production and management practices. Finally, Eric Antrim, the Crop & Soil Specialist based in Jefferson County, introduced himself and explained that he had moved from California for this position and was excited to learn about the different and varied types of soils in our area and to help farmers and producers with all their growing needs.

* 1. **Program Reports**

Tamara Hill gave the 4-H Youth and Family program report to the board. She highlighted that Farm Day Camp was almost full, Northwind Afterschool Program enrollment for next year was over half-full, and that she was very excited to announce the Association had hired Jorja Sands for the long-vacant Dairy Educator position.

Cassondra Caswell gave her SNAP-Ed and General Nutrition program report to the board. She explained that with the school year ending, her staff were gearing up to shift from youth to more adult focused nutrition education. She also discussed with the board the future of SNAP-Ed funding, given the recent bill that had passed the House and could eliminate all funding for SNAP. She said she was hopeful it wouldn’t pass the Senate, but that it was a possibility.

1. **Approval of BOD Meeting Minutes, March 27, 2025:**

Lori Sheffield asked the board to review the minutes from the March 27th board meeting (attached).

**Patty Hogle motioned to approve the BOD meeting minutes dated March 27, 2025, as presented. Loni Recker seconded. All in favor, motion carried.**

1. **Finance:**

**3.1 Financial Reports – March 31, 2025**

Finance Manager Badra Rouhi, went over the Financial Statement and Balance Sheet (attached) with the board and explained that they hadn’t received any funds from the USDA since October. She said that she had received funds from the 21st Century grant and SNAP-Ed but had to draw $100,000 from the line of credit to cover expenses.

Board member Gavin MacKellar asked about the unclaimed funds line in the balance sheet.

Badra explained that these funds included checks the Association had sent that had not been cashed and were typically fair premium checks. She said that she had to keep these funds available for 3 years before turning them over to the state if they were still not claimed. Badra asked if there were any additional questions.

Seeing none, Executive Director Patrick Ames, added that the Association had about $46,000 cash on hand. He said this was very tight and largely due to the federal funding freeze.

Gavin MacKellar asked at what point do you need to reduce staff to address money issues.

Patrick said at this time he was not worried, but that he was planning to have a conversation with board members later in the meeting to create a committee that could proactively begin addressing some of those issues.

**Seeing no further questions, Jim Nee moved to approve the Financial Reports as presented. Loni Recker seconded. All in favor, motion carried.**

**3.2 Financial Resolutions:**

Patrick gave an overview of Resolution #2025-22 to the board (attached) and asked if any members had questions or concerns.

**Seeing none, Mark Akins made a motion to pass resolutions #2025-22 as presented. Gavin MacKellar seconded.** **All in favor, motion carried.**

Patrick gave an overview of Resolution #2025-23 to the board (attached).

Loni Recker asked for an explanation of the amount of money being given to Fat Free Studio.

Casey Caswell explained that this money would go toward the Eat Easy web platform, advertising, digital ads for each CCE Association to use however they’d like, and welcome kits.

Loni asked if Fat Free Studio had numbers available for the impact these ads and projects would have on participants.

Casey said that yes, they did have impression numbers for advertising and the web platform was developed to show user data in the back end so you could see how many people used it and which lessons they engaged with.

**Mark Akins motioned to accept Resolution #2025-23 as presented. Patty Gilbert seconded. All in favor, motion carried.**

1. **Unfinished Business: None.**

5. **New Business:**

**5.1 HR Policy 401 – Equal Opportunity Statement**

Patrick explained that St. Lawrence and the other CCE Associations had contacted the law office of Bond, Schoenick, & King to review the Association’s EEO statement to stay in compliance with recent federal changes. The law office suggested amending the statement to remove “valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.” and replacing it with “to the extent permitted by law.”

Lori Sheffield asked if there were any questions.

**Seeing none, Larry Denesha motioned to approve HR Policy 401 as presented. Mark Berninhausen seconded. All in favor, motion carried.**

**5.2 Establishment of a Personnel Committee**

Patrick Ames handed out a staffing flow chart that indicated how much the Association had grown in recent years and showed how many positions were linked to grant funding. He explained that after compiling this chart he found only 3 people not currently attached to grants. Given the uncertainty of future federal funding opportunities, he wanted to establish a personnel committee to begin looking at options post competitive funding or looking at restructuring to make the future of CCE viable. He asked if any board members would be interested in volunteering to serve. Jim Nee, Loni Recker, Mark Akins, and Gavin MacKellar volunteered as well as staff Badra Rouhi, and Casey Caswell.

To start, Patrick suggested meeting the months opposite the board and said that the schedule could be adjusted later if they found the need to meet more or less frequently. He also said that he was hoping Tracy Sanford, the Association’s regional HR representative, could serve as an advisor to the committee.

6. **Reports:**

**6.1 Legislative Representative:** Larry told Patrick to let him know if he wanted him to bring a resolution to the county board regarding SNAP and USDA funding and Patrick said he would be open to that.

Larry Denesha, gave his report to the board. He highlighted that the public safety building had been completed and 4 part-time patrol officer positions for the DSS building had been created. He also announced the beginning of construction on the only graphite mine in the US in Fowler, NY. He explained there had been a recent discovery of a large deposit of shale graphite in the area.

**6.2 Executive Director:**

Patrick gave his Executive Director’s report to the board and explained that oversight from Cornell University was shifting due to the recent executive orders. As a result, Extension Associations were planning to hire a corporate advising firm called HR One for assistance with creating and providing HR policies. He said that for $4,000 they could provide a master policy book that follows federal and state guidelines for all 56 Associations and that they would charge an additional $500 fee to customize local policies for each. He also said Cornell University had offered to cover the main $4,000 fee, but each office would be responsible for the $500 customization fee.

Patrick also highlighted the success of the Manure Pit Training sessions that were held in April. He said that they were very well attended and that farmers were now interested in a Grain Bin Rescue Training.

Mark Akins asked when the next personnel committee meeting would be and Patrick replied that it could be as soon as next month, but that he would send out an email with more details soon.

7. **Adjournment**

**Gavin MacKellar moved to adjourn the meeting; Loni Recker seconded. All in favor, motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.**