



Agriculture Advisory Meeting Notes

Date: May 1, 2023
Meeting Place: B-102 with Zoom Option

Called to order: 6:00 -7:30 p.m. **Chair(s):** Erin Krier **Note Taker:** Erin Krier

Council Members Present: Jose Chang, Marc DeBernardi, Kevin Dwyer, Jim Glines, Dr. Christopher Greer, Hector Guerra, Tom Gulliver, Dr. Jodi Jacques, Ron Labastida, Jerry Mahoney, Nic Tasca, Jill Vink, Claire Wineman

Council Members Absent: Dr. Sean Abel, Mitch Ardantz, Dylan Bognuda, Teri Bontrager, Emma Chow, Rosemary Cummings, Tom Durant, Brenda Estrada, Guillermo Guerra, Miguel Guerra, Eryn Gray, Larry Lahr, Lacy Litten, Yeni Martinez, Holly Nolan-Chavez, Christine Ready, Andrew Rice, David Rice, Danilu Ramirez, Luis Valdez, Montse Zarate

Guests Present: Angela Cruz-Garcia, USDA NRCS
 Brian Ray, Community Bank of Santa Maria

Agenda No. 1 Student Update

Discussion:

- Erin shared the stories of many successful transfer students graduating from the AHC agriculture program this month.
- Student representative Nic Tasca gave updates on the Pest Control Adviser preparation program and its value for students hoping to earn this license to improve their status in the industry. Erin also reported that the first student who went through the program and took the exam just texted her today to show her his PCA License that he received in the mail after passing the exam – a true success story!

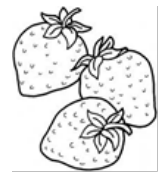
Action: None

Deadline: n/a **Responsibility:** n/a

Agenda No. 2 NSF ATE Impacts Video

Discussion:

- Erin explained that the National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education (NSF ATE) program, the grant from which sparked the whole creation of the current agriculture program, had previously featured the AHC agriculture program in their annual Impacts book. Erin was approached with a request to participate in an NSF ATE Impacts video project that would highlight the PCA preparation program and a student who is enrolled in it.
- Yeni Martinez, student representative on the agriculture advisory committee, was selected to be the featured student and the filming crew will be arriving in June to capture footage for the story. Yeni currently is working as a field scout at Betteravia Farms while taking the classes he needs in order to qualify to take the Pest Control Adviser licensing exam. As a working father who seeks to improve his position within the company, this program has been invaluable in helping him to achieve his goals and it is exciting to get to showcase his work in this upcoming video project.
- Jill Vink requested that the pdf version of the NSF ATE Impacts report along with the link to the video, when ready, be shared with the advisory committee.


Agenda No. 5 Western Growers Association AgTechX Ed event

Discussion:

- Erin reviewed the event that the AHC agriculture program hosted with the support of Western Growers Association, AgTechX Ed, which brought together educators, industry leaders, and CDFA Secretary of Agriculture Karen Ross, for one and a half days. The event included panels of industry leaders discussing innovations in the industry and employee needs/workforce gaps and an education panel with representatives from AHC Agriculture, AHC Machine & Manufacturing Technology, Ventura College Agriculture, Cal Poly State University Bioresource & Ag Engineering, and the SMJUHSD Mark Richardson CTE Center to discuss the challenges and opportunities in curriculum development to address the workforce needs. Secretary Ross hosted a “fireside chat” and spent the following morning at the SMJUHSD CTE Center engaging with high school agriculture students.

Action: None

Deadline: n/a

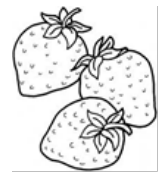
Responsibility:

n/a

Agenda No. 6 Pending Grant Proposals

Discussion:

- Erin shared details about two grant projects for which the college is seeking funding:
 - Cal Poly has included AHC as a partner institution (along with many other national partners) in an SCRI grant titled “Taming agriculture’s elephant: Broadening the conversation about field equipment sanitation practices for specialty crops”. Erin sought feedback from the advisory committee regarding the fact that it is common practice in the industry to clean and sanitize field equipment per FSMA regulations and food safety concerns, but there tends to be a more dismissive approach when it comes to cleaning and sanitizing field equipment that may serve to move plant pathogens and/or invasive weed seeds, particularly as equipment is shared between different ranches or even in different regions. Erin solicited feedback from the committee about what barriers are preventing growers from using cleaning and sanitizing of field equipment to mitigate the spread of plant disease and/or weed seed. Dr. Greer mentioned that the growers are in a hurry to get to the next field. He referred to another SCRI grant for which he is applying focusing on a similar topic with specific respect to Fusarium Wilt in lettuce. One of the components of his proposal includes holding workshops for farmworkers to address movement of soil, particularly problematic when it is wet and muddy. He mentioned this is a particular concern for some of the pathogens that are isolated to small numbers of fields currently. Commissioner Chang mentioned that for regulatory purposes, similar practices should be in place to prevent the spread of certain insects as well, such as was done with the successful eradication of EGVM when growers took care to clean and sanitize all equipment to prevent its spread. In areas of concern for CDFA A-rated pests, field equipment cleaning and sanitizing becomes a regulatory mandate. Also, ACP presence in the southern Santa Barbara and Ventura counties has led to a requirement that harvesters must declare they will clean and sanitize equipment prior to movement. Dr. Greer shared about a rice blast disease that had been plaguing the industry and growers were required to clean combines before they could move them out of an infested field – but to properly do so, they basically had to take the machine apart to properly sanitize it and that would move the equipment out of use for an entire day. The other issue Dr. Greer mentioned is what growers are able to use for sanitizing because there are restrictions for what can be used on surfaces that will contact food. Claire Wineman mentioned that there might be more likelihood of growers adopting field equipment cleaning and sanitizing procedures as a best



practice when moving such equipment between regions rather than from field to field – such as moving from the Central Coast to the desert. She wonders if LGMA would have some metrics on this procedure – she knows that equipment design will have an influence on how realistic it is to clean and sanitize and if soil movement is a concern, the soil texture will influence how easy or difficult it is to clean. Also, is sufficient water pressure available in the field? Dr. Greer also pointed out that it is rare than an introduced pest would be identified in the first field it appears, so by the time it is detected, it has likely already spread. Ron Labastida mentioned that with respect to LGMA, the energy is mostly geared toward harvest equipment.

- AHC submitted a grant application to USDA to fund three overarching objectives: create a food safety certificate program that would include a class designed for students to earn their Produce Safety Alliance grower training; incentivize student internships with stipends to assist in maintaining the student farm; and increase student farm production to provide access to fresh produce on campus for students.

Action: Follow up will occur with specific committee members based on their area of expertise as needed if one or both grants are received.

Deadline: Ongoing **Responsibility:** Erin Krier

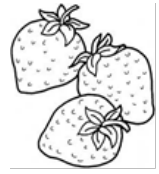
Agenda No. 7 Programs for Industry Partners

- Erin informed the committee about two new programs that are seeking grower/industry partners:
 - Learning-Aligned Employment Program (LAEP) – this new program is under oversight from the AHC Career Center. This program provides up to 50% of the cost of hiring an intern for employers that become member partners of AHC in the LAEP program. This state-funded program can help employers offset intern costs.
 - Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL) California Farm Academy Apprenticeship program – an established program in California wishing to expand their reach to the Santa Maria Valley and looking for grower partners. The program would connect AHC students with grower partners and is designed for apprentices to do on-farm training in addition to academic coursework with the intention to have the apprentice qualify to become an employee at the end of the apprenticeship period.
- Dr. Greer mentioned that he is familiar with some of the other programs offered through CLBL, such as their incubator farm program for beginning farmers.
- Tom Gulliver shared a story about a business that he knows (Mafi Trench) who recently engaged with the LAEP program and was pleasantly surprised by the value the opportunity provided to help them employ and fund internships.

Discussion:

Action: Send detailed information to advisory committee members about the LAEP and Center for Land-Based Learning program opportunities.

Deadline: May 2023 **Responsibility:** Erin Krier

**Agenda No. 8 Program and Course Updates**

- Creation of a Precision Agriculture/Mechanized Agriculture/Agriculture Technology program continues to be a work in progress. Industry input is solicited and welcome to guide the coursework included in a new program. Erin reported that the Precision Agriculture program is further in its development.

Discussion:

- Erin reported that the Pest Control Adviser Preparation program continues to attract students. The first student who took the new AHC classes in order to qualify to take the PCA licensing exam took the exam recently and passed! He is now employed as an in-house PCA for a large, local grower. Erin reminded committee members that students using this alternate route (option 3) to qualify to take the exam are in need of work experience hours via internships and/or jobs that give them pest detection, identification, and control experience.

Action: None **Responsibility:** n/a

Deadline: n/a

Agenda No. 9 Student Clubs

- The Young Farmers & Ranchers club took their annual spring break industry tour trip, thanks to generous funds provided by Ag West Farm Credit (formerly Ag Credit West). The group went to Ventura county and had a tour of the Mission Avocado packing facility, the Ventura County Botanic Garden, the Ventura Farmers Market, and the Goleta branch of AgRx, which concentrates mainly on fertigation and pest control in avocado and citrus orchards.
- The AHC Rodeo Team has had a very successful year with competitions. Team member Sutton Mang won the 2nd go at the Cal Poly Poly Royal rodeo and placed 2nd overall in the contest for breakaway roping. She is sitting 4th in the state and will be likely to earn a spot at the Collegiate National Finals Rodeo. The team now includes several young men and students competing in rough stock events. Cal Poly's rodeo coach, Ben Londo, has been serving as an interim coach to provide training, practice grounds, and guidance for the AHC team. Erin shared with the committee the upcoming dinner and auction fundraiser event, which will be on August 26 at the Elks Lodge. Jim Glines provided an update from the Boosters regarding the dismissal of the rodeo coach and the current work being done to hire a new coach. He clarified that with the hiring of a new coach, the AHC rodeo team will be welcome to practice again at the Elks Unocal Events Center and Rodeo Grounds. A new coach will likely be announced within the next 30 days. The Boosters have been able to provide students with a gas stipend for their travel to Cal Poly for practices. Jim also mentioned that an AHC bareback rider placed well in one of the go rounds at the Poly Royal Rodeo event.

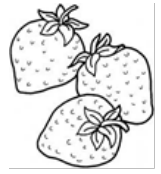
Discussion:

Action: None **Responsibility:** Erin Krier

Deadline: n/a

Agenda No. 7 • Additional Input, Feedback, Suggestions from Committee**Discussion:**

- Erin shared an update on the full-time permanent position for the ag program coordinator/professor as was mentioned in the previous committee meeting. The position was institutionalized and opened for applicants. Erin applied and interviewed for the permanent position last week and is awaiting to hear the hiring decision.



- Angela Cruz-Garcia and Ron Labastida asked for clarification about the food safety program being considered for development. Angela suggested that during the development of such a program it would be beneficial to discuss with industry partners, particularly the many local cooler facilities, what kind of training and education they need students to receive to be in helpful positions within the company with regards to food safety. Erin confirmed that the grant would fund her becoming a lead Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) grower trainer so that she could deliver the USDA-approved PSA food safety curriculum. Erin will request committee feedback about the development of the program should the funding be received. The intention would be to provide non-credit PSA grower training and additionally create a credit-based 8-week course that could become part of a Food Safety Certificate that would include courses such as AHC’s microbiology and sanitation, safety, and equipment.
- Tom Gulliver suggested that the AHC agriculture advisory should be asked to assist with the future FFA Field Days in whatever capacity is needed. Additionally, he can help connect former FFA students who are currently working in the industry and would be helpful as judges or assistants. Erin acknowledged that help with judging and also acquiring the items needed for different judging classes such as vegetables and ornamental plants.
- Claire Wineman offered to share the fall schedule out if it can be shared with the committee to try to encourage enrollment.
- Hector Guerra mentioned that the FFA advisors are happy to help with the Field Day event and will continue to provide guidance and work to make it happen. They would like to see more events added and they appreciate the partnership to provide local students with a nearby Field Day.

Action: Follow up will occur with specific committee members as needed.

Deadline: ongoing **Responsibility:** Erin Krier

Reports: **Important Dates and Follow-up**

- Next advisory committee meeting for spring semester will be Monday, December 4, 2023 at 6:00 pm