

**Town of Boscawen
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Fresh Start Farms-148 Corn Hill Road
FINAL MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, September 21st, 2023, at 4:30 PM**

Members Present: John Keegan – Chair; John Porter – Vice Chair; Gary Tillman; Ralph Odell; Julie Fournier – Alternate; Bill Bevans – Ex-Officio

Excused: Roger Sanborn

Others Present: Kara Gallagher – Planning and Community Development Assistant & Recording Secretary

Guests: Emma Richmond-Boudewyns – Market Manager of Fresh Start Farms & Joe Pustizzi – Owner of Pustizzi's Fruit Farm

Chair Keegan opened the public meeting at 4:30 p.m. and completed roll call.

Minutes:

Chair Keegan requested the following changes:

- Line 45-Strike “to” after “Commissioners”.
- Line 56- “presentation” should be plural.
- Line 88-Strike “will” after “pigs”.
- Line 91-Strike “to” after “pig”.
- Line 93-Add “and” after “pregnancy” and strike “is” after “piglet”.
- Line 136- “cleaner” should be plural.

Mr. Tillman motioned to approve the 08.08.23 draft minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. Odell. All in favor. None opposed.

Financial Report:

Mr. Tillman motioned to approve the Financial Report through 08.08.23 as presented. Seconded by Ex-Officio Bevans. All in favor. None opposed.

Old Business:

Fresh Start Farm Tour: Ms. Emma Richmond-Boudewyns, Market Manager of Fresh Start Farms, reintroduced herself. She has been with Fresh Start Farms for about a year and a half. Day to day she runs the farm stand, coordinates with farmers to sell their produce at farmers' markets and completes wholesale orders. This summer she spent much of her time caring for and harvesting blueberries at the farm. Also present was Mr. Joe Pustizzi, owner of Pustizzi's Fruit Farm. He said he loved having the opportunity to work with Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns and the Fresh Start farmers. Mr. Pustizzi moved to Boscawen in 2001-2002. But it took until 2006 before he did his first blueberry planting. The farm was a woodlot before he bought the property. In 2010, he planted the last blueberries. He also had raspberries and strawberries at

that time. He mainly focused on fruit production. He tried to harvest vegetables, but it didn't work for him. He loves seeing the farmers using his fields for vegetable farming again. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said "Fresh Start Farms" is the name of the collective farm that is operated by the non-profit called "Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success" (ORIS). ORIS works to resettle refugees in NH and Massachusetts. Many refugees have relocated from East Africa. ORIS offers many different programs including housing, job placement, and healthcare. The Fresh Start Farms Program focuses on working with refugees that are interested in farming in NH. Their job is to help the refugee's access farming resources. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns helps the refugees gain access to different farmers' markets around the state. ORIS is currently working with about 25 different farmers from 9 different countries including Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia among others. They grow crops at 3 locations: land is leased at Pustizzi's Fruit Farm in Boscawen and St. Paul's School in Concord, and a location in Dunbarton is owned by Fresh Start Farms. They currently grow crops on a total of about 10 acres. Depending on the plot, each farmer has about $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. At Pustizzi's Fruit Farm there are 3 farmers and their partners.

The tour began with a walk through the 700 blueberry plants containing 11 different varieties. Some of these were early season varieties that start blooming in mid-July. This season was tough on this crop, but last year the farmers were picking blueberries until late September. Spotted wing drosophila (SWD) was the main cause for the poor crop. SWD is a small fruit fly that primarily attacks raspberries, blackberries (and other cane berries), blueberries, strawberries, and wine grapes. Native to Asia, SWD is currently found in most of the primary fruit growing regions of the U.S. The frost in May, and the extremely wet season throughout the spring and summer were also contributing factors to the poor yield. Mr. Pustizzi described different cultural practices to deter this and other pests. The majority of blueberry sales comes from "Pick-Your-Own". Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns showed the raspberry bushes that have been taken over by weeds. She feels they could be salvaged or replanted and then reincorporated into Pick-Your-Own with the blueberries. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns showed the Commissioners the Irrigation Pond. Because this year was so wet, the pump was never used, so all crops were rain fed the entire season. She explained that Fresh Start Farms leases two big fields at Pustizzi's Fruit Farm, the front field is 3 acres, and the back field is 4 acres. Right now, only the front field is being utilized. She has been trying to figure out what the future use of the untilled land will be.

Mr. Tillman asked if the farmers have other jobs or if this is the main source of their income. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said it varies depending on the person. The farmers make anywhere from \$0-\$30,000 per year. The first plot the Commissioners visited is farmed by Hari and Prem Adhikari. The second plot is farmed by Batulo Hassan and Salad Shegow and the last plot is farmed by Godance and Melanse. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said because most of their farmers are from East Africa, ethnic crops are the primary cultivars. She pointed out African Eggplant, as well as abundant varieties of flowers and peppers. Fresh Start Farms has a contract with the NH Food Bank. They buy a lot of African Eggplant. The UMOJA farming group fills a wholesale order at the Boscawen and Concord locations. They sell around \$4,000 worth of produce per week. Fresh Start Farms now has local high school food pantries buying from them. There are other food pantries with federal grants that focus on buying ethnic crops from local producers as well.

Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns introduced Mr. Prem Adhikari. Mr. Adhikari showed the Commissioners his plot and some of the crops he grows. He said his wife, Hari, loves to grow and sell bouquets, so much of their plot is covered with different types of beautiful flowers. He also grows African Eggplant, Japanese Eggplant, Italian Eggplant, Barelaa, Lauki Squash, Luffa Gourd, and Bitter Melon. Mr. Pustizzi pointed out the fencing around Mrs. Adhikari's flowers, and the rest of the cultivated area, was put up in partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). It was installed to deter deer. Ms. Richmond-

Boudewyns said in the last year and a half Fresh Farms has built 12 new high tunnels. They work with the NRCS to help farmers coordinate high tunnel contracts, which is a cost sharing program. Mr. Adhikari showed a crop called Ground Cherries and offered each Commissioner one to try. Mr. Pustizzi explained that all the beds were shaped using a bed shaper, and all the plastic was laid by hand by himself and Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns. They tried a new technique this year that ended up being difficult because of the rocky ground. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said she's been looking for grants to purchase a small walk-behind tractor for next year to make bed shaping easier and more efficient. Vice Chair Porter said he has made beds that are seam to seam three rows wide with no walkway and used landscape bricks or rocks to hold down the plastic. Mr. Pustizzi said when the garden is done for the year, it is extremely beneficial to rock pick.

Ms. Richmond Boudewyns lead the Commissioners to Ms. Batulo Hassan's plot and showed some of her crops. There was a large section of African Eggplant, which is not picked once it turns reddish orange. They are best picked when green. She said African Eggplant is very bitter. Ms. Hassan also grows Asian Eggplant and Italian Eggplant, among many other crops.

The last plot is farmed by Goddance. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns pointed out some Jerusalem Artichoke, Kale, Swiss Chard, Amaranth, Sowa Sowa, and Celery.

Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns brought the Commissioners into the Farm Stand and passed out chicken and veggie Somali hand pies called Sambusas. Chair Keegan thanked Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns and Mr. Pustizzi for the tour.

New Business:

Economic Development Committee 1st Annual Pumpkin Ride & Walk: Vice Chair Porter explained the EDC is planning an event on October 14th. The EDC is trying to showcase the section of the Rail Trail that runs through Boscawen. The event will start at the Jamie Welch Memorial Field at 10am. It will include events for kids and adults, including a costumed bike ride, a bike repair workshop, pumpkin painting and scarecrow craft build workshop, a rail trail history walk, a kids costumed rail walk, a tailgate party, and vendors. Vice Chair Porter asked if Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns would be able to help provide pumpkins for this event. Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns said she thinks she will be able to gather a variety of types and sizes. Vice Chair Porter, Chair Keegan and Mr. Tillman said they would help with the transportation at 8:00 am. PCD Assistant Gallagher will put Ms. Richmond-Boudewyns in touch with Mr. Mason Donovan.

Next Meeting: October 10th, 2023 @ 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Tillman motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Vice Chair Porter. All in favor. None opposed.

Respectfully submitted by Kara Gallagher.