

## **Southeastern Massachusetts Aquaculture Center Meeting Minutes April 16, 2020**

In attendance: Mike Maguire, Rick Karney, Dale Leavitt, Judy McDowell, Andrew Cummings, Scott Lindell, Chloe Starr, Matt Charette, Diane Murphy, Ed Baker

Staff: Abigail Archer, Josh Reitsma, Harriet Booth

MDAR: Sean Bowen

### **1. Welcome from Co-Chairs Mike Maguire and Rick Karney**

### **2. Meeting Minutes of 12-10-19 and 3-18-20**

Moved to approve the minutes of December 12, 2019 as written Judy McDowell, second by Rick Karney

APPROVED JM, RK, AC, SL, CS, MM, EB

Abstained DL, MC, DM

Moved to approve the minutes of March 18, 2020 as written Judy McDowell, second by Rick Karney

APPROVED DL, JM, RK, AC, MM, MC, DM

Abstained SL, CS

### **3. Check In, Discuss Status of Shellfish Farms and Businesses and ways SEMAC may be able to assist with information gathering, communication, etc.**

Diane Murphy (DM) gave a summary of updates she received from several growers. The timing of the market shut down is lousy because spring is usually the first bump in sales. There is concern about a glut of oysters. When restrictions are eventually lifted – will people even go to restaurants again and order oysters? Will they have the disposable income to do so? Growers have laid off workers and are maintaining the grants themselves – now tasks that would have taken one tide are taking many more. Also concern that part-time growers might sell at lower prices than full-time growers and depress prices overall.

Rick Karney (RK) reported that some growers in Martha's Vineyard are doing direct sales and bundling shellfish with other products. The major fish market on the Island is still open – doing sales from the window. Group discussion about the pros and cons of direct sales. It's a lot of effort for a small volume of product sold.

Andrew Cummings (AC) shared his experience on his grant in Wellfleet. Normally employs 2 full-time and one-part time workers to run the farm. Without any sales, he prioritizes what HAS to be done on the grant – but the reality is that it all needs to be done. The Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program and EIDL programs application process is not geared towards farmers – the questions don't apply the same way as other businesses. Communication with lenders is difficult. There is often a lag in communication. He will receive messages that say, "Information is missing" but it does not say WHAT information is missing. Both the SBA loan applications and the farm work are time sensitive. For a business his size, he needs wholesale volumes, direct marketing pop up sales does not work. Concerned that now is not a great time to be borrowing money.

Josh Reitsma (JR) reported that he has heard similar experiences from other growers.

Mike Maguire (MM) reported that the dairy and terrestrial farming communities are also experiencing frustration with the PPP and EIDL application processes.

Dale Leavitt left the call.

The group discussed writing a letter to the Massachusetts Senators and Representatives to explain the current issues with the two SBA programs. It should include personal stories as well as numbers and be no longer than one page. Matt

Charette (MC) suggested it focus on the structural gaps in the current legislation so they can be rectified. SEMAC Staff will coordinate with the Co-Chairs to write this and send it.

Judy McDowell moved and Rick Karney seconded: To write a letter to the federal representatives.  
APPROVED 9-0-0 with a roll call vote

Chloe Starr (CS) gave an update on ARC operations. Growers are still keeping their seed orders. The hatchery will continue with production. They are taking it day by day. Rutgers may not produce seed this year.

#### **4. COVID-19 FAQ Document**

SEMAC Staff member Harriet Booth (HB) gave a summary of the document, which had been emailed to the group ahead of time, and asked for comments. The group discussed the document and thanked HB for her thorough work on it. It is good information to get to growers so they can answer questions that customers may have. Ed Baker (EB) suggested that the document start with a statement that covid-19 is a respiratory illness and that it is not transmitted by eating. Josh Reitsma (JR) suggested that the information be shared with Shellfish Constables as well. AC asked if the SEMAC staff could partner with MDAR to get the information out so that the information focuses on food as a whole, not just shellfish. HB replied that some of the information in the document specifically applies to the marine environment.

JR, Sean Bowen, and HB discussed if the document could be shared through MDAR channels. Could DMF be asked if it could be sent out to all their shellfish permit holders? Abigail Archer (AA) suggested that MAA could perhaps distribute it. RK suggested that the SMEAC staff share the document with Bob Rheault at East Coast Shellfish Growers Association.

HB will make the suggested changes to the document, ask Bob Rheault for feedback, and then will email it back to the SEMAC Board

#### **5. SEMAC Bylaws**

Did not discuss. Mike Maguire moved to table it and pick it up at a future meeting. Ed Baker seconded. Roll call vote. APPROVED 9-0-0

#### **6. Other Business**

EB reported that Bob Rheault at East Coast Shellfish Growers Association has been working on selling shellfish via door delivery. Maine and New Hampshire allow this. Massachusetts does not allow direct sales from growers at this time – must have a wholesaler license and facility. Or a grower can work through a dealer but dealers do not have much incentive to work this way.

JR reported that he checked in with DMF about allowing direct sales and that DMF considers it too risky.

JR reported that the Cape and Islands NPR station will air a story about shellfish sales.

Sean Bowen reported that Bonita Oehlke at MDAR is working with Wendy Mainardi at the DMF Seafood Marketing Program on seafood sales initiatives.

#### **7. Schedule Next Meeting**

Thursday, May 21 at 10:30AM via conference call