



ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING MINUTES (draft)

May 21, 2020 | 6:00 PM | Via WebEx

Board Members in Attendance: Brett Kreher, Bryant Zilke, Diane Held, Rachel Chrostowski, Dan Castle, Mark Gaston, Dan Henry, Scott Bylewski

Staff in Attendance: Sarah Gatti

Guests in Attendance: Maria Whyte, Tom Hersey

1. Consideration of the January 23 and April 22, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Bryant Zilke made a motion for **APPROVAL** of the January 23, 2020 meeting minutes, seconded by Diane Held and carried by all voting members (Scott Bylewski rescued).

Bryant Zilke made a motion for **APPROVAL**, of the April 22, 2020 meeting minutes, seconded by Rachel Chrostowski and carried by all voting members.

2. Erie County Business Task Force – Update

Dan Castle debriefed the Board, informing them two subcommittees had been formed focused on marketing and small business.

3. Agricultural Sector COVID-19 Recovery Support - Discussion

Members of the Board summarized the issues they are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic:

A. Labor Issues

- Delays in seasonal migrant workforce arriving and two-week quarantine period where they arrive
- Difficulty hiring local workforce because unemployment payments are so high – farms can't compete
- Even when local workers can be utilized, they are inexperienced and not as efficient as seasonal workers
- Many farms have group living quarters that could become hotspots for COVID-19. These farms need to prepare a plan so their entire workforce doesn't take ill.

B. Shortage of Packaging/Equipment

- Shortage of egg cartons for grocery resale
- Inability to obtain Honduran pine planting stakes

C. Supply and Demand

- Farm-to-Table suppliers may not have a market this summer if restaurants continue to be take-out only

- Cosmetically-defective (i.e., crooked cucumbers) food may not be able to get to market if restaurants continue to be take-out only
- Cancellation of festivals (i.e., Eden Corn Festival, Williamsville Strawberry Festival) will negatively impact sales – farmers typically see a big bump in sales at festivals.
- Nationwide meat shortages present an opportunity for local farmers to fill that void (at least regionally). However, there is a lack of livestock processing facilities in Erie County.

Sarah Gatti then asked the Board on how the County would best be able to help during the COVID-19 pandemic and presented some “starter” ideas: engage a business consultant to help farms prepare reopening plans, fund an agency that is already doing relief work, or supply PPE to farms. Dan Henry agreed these ideas were on the right track. Rachel Chrostowski noted the American Farmland Trust has started a fund to help struggling farmers and suggested County staff get additional ideas from them. Diane Held suggested that some farmers may need assistance preparing a reopening plan. Ms. Held further suggested a specialized workforce development program to train local workers for agricultural positions.

4. Erie Grown - Update

Ms. Gatti informed the Board the launch of Erie Grown has been met with positive feedback. The website is approaching 20,000 views and approximately 40-45 new growers have enrolled.

5. Other Business

Ms. Chrostowski informed the Board she would soon require a signed letter of support from the Chairperson for the 2020 round of farmland protection implementation grants. Such letters do not require oversight from the AFPB as a whole – just a signature from the Chairperson.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 PM.

Sarah Gatti

DRAFT



ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD MEETING TRANSCRIPTS

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The following is a corrected transcript of the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Special meeting held on April 22, 2020 at 6:00 PM via WebEx. These transcripts have been prepared pursuant to Governor Cuomo's Executive Order 220.1 issued on March 12, 2020 suspending the Open Meetings Law.

Dan Castle [00:00:01] I think everyone that we were expecting to be on is on.

Sarah Gatti [00:00:06] You're right. And I have 6:04 on my phone.

Brett Kreher [00:00:12] OK. All right. Yeah, I was hoping that Dan Henry and Diane would join us here.

Diane Held [00:00:25] I'm here. I had a phone call right at 6:00, I'm sorry. We're getting audited this week, so we have to answer when they call.

Dan Castle [00:00:35] Dan Henry, you are muted.

Brett Kreher [00:00:42] Oh, Dan Henry is here. I see his picture. He's just muted.

Dan Henry [00:00:48] Excellent. OK. Can you hear me now? How's everybody doing?

Brett Kreher [00:01:01] Real good. We're just kind of struggling with the technology here, trying to get things started. But I think we've got most everybody on here and I wanted to thank everybody for joining us.

Brett Kreher [00:01:12] We get a little bit of feedback. So, I'm going to ask if everybody could locate their mute button and try to remember to mute your phone when you're not talking.

Brett Kreher [00:01:21] And I'll try to do the same.

Brett Kreher [00:01:24] So, yeah, I just wanted to welcome everybody here and then turn it over here to Dan for a minute to make a few introductions.

Dan Castle [00:01:37] I'm glad to. So again, thanks, everyone, for taking the time. I know this is an incredibly busy time for the folks in the agricultural sector. And you guys in particular. So, we want to make every minute count here. You know, I think we have a little bit of normal business to take care of tonight. Want to give you an update on what's going on with the task force that Maria and Diane and I are part of. We are starting to move into the age of subcommittees and we're expecting to get some good stuff done. The highlight of this meeting is to have a bit of an open discussion with Maria Whyte and Tom Hersey about what is going on and how the

agricultural sector and farmers particularly are dealing with the COVID issues. You know, we talk about reopening. You guys have been open. Most of the agricultural sector has been open, but, you know, facing challenges that no other businesses face. Certainly, with the disruptions of the supply chain it's really difficult. After the last meeting, you guys gave us really great feedback that Sarah and I summarized and sent up the chain of command, if you will, to Maria.

Dan Castle [00:03:14] They caught right on to the issues that you guys are facing and both have indicated a desire to hear directly from the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board. So, I'd like to have some time for an open discussion about what issues you guys are facing so that we understand how we can best help in the response. We'll talk a little bit about some of the things we can do. Sarah's got some general questions and then kind of wrap up with a little bit of an update on Erie Grown website, which we talked to you guys about last time around. It's gotten a lot of great feedback, which we'll talk about in a few minutes. Why don't we get started with the approval of the minutes for the last couple of meetings and then we'll dive right into the meat of the meeting.

Brett Kreher [00:04:11] That sounds good. First, I wanted to call to everyone's attention that we've got Deputy County Executive Maria Whyte here with us tonight, as is the Department of Environment and Planning Commissioner Tom Hersey. I'd like to thank both Maria and Tom for joining us here tonight. We'll get through the first part here as quickly as we can. I hope that everyone had a chance to review the minutes. And I'm looking for a motion to accept that January 23 minutes.

Bryant Zilke [00:04:48] I'll make a motion.

Diane Held [00:04:53] I'll second.

Brett Kreher [00:04:53] Thank you very much. All those in favor say I.

Scott Bylewski [00:04:56] I'll recuse myself at that one because I was not in attendance.

Brett Kreher [00:05:03] Thank you. Opposed? Carried.

Brett Kreher [00:05:12] Looking for someone to make a motion to accept the April 22 meeting minutes.

Bryant Zilke [00:05:19] So moved.

Diane Held [00:05:21] Seconded.

Brett Kreher [00:05:21] Thank you. All those in favor say I. Opposed? Carried.

Brett Kreher [00:05:31] Sarah, were you able to get that?

Sarah Gatti [00:05:37] Yes, I was.

Brett Kreher [00:05:42] Excellent. Thank you, Sarah.

Brett Kreher [00:05:45] Then I guess with that being completed, we'd like to move to item two, Erie County Business Task Force Update. So, yes, please Dan if you can take it from here.

Dan Castle [00:05:55] Let me let me say a few words. I'll then turn it over to Diane and she can add her comments. And then Maria, who is front and center on the entire business task force and can provide her perspective as well. So, you know, we've had a few meetings of the task force. And to me, it's been really interesting. It's a really nice partnership between government, both city county government, state government and businesses. It was kind of born out of the County Executive's interest in helping businesses. It's a mutual effort with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and Dottie Gallagher. It's been really interesting because, one, it's a communication out. The County Executive every week is able to convey out the status of our situation and where we are and all the tests and the results and the reopening. We're able to pass on information as it comes out from the state.

Dan Castle [00:07:15] It's also a return back. So, getting feedback from the business sector, small businesses as well as large businesses, there are some major employers from a wide range of sectors, they're providing feedback to the County and City. Some folks from Empire State development in terms of what businesses are

facing. And that's been really helpful to me and I think others as well. So, it's really been this collaborative effort and we're really focusing on implementation and actions. Things are happening just so fast. Every day you go on to the State's website or other websites, there's more information coming out about reopening, and the different phases and recovery plans and protocols by industry and sector. I know other counties are doing things. I've been on calls with a number of other county planning directors and everyone is in our same boat and things are just happening so fast on a daily basis. It's exciting, but it's hard to keep on top of. I think it's helping that we're getting to a point now at the task force where we're starting to identify subcommittees. There is a task force meeting today where we agreed to begin with two in particular. One is a small and micro-business subcommittee that will be co-chaired by Tuona Batchelor from Erie County Department of Environment and Planning and Susan McCarthy from Buff State Small Business Center. The other subcommittee is marketing and outreach. How do we do everything, from getting the word out effectively, to buy local campaigns? You know, there's been a lot of interest in that. One of the first things that the task force did was rollout Erie Grown. We'll talk about that. I don't steal much of her thunder, but I will say we just today or within the last day or so passed 20,000 hits on that website in terms of people looking for where to find local produce. So, there's been a lot of good things about it. There's still a lot of work left to do.

Dan Castle [00:09:47] But I think, Diane, maybe I'll turn it over to you to talk about your perspective specifically on the agriculture industry and where we can go from there.

Diane Held [00:10:03] Thanks, Dan. I apologize for my dog because she'll be barking in the background. I don't know that I have a whole lot to add besides what Dan has mentioned, except that it's been really valuable for me to hear everything. I mean, like Dan said, there's so much information out there. And, you know, I'm getting to listen to these reports and this information that's kind of right real time from some of the experts and the people that are in these different business sectors. And even though that may not be agriculture, those business sectors and those different things that are going on in the county affect agriculture and vice versa. So, I think that's really important and valuable. And, you know, at this point, I think it's just me trying to listen and gather information to see where those connections could be. But they've talked about health issues and workforce issues and business issues. And I don't want to steal María's, but she did a great job today talking about child care issues. So, I think as time goes on, these are all the things that we're all hearing about in the media that are impacting the whole country, but some of those things impact us here more than any place else. Some of the workforce and the unemployment statistics are just incredible in this area. And, you know, we're worse than most places. So, I appreciate, you know, being able to represent agriculture and being a part of the group. So, I think it's really valuable.

Dan Castle [00:11:42] Maria, we'll maybe we'll put you on the spot here to talk about your perspectives. Then it kind of leads us to the next phase.

Maria Whyte [00:11:56] First of all, thank you, Brett and members of the Farmland Protection Board for the opportunity to join your meeting this evening.

Maria Whyte [00:12:04] Really, I more than anything, I want to spend the time that I am on the call with you guys hearing more from you directly. But, I'm happy to share a little bit of an update on the Business Assistance Task Force. Really, the only thing to add, as Dan indicated, is that we formed two subcommittees today, a marketing subcommittee and a subcommittee on small business. Those subcommittees are really in response to the survey that was conducted by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership. They really sought to have broad participation in the survey. They received more than 1,500 responses from businesses across Erie County and all of them representing the variety of sectors in our local economy, everything from tourism to agriculture to manufacturing to health and life sciences.

Maria Whyte [00:12:57] It was very clear that that that one of the biggest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business community is a tremendous hit to local small business, main street type of businesses. It's for that reason why it was important to really form a subcommittee dedicated specifically to helping that group of people. Another indication from the survey was that in order to support main street businesses, we would have to make a deliberate effort as a local community to encourage people to buy local - everything from using your local hardware store, you know, to buying your produce from the local farming community. The effort that it would take to really support the local economy will require a broad-based buy local type of campaign. It's for that reason that the marketing subcommittee was created to make sure that we are doing that as well. Of course, the Erie Grown website now further supports that effort.

Maria Whyte [00:14:17] So I think the work of the committee is still very much in the infant phases and will need to unfold.

Maria Whyte [00:14:24] You know, another thing that came out of the survey is that a great deal of what needs to happen in order to support the local business community is not going to be able to be achieved just simply at the local level. The resources at the local level won't be sufficient and it will take advocacy on the part of the state and federal government. I think as the next months unfold, you will see the business taskforce begin to make policy recommendations to the state and federal government that would help support the local business community. So, I think that's really summarizes my update for now.

Dan Castle [00:15:07] Thank you, Maria, that's very helpful. As Maria said, the point here is to get some direct feedback from this committee about the issues you guys are facing and your colleagues are facing.

Dan Castle [00:15:22] We're going to start with that and then will gradually move into - so how can we help? Brett, I'm going to defer to you, maybe similar to last month. Maybe we can go around the horn here, talk a little bit about what each of you folks are seeing. And let's talk about how we can help.

Maria Whyte [00:15:43] I would really like to hear sort of the top three concerns from your variety of perspectives.

Maria Whyte [00:15:50] I just want to say, you know, I think the role that agriculture plays in the local economy is not lost on the County Executive. In each of his proposed economic development plans, there has always been attention paid to agriculture. The County Executive is very interested in how the COVID pandemic is creating additional challenges for that agricultural community is no doubt a top priority for him. I am eager to hear from you about those concerns so that Erie County can be conscious of them as we try to identify solutions. And then, frankly, as we try to advocate for solutions at the state and federal level as well.

Brett Kreher [00:16:46] Thank you, Maria.

Brett Kreher [00:16:51] We'll endeavor to do our best to provide some information that's helpful.

Brett Kreher [00:17:00] Before we get started with that, would Tom Hersey be interested in speaking some further about this? I guess I'm not sure about that. But I wanted to open the floor to Thomas if he had some thoughts.

Thomas Hersey [00:17:12] You know, I've been working with a lot of the community-based organizations and not for profits. I think there's some efforts that are going on there and some issues with respect to food security, food distribution and some things like that that provide an opportunity for agriculture to also work with the not for profit sector. I just wanted to mention that in addition to, you know, as far as what's going on, in addition to the business task force, I think there's some other opportunities and networks out there that may be an opportunity for the agricultural community.

Brett Kreher [00:17:52] Thank you, Tom. Yes.

Brett Kreher [00:17:58] Dan, did you think at this point we should we should discuss a little bit about what are some of our agricultural concerns?

Dan Castle [00:18:05] I think that's a great idea. Yeah, let's go around.

Brett Kreher [00:18:09] OK. Well, Dan, you did a nice job capturing some of the issues, or capturing all of the issues, that we brought up last time. I thought I'd touch upon a couple of additional issues. One of them that is a little bit of a challenge for us. So immediately prior to this, everybody here remembers that the unemployment rate was as low as it's been in our lifetimes. That's really been terrific to be more or less fully employed. It made hiring very difficult, however. And so, if you were a growing business or even just replacing turnover and entry level positions, hiring people was a considerable challenge. And so, we actually have utilized some temporary help since late last year just because we were unable to back sell some of our entry level positions quickly enough. So, we've had about a dozen temps working for us and it's worked out fine. It's not what we prefer, but it's worked out fine. And shockingly, here we are. May 21st, a couple of months, solid couple of months into this pandemic with the highest unemployment rate of my lifetime. And we're in the same situation. We actually still have the same number of temps because we are unable to hire with the very high unemployment insurance rate right now. So that's been difficult. Basically, hiring is just as difficult as it was. And who would have thought? But that's the situation that we're in. So, I don't have any great solutions, but I wanted to call that out, too. I wanted to address that as an issue. Another issue that that I wanted to discuss briefly. And it's not really so much an

agricultural issue, but I think it's an up and coming issue that maybe I just haven't been exposed to, because being an essential business, our business here at the farm has sort of been the same as it was. Other than all the changing protocols and procedures that we've had to put into place as far as CDC guidelines have evolved, you know, with the more washing of things and disinfecting. And then also the masks. And when, you know, originally it was suggested and now, now we're requiring masks in certain situations. And then, of course, we've got to write up our plan. Everybody has to write up their plan and fortunately there's some templates. So that that'll be very simple for us, for our plans to accomplish social distancing in the workplace. But the issue that I want to mention is, is that there is a little bit of a challenge. And I again, I'm talking about a problem here. I don't have any great solutions because there's a wide variety of opinions and how seriously people take this. And I guess anything's like that. But this one is it's a real challenge. So, on the spectrum, I would say on our farm, the way that we're operating our farm is probably more on the more careful end of things. We think that everybody needs to be as careful as possible to not be transmitting this disease. If you're a carrier, to not be transmitting it to others around you. And so that's one of our main concerns. And we've tried to bring along our workforce of about 250 along with that. And I think it's just seems to have gone pretty well. Obviously, we've got some sticklers and some holdouts that we've had to kind of drag along here. It's actually gone really well. And I couldn't be happier with our workforce and each individual on that, that people are going along with it, even if they might disagree with it a little bit. But I've noticed last night I went out to I took my daughters out to an ice cream parlor and I saw firsthand the fact that that there's a wide range. So, the guy behind me, he did not take this seriously at all. Even when we asked him to respect our space and stay back, he just kind of got closer. And so, they called my attention to the fact that we need more educational efforts. And frankly, I think we're going to need some more enforcement. And it was it was a little bit of a tough one for me.

Brett Kreher [00:23:04] And so this this really upset my daughter. And she just felt like, well, here's somebody, a scofflaw who doesn't care. And so, I think we're going to have some of those things as we kind of open up, we're going to have more and more of those kinds of situations. So, it might require more, you know, more police action. I don't know quite how the educational process will work, but I think it might. It was the kind of situation that I kind of addressed myself. I had to kind of turn the other cheek. I could see otherwise the situation was going to devolve into shouting and ad perhaps worse. So, we basically just turn the other cheek and got her ice cream and had our social distancing and no problem. It's the kind of situation that just increases all of our risk very slightly, I recognize, but it's an issue. And then lastly, sort of on the food. Food security, food distribution. The same issue persists in the egg industry where there's the egg carton industry has consolidated down to basically two major players. One in pulp, which is paper and one which is foam, which most people call Styrofoam manufacturers. And those two manufacturers are running flat out. And so that's a situation that's kind of delicate. We're in okay shape at the moment. We're in okay shape for the next several weeks. But will that situation devolve over the summer and fall or until things change? Well, it very well may.

Maria Whyte [00:24:55] This is Maria. May I just ask a couple of questions about that? And thank you so much for sharing your concerns with us. This is precisely the type of thing that I am wondering about. The cartons, the egg cartons that you're talking about, what exactly is the obstacle? Is it that the supplies to the manufacturers of the cartons are being held up? Is it that the work force of the manufacturers of the cartons is being challenged? Help me understand what is the obstacle?

Brett Kreher [00:25:36] So the main obstacle is that is that a large percentage of the eggs that were produced in the country were going into channels where they were winding up in restaurants. Those eggs are getting diverted basically to retail, to grocery stores because more people are getting more of their food from grocery stores and so on. The eggs that are being purchased by grocery stores are being purchased in cartons versus flats. The only problem is that people just aren't used to them. And so, you inadvertently, you know, bump into something in an egg falls and makes a mess. And so, grocery stores don't want them and consumers don't desire them.

Maria Whyte [00:26:26] Right. So, I understand that that was to some extent a similar problem, somewhat similar problem anyway, with dairy farmers, where the school system, for example, was purchasing a great deal of the dairy supply. And then when the school districts quit purchasing milk for schoolchildren, it changed. The demand for milk at the grocery store was still extremely high. But because it had to be compartmentalized differently and because, as I understand it, the highly perishable nature of the product itself, it made it very difficult to kind of keep up with demand at the at the grocery store, which just as you're saying, you know, consumers are looking for something different than a two and a half dozen open flat.

Brett Kreher [00:27:24] Right. That's right. Yes. A pretty similar situation.

Maria Whyte [00:27:37] I'd welcome, you know, any additional feedback, you know, from any of the other farmers and representatives on the call.

Brett Kreher [00:27:50] That sounds great. Dan Henry, would you be prepared to go next?

Dan Henry [00:27:56] Yes, thanks for that.

Dan Henry [00:28:00] So I would echo a lot of the things that Brett just mentioned with respect to labor and supply chain issues.

Dan Henry [00:28:09] Just to give you a quick background, our family farming business is greenhouse flowers at this time of year we're peak season with supplying a lot of a local garden centers. The other side of our business is produce - vegetables that we grow out in the field.

Dan Henry [00:28:24] So with respect to labor, that is probably our biggest immediate issue. We rely heavily on a lot of seasonal workers and a lot of our seasonal workers are returning. Seasonal workers aren't able to get here right now. And so, we've been able to find local fill in labor, I'll call it, but, you know, they lack the experience and the knowledge that our returning workers have. At this time of year, with the diversity of our business, you know, it isn't as simple as training someone on one job or one task. They're set to go on a given day depending on what the weather is like, if it's a rainy day, you know, an entry level worker might be asked to, you know, water flowers in the greenhouse or help stage orders. then on a day like today where the sun is shining and nice and we're able to plant here, she may have to go to the field and plant zucchini or peppers or something like that. So, there's a lot of different jobs. It's a diverse work environment. And so, we really rely on those returning experienced workers that know our business and know the ropes, so to speak, to get a lot of these jobs done.

Dan Henry [00:29:45] So Brett touched on the unemployment situation that we are seeing is a major contributing factor to why a lot of our returning workers haven't made it here. They fly in from Puerto Rico and they have had issues getting flights. But that's opened up a bit where we've seen a few guys come in. But we're working with about 25 to 30 percent of the workers from Puerto Rico that we otherwise would have this time of year. And so, the folks who we've had to use as skilled workers are, again, just they lack the experience and they're really not quite as trainable to be able to adapt to those different types of jobs that I mentioned.

Maria Whyte [00:30:31] May I just ask, even you supplement the workers that are the migrant workforce that's coming in from Puerto Rico, if you supplement them by the local workforce, what capacity are you operating at? Did that get you up to 50 percent capacity, 60 percent? I'd like you to help me understand where you are compared to where you'd like to be.

Dan Henry [00:30:56] As far as total, total number of workers we're at about 80 percent of where we need to be right now. I guess silver lining is the weather has been uncooperative lately and so it hasn't hit us as hard as maybe it would have otherwise. I hate to say normal year you know if we have normal weather anymore. That's where we are at. But again, the weather is opening up, have got some nice days here. We're really scrambling to get to it to play catch up and get all of our flowers shipped and planting done in the field at the same time.

Maria Whyte [00:31:35] I didn't mean to cut you off. Please carry on with whatever other issues you wanted to raise.

Dan Henry [00:31:44] The second issue, I would say that Brett kind of touched on this as well as, is the supply chain. The issue that we're seeing is suppliers, again, have had to shift their production. Like Brett mentioned, with the egg cartons, you know, they're instead of producing, you know, three different types of an egg, they've had to stop producing one and really focus heavily on others. They've got to kind of retool and regroup to do that. We're seeing the same thing. A small example for us would be wooden stakes, if you can even believe that. We use wooden stakes in the field for our peppers and eggplant, tomatoes, different crops like that. For whatever reason, those are all almost exclusively from Honduras. They're Honduran pine and they're treated. Because of import restrictions right now from other countries, those stakes can't get here. It's the simple example, but there's a lot of little things like that that are that we're coping with right now and reacting to.

Maria Whyte [00:33:05] What's plan B?

Dan Henry [00:33:08] Plan B right now is I'm working with a broom handle manufacturer in Georgia who would otherwise be making manufacturing broom handles, and they are now thinking that broom handle can be cut down to the length that we require for our crops.

Dan Henry [00:33:25] Again, you know, we all are adapting and doing what we have to do to make things work.

Dan Henry [00:33:40] But again, with the broom handle thing that we're looking at, about a 20 percent increase in costs versus what we would have paid for the regular Honduran stakes that we would have otherwise gotten. So, there's a there's a bit of a cost to that. There's been a lot of great USDA programs that have been rolled out recently. One of them is the Farms to Families program. There was a lot of grant money that was recently allocated to a lot of distributors throughout the country to put boxes together, to distribute to food banks and to institutions and direct to the public and then all sorts of different places. And so, we're thankful for that. Again, an example of the supply chain kind of adapting itself to get the food from A to B. There're still obviously people that need to eat. There's lots of demand, but the supply chain has been disrupted. And so, we're working through that. Especially perishable items to make sure that people are still getting their fresh fruit. It's especially important as we get into our harvesting season here locally- June, July and August. And kind of with that would be my third point. I touched on this last time we met with the fresh produce business and our fresh produce business. A certain percentage of our products do go to food service. You know, off grades, so to speak. There may be nothing wrong with them from a quality, freshness perspective, but they are they may have a cosmetic defect that they're misshapen, something that's not desirable at a grocery store for people to purchase. And so those products all end up in the food service market or a lot of them end up in the food service market. And so, with schools out of session in restaurants not open for normal business, that sector of the industry, the food industry is really taking a hit. So, we're hopeful and optimistic that as things begin to reopen, it's done so in a safe manner and that these customers and users of these products are able to open back up and continue to utilize them, hopefully at the levels that they have in the past.

Dan Henry [00:36:20] A lot of small farms rely on supplying the farm to table type restaurants where they're growing and picking and delivering it right to restaurants directly. We're more geared towards wholesale distribution. I know a lot of colleagues of mine in the farming community here locally do that. They're very nervous whether they're going to have that market for their products here this summer.

Dan Castle [00:36:49] I recall last time we talked to you and you're the one that made the comment that food service takes crooked cucumbers. I've used several times since then. I appreciate that comment.

Dan Castle [00:37:02] I heard on the radio this morning that the corn festival has been canceled. I'm wondering if there's anything unique corn farmers are facing?

Dan Henry [00:37:24] Oh, yes, certainly, I mean, it was I think, I guess expected that that that news was going to come out and we were disappointed to hear it, but certainly understand the reasoning and justification behind it. You know, as far as how it's going to affect the sweet corn sales here in Eden specifically for that festival, obviously we're going to miss out on those sales. It's you know, it's very concentrated for that weekend, but it does add up. It is a nice bump in our in our sales for that time. I think more than anything, it's you know, that that festival is as silly as it may sound, brings a lot of great positive attention to the town of Eden and the farming community. You know, there's a very large display and exhibit at the corn festival that a lot of people worked really hard on over the years where they have equipment on display and there's a lot of education going on. And they're teaching kids and adults to come to the corn festival and don't have a connection to agriculture. So, they can they can find out how a cow's milked or how their sweet corn is grown and harvested. And you know what's the best way to cook it and all that fun stuff that surrounds the festival. So, we're certainly going to miss that. That positive light that gets shed on us during the first weekend in August.

Maria Whyte [00:38:57] I have a number of other questions, both for Dan and for Brett. Diane or Mark, do you guys have any other comments before I follow up with some questions?

Brett Kreher [00:39:22] Bryant, do you have anything?

Mark Gaston [00:39:30] This is Mark, can you hear me now?

Dan Castle [00:39:32] Yeah.

Mark Gaston [00:39:36] Bryant, I'd rather have the farmers go first. So, if you've got something, Bryant, that you want to say, jump in. Otherwise, I've got a bunch of questions, too.

Sarah Gatti [00:39:45] I'm not showing Bryant on the call anymore. So, Mark, go ahead and if Bryant comes back I'll let you know.

Mark Gaston [00:39:54] So, I mean, as far as the just kind of the other sector that I've been hearing about. I'll be honest, this is secondhand from some of the dairy guys. Well, of course, you know of historic low milk prices. They are between ten and eleven dollars per hundredweight, which is ridiculous. I know they're all having extremely hard times.

Mark Gaston [00:40:24] I've heard there's been some, of course, supply all going to stores that I heard Upstate had some issues in regards to Wegmans and Tops just being able to keep up on stocking of shelves with their product. And as they were turning over, you know, from whether school lunch or into supermarket supply. So, I don't know exactly where that is. But I did hear there were some issues in regards to that. So, I guess a couple of nuances there. I haven't really heard too much else besides that.

Mark Gaston [00:41:14] The Corn Festival was kind of one of the questions that I had. Are there any other festivals throughout the year that you might see get canceled that might have an impact on business? Probably the strawberry festival, right? That's usually in June.

Brett Kreher [00:41:48] Dan? Dan, can you speak to that? I cannot.

Dan Henry [00:41:54] It is usually in June and to be honest, I haven't heard whether it's been canceled or not. I know a lot of a lot of the strawberry growers around us would partake in that festival. Thankfully, there's been a lot of guidance out lately here as to how to safely conduct those u-pick operations so that folks can still come out and get their fresh strawberries. But again, I have not heard whether the festival itself has been canceled or not.

Mark Gaston [00:42:26] The other sector I've been thinking about here, especially, with Mother's Day and, the are nursery folks and flower, you know, I mean they're taking a hit as well as far as some of these, you know, holidays and such.

Mark Gaston [00:42:51] I'm just wondering, as far as distribution goes, is there a way that we can facilitate more of a CSA. I'm wondering if there's a way that we can facilitate some of these folks in different locales working together as more of a drive thru. You know, this is what we have available this week. You know, support your local farm campaign, drive through, pick up your vegetables type thing.

Dan Castle [00:43:27] No, that's a good point, Mark. I mean, I think, I don't recall if there are specific flowers, a greenhouse portion on Erie Grown, but maybe that's something we can do is build up a portion of that site for the greenhouse industry in the County.

Sarah Gatti [00:43:47] Yeah, I believe they're not individually called out but we do have greenhouses on there. They're not symbolized differently or anything, but we can certainly do that. Also, while I'm unmuted, I was just looking it up and I believe the strawberry festival was canceled.

Dan Henry [00:44:08] I could touch on the flower side of things quickly. As I mentioned last time we spoke, we do Easter flowers and then we do the spring annuals and perennials, which is what we're working with right now. Easter was definitely severely impacted for us. People weren't sure if they could go out and if so, where they could go. So, our sales were definitely impacted. Now, more recently here. Going into Mother's Day and since then, with respect to our spring crop, it's almost been the opposite. We've had tremendous sales recently. The garden centers are open and people are very eager to get out and buy plants. A lot of people are at home. They're not taking vacations. And so, they're very interested in beautifying their homes. And so, we've had a great response from our customers, which is encouraging. So, we're hoping they get a little bit of a late start. A lot of it had to do with wetter weather. But we're hoping that this momentum will carry into, you know, through the month of June as we start to sell out some of the varieties. Our landscape business, the business that we do with landscaping companies and landscapers is definitely down. But I think now, as restrictions are starting to ease a little bit there, they were able to get out there and do what they need to do as well. As far as the drive through that, Mark, we did do that at Easter time and we had we did a one-day event and we had a great response for it. And talking to friends and colleagues in other state, they've done similar things with, you know, vegetable box drive through pickups and they've had very good response to that. It's something that we've certainly discussed here within our business. And it's, as I mentioned, it's not something we're geared up for. With our labor situation very tight we're scrambling to get our normal day to day activities accomplished. Adding something else into the mix that's totally new and different from anything we've really done is kind of a daunting task at the moment. We're also struggling through trying to identify a way that we could accomplish that and do it right and be successful.

Dan Henry [00:47:09] The other side to that is being wholesale. We are specifically talking about our business. Now there's kind of a fine line between doing something like that and upsetting the apple cart with your core customer base that's been there through the years and that you're going to count on in years to come.

Dan Henry [00:47:31] For example, we have, you know, a couple small farmers market type independent groceries. Braymiller's Market, if anyone's familiar with them in the south towns, is right down the road from us. And they're a great customer of ours. We deliver fresh produce to them every single day in the summertime. And they also have like a restaurant supply business that they operate out of that location. And I know I haven't had conversations with them specifically about it yet, but I know that if we were to do something like Mark suggested with a drive through that I'd probably get an unpleasant phone call from the owner, Braymiller. There's a fine line there.

Mark Gaston [00:48:19] Gotcha. Just one other question, have you talked to any of the local sawmills about the stakes?

Dan Henry [00:48:42] We've actually in the past, we've worked with a company in Angola that employs people with disabilities. It's a glorified woodshop. For a while, they were actually making these stakes for us. The issue is actually with the wood. The reason that we use the treated Honduran pine is because the stakes, once they're pounded into the into the soil and they sit there for the season, exposed to moisture and so on and so forth, the treated stakes don't rot and break up. At the end of the season, they have appointed tip on them. If they break off when removing them, you're left with a pointed wooden stake in the ground that your tractor tires really don't like. We've tried the local route and we can't get the right material was really what it boils down to.

Mark Gaston [00:49:47] What what's the stake size?

Dan Henry [00:49:52] 3/4 inch by 1 inch by anywhere from 30 inches to 60 inches in length.

Dan Castle [00:50:02] You say 30 to 60 inches?

Dan Henry [00:50:06] Yes, 30 to 60 inches.

Dan Castle [00:50:08] You want them treated specifically or does the type of wood matter under the treating?

Dan Henry [00:50:15] It's that Honduran pine. I don't know other than that.

Mark Gaston [00:50:25] We use stakes for our tree shelters. We use survey stakes. We use wood hubs. So, I mean, we have a few local hardwood guys. Let me just look into it. Because I mean, if you're able to take a different wood species, that might be suitable. I don't know what the cost is. I might be able to provide at least some information or talk to Alan in my office? I'll touch base with him and see if I might be able to find anything that might help.

Dan Henry [00:51:23] Yeah, that would be great. Thank you.

Dan Castle [00:51:27] I think I'll also reach out to County Parks and Forestry. There's a sawmill down in the Sardinian forest. I'm not familiar with it at all. I'm not real sure what they can or can't do but I will reach out to the Commissioner tomorrow to see if that's something they might be able to help with as well.

Mark Gaston [00:51:53] I'm pretty sure that that sawmill won't be able to do what they're looking for.

Dan Castle [00:51:57] Okay.

Mark Gaston [00:52:03] There's no way that will handle that.

Dan Castle [00:52:05] Okay. Fair enough.

Maria Whyte [00:52:09] So I think, gentlemen, I just wanted to follow up on a couple of things that you said with a few questions and then just with a few comments about some of your points, Bret, which I thought were very good. I guess I'm wondering in terms of the labor challenges that you're having, obviously, if your workforce is predominantly coming (or used to) predominantly come from Puerto Rico, that you don't have some of the cross-border challenges that you might in other parts of your workforce? I'm wondering if, you know, the concern

around travel at the southern border is in any way harming our farming community and our ability to access the migrant workforce that we often take advantage of?

Dan Henry [00:53:05] Yes, I can I can touch on that. So, the other two thirds of our seasonal workforce does come from Mexico. The first third that we take on this time of year comes from Puerto Rico. As we get close to our harvesting season at the end of June, the balance comes up from Mexico. So, there are certainly some challenges right now with getting those folks up here and across the border. You know, you're starting to hear about a lot more COVID-19 cases and issues in Mexico, which I'm sure is only going to result in further delays and further challenges with getting the workers up here. The US Department of Labor and (NY) Department of State has made it a priority to get returning foreign workers to farms across the country as you know, as essential workers for essential businesses. I've been told there are delays. A lot of it has to do with processing the paperwork that has to be done by the US. A lot of people obviously are working from home. Offices are short staffed. They're having a hard time processing things in a timely fashion. And then once they are processed, of course, when the workers get to the border, they are going through proper, proper protocols for screening them for their illness. In a time, sensitive industry like farming, a two week or three-week delay could be a huge impact, a huge crop loss, right at the beginning of the season. So, it's definitely on our radar again.

Maria Whyte [00:55:04] Are you preparing for that? Are you anticipating a two to three-week delay? Is that something you're planning for?

Dan Henry [00:55:12] At the moment, we're preparing for a one- or two-week delay, which we initially kind of came up with that plan on our end, because even if our workers do arrive on time, you know, we have to quarantine them for at least one week, possibly two. And so, we've taken measures to prepare for that. So, this two-week delay would now be on top of that two weeks. A lot of our plants are started in the greenhouse, you know, months ago and so we can't really tell them to stop growing. So, farmers, we're going to have to walk through it.

Maria Whyte [00:56:07] Brett, what about you? What kind of impact will the worker shortage cause for you?

Brett Kreher [00:56:20] So we're having some challenges as well. So, I talked a little bit about our local labor force, which is the bulk of our labor force. I didn't touch on the H-2A. We utilized both some Mexicans and some South Africans. We have been able to get Mexicans in and that's been pretty good so far. We do have another group that we're supposed to get towards the end of next month. We're cautiously optimistic that they will arrive and arrives at approximately the time that they we expect them. But like Dan says, you know, there's a lot up in the air. And we might be a little bit overly optimistic on that. But we've still got our fingers crossed. The South Africans were supposed to arrive last month. Of course, they haven't been able to leave. We are hopeful that they will show up partway through the summer. But obviously, they won't be here, too, with us in the spring. The South Africans we have as equipment operators, they all speak English and they're used to modern farming equipment. Without them here this spring, we're going to utilize some of our other members of our team to kind of switch over. With the late spring that Dan has talked about, it's actually to some degree worked in our favor and that we haven't had field conditions here in Western New York, where we've really been able to do much fieldwork before the last few days. The bad news is we're running late out in the fields. The good news is there's nothing we could have done about it, even if even if we had adequate labor. There's about a half a dozen or eight of them who will be able to help us to plant our crops. We're in okay shape. We believe that we're in okay shape from that standpoint. Like Dan said, they're not going to have the same skill level as the people who are used to operating as this equipment. So, it's you know, it's not as good of a situation, but we were cautiously optimistic it'll still go okay.

Dan Castle [01:00:28] I know we're a little past seven. I do want to get to Diane, I know she's been in communication with farmers and other sectors, such as livestock. I definitely want to give her a chance to talk about what she's hearing as well.

Diane Held [01:00:47] Sure thing. Thanks, Dan. I just had a couple of things. One, and it came up last time, I think Earl talked about it and if Bryant had been on here, he certainly could have talked about it: concerns with the livestock industry and getting livestock processed. Obviously, there are the well-publicized issues that have gone on the West and the Midwest with the large meat processing plants. That creates shortages here and what an opportunity for local farmers to be able to kind of come in with their, you know, beef or poultry. We have a real severe shortage and have for quite some time, of USDA-certified processing plants that are within a reasonable distance of here. The places that USDA-certified are backed up for sometimes six and seven months now because of everything that's going on. The other thing about any local processing is that they have the same struggle that farmers have in terms of labor. That's one of the reasons why there are fewer processing plants is

because they need trained labor. It's not always the most glamorous job and so they struggle to be able to get domestic labor. You've seen some of those go out of business over the years. So that's a real opportunity. But, you know, it has to be done, you know, with some eye to the fact that there has to be a labor force. It's created a real lot of need in that local livestock arena.

Diane Held [01:02:24] A couple of other things that we've been working on, one is the Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension have kind of coalesced to work across the state and in each of our counties to just flag with the Department of Health, and specifically the public health emergency preparedness coordinators, that there are these group living situations on local farms. If one of the employees does end up with COVID, is there a plan? What happens if an employee shows up, how can they isolate them? These farms can't afford to have COVID go through their entire workforce if they're shut down, it would be devastating. There really needs to be some thought given to that in Erie County. I know it's such a challenge here because there's so many other things going on with COVID throughout entire population, but it definitely would have a big effect on the farmers in this county.

Maria Whyte [01:03:45] I would like us to be able to coordinate a conference call with the State Department of Labor (DOL), and I'll talk to Dan Castle and the Commissioner about this offline. But what are you hearing about what DOL is prepared to do in coordination with Department of Health on the group living.

Diane Held [01:04:06] Well, I don't know what their involvement is. The Department of Health has kind of been tasked with having this this plan in place. What could be done to isolate against one or two workers? Are there hotels available where you could pull them out and isolate them for the time that they need to be isolated? If you have anybody in group living situations, that's where you see the virus really spread like crazy. It's having that thought process ahead of time before something happens.

Maria Whyte [01:04:56] The County itself has essentially rented out an entire hotel for precisely this purpose. We have made arrangements to help isolate individuals who are unable to isolate in a private residence. The County can certainly partner on that. But, I interrupted you, please carry on.

Diane Held [01:05:18] No, that's okay. I just think it's really important that farmers know, too, that the farmers that have employees in group living situations, know that they get the County involved and be able to isolate workers so that they don't have necessarily have it go through the whole workforce. So, it's making that those plans ahead of time. There's been a push through on your State Department of Labor to get sanitizer and face coverings out to farms across all New York State. They've been using Soil and Water conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension across the State to help with that. We had a need to get a bunch of sanitizer and face coverings transported out to all of Western New York and Kreher's, they called in one of their semi-trucks for all of Western New York. It's one of these feel-good stories. So, we've been distributing throughout the Western New York region to try and get that sanitizer and face coverings to the farmers.

Maria Whyte [01:06:24] That is terrific.

Brett Kreher [01:06:26] You're welcome and we're happy to be able to help.

Maria Whyte [01:06:48] I just had one other thing to add, and I'll have to excuse myself. Really, it was in response to your comment, Brett, about the level of seriousness with which the variety of individuals in our community are taking the crisis. I think that you hit the nail right on the head. I mean, local officials, state officials, I don't know how clear we can be, but nevertheless, the discrepancy remains. And to quantify, to help make that discrepancy real and quantifiable, let me just share some information with you. Erie County, as of Monday, had 5,009 positive cases of COVID-19, with 449 deaths as of that same day. Monday, the 18th of May, Cuyahoga County in Ohio, which is where Cleveland is, had 3,410 cases and only 175 deaths. Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, where Pittsburgh is, had 1,641 cases with only 143 deaths. Both of those counties have a population greater than Erie County, and yet they have one third, in the case of Allegheny County, one third the number of cases. Why is that? It's because the lockdown orders were earlier and they were stricter. They came out almost 10 days before New York's did. It makes a tangible difference in the lives of people. 143 deaths versus 450 deaths. The seriousness of the situation cannot be overstated, and especially during this time period when we know so little about the virus. I mean, we're finding out crazy things. I mean, there's so much about it that's unknown that we really have no choice but to take this situation seriously while we learn to better understand it. The unemployment rate in Erie County is 23.48% - that's one in every four people. If your family makes less than \$50,000 a year, it's a 40% unemployment rate. It's hitting low income communities harder than ever. And you're precisely right at the beginning of this, our unemployment rate was at 3.9%, essentially full employment. Nevertheless, you know, we have entered a new phase to have this cautious opening The County is

very committed, as committed as we could possibly be, to maintaining the standards that will allow us to advance to the next phase. Those standards, maintaining those standards of declining hospitalizations and deaths, of high capacity contact tracing and testing in our community, maintaining those standards in part depend on all of us. They depend on the non-pharmaceutical interventions because we don't have a vaccine. We have only to rely on hand sanitizer and facemasks. Those things are so significant.

Maria Whyte [01:12:15] So I think you were right to be distressed by the individual next to you who was not social distancing. So, in any case, we're working on it. We agree. And we think that the statistics coming out of Allegheny County and Cuyahoga County, when we tell that story, demonstrate the quantifiable difference it makes. That will be important. It is something we will all have to work on together and it will not be easy. This country wasn't built on what was easy, it was built on what we did right and we will carry on that way.

Dan Castle [01:13:50] I'm sure that if the County Executive would like to do something specifically with farmers, we have a few on the call that would love to host him for a public service announcement at their operation. That's great.

Maria Whyte [01:14:06] I will for sure keep that in mind. Before I sign off, friend, let me just say, you know, I took very copious notes on the variety of feedback that you gave. I will huddle up with Department of Environment and Planning and with Cornell and Erie County Soil and Water to identify what are some of the other ways Erie County can support you, but know that you have our attention and our ears are wide open. And please keep the channel of communication directly open so that we can come to better understand your needs. The last thing I want to do is spend time and money solving the wrong problem. So, help me understand the problems so we can put our time and talent and resources into solving the right problem. Thank you for everything you're doing.

Brett Kreher [01:14:54] You're welcome thank you, Maria. We appreciate that an everything that you and our County government has done to support us and to support the success of our community.

Maria Whyte [01:15:03] All right, friends do take care of one another and I'll be back in touch with DEP to follow up.

Brett Kreher [01:15:14] If everybody else could hang in there with us for just a few more minutes, we'll try and wrap this up here quickly.

Dan Castle [01:15:24] I would like to touch on one other thing. Sarah, maybe you can advance the slide. One of the things I did want to bring up in the few minutes we have left is the County Executive had put \$100,000 into the budget of Office of Agriculture to provide money to municipalities to help prepare agricultural and farmland protection plans. We're trying to find out how we can repurpose that money. We're a little bit where we're uncertain just how predisposed that money might be depending on how was put into the budget but we think we might have some flexibility. I would definitely appreciate some ideas in terms of, you know, how can the county use some of this money - to hire a consultant or maybe pass through municipalities in a way that could help you guys respond, recover and get back to some semblance of normal? Is it helping with worker safety and PPE? Is it marketing and support? Is it grant writing? We're looking to see if it could be repurposed for public-benefit corporations like Cornell Cooperative Extension or Soil and Water. We may have to go through the legislature to do that. I know we've only got 10 minutes left.

Sarah Gatti [01:17:35] I'll just add that the points you see on your screen are just starter ideas to get us started. If we want to just quickly go around the room and talk about how the County can best help or if you'd rather email me later. As Maria said, we don't want to spend a lot of time and effort trying to fix the wrong problem. If anyone has any suggestions, we'd love to hear them.

Dan Henry [01:18:35] Not to get into a huge discussion about it, but I think looking at these points here quickly, we're on the right track. Diane mentioned the distribution of hand sanitizer and PPE equipment. Thank you, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and everybody else who is involved in that. I know that made its way to our farm and we are certainly appreciative of it. So, you know, more things along those lines. Our business is now we're required to have a plan in place as far as reopening and keeping the workplace safe. There're great templates out there to get started with, but I'm sure there's going to be farmers out there that could use assistance developing and implementing those plans. Anybody else has anything, please jump in.

Rachel Chrostowski [01:19:30] In the absence of other ideas, I just thought I would share that American Farmland Trust put together a fund to help struggling farmers. I'm not sure exactly what that funding is going to.

If you're looking for additional ideas or ways to support the agriculture community, talking with AFT about that might be a good idea.

Brett Kreher [01:19:59] Sorry. Just a little distracted. Earl sent me a text that said he was on, but no one could hear him.

Dan Castle [01:20:30] We'll reach out to him.

Brett Kreher [01:20:36] I appreciate these starter ideas. These are some good thoughts. I would trust Dan Henry's thoughts on this.

Diane Held [01:21:20] There's some farms that are big enough and have enough staff and have enough wherewithal to kind of boom, boom, boom, do stuff like this. But there's an awful lot of farms that the farmers that, you know, there's just a handful of people working there and they're trying during a busy season. And they're losing money. And now they have to do something like a plan. And they're overwhelmed. If there was some way to provide assistance. The other thing that I was thinking of, and what's unfortunate about this is this is not something that you can do fast, but boy, wouldn't it be great to really do a very focused workforce development program for agriculture? Especially if you're going to have really high unemployment and a need for ag workers. You have to have them trained and you have to have them understand what the work is. So, there's this whole continuum that's not going to happen fast enough but it's just one idea maybe to tuck away.

Dan Castle [01:22:30] You're thinking of a long-term plan for workforce development?

Diane Held [01:22:44] Farmers always need labor, but COVID really exacerbated things and now there's shortages. The difficulty is trying to get people here. There's a reason why there is offshore labor, and that's because it's hard to get domestic labor. Even now when there is domestic labor available, if they're even inclined to look at a farm, they don't have the knowledge, they don't have the skills and they're not trained to do it.

Dan Henry [01:23:17] One thing with respect to training that a lot of times is maybe overlooked is language barriers. There's a lot of print materials that are that are in Spanish, for example, that are available to farmers. But, you know, the onsite training and explanation, especially in a situation like this, that is unique and it's rapidly evolving and day to day, week to week. So, you're scrambling to get things, programs in place and procedures in place and implemented quickly while overcoming the language barriers associated with that. That might be something to consider.

Diane Held [01:24:05] Okay. That's a good idea, Dan, because I think it's not even just language. I think there's cultural barriers, too. When you're talking about something like this, that's a really specific situation. You need somebody who can really speak to the way that people will understand what the concerns are.

Dan Henry [01:24:24] Absolutely.

Dan Castle [01:24:26] I really appreciate the input. I know we're kind of running short on time here and I think we could go on for half a day on this subject or longer.

Dan Castle [01:24:37] Sarah, can you just give an update, a couple of minutes on the Erie Grown website, kind of give a sense of what what's been happening and then maybe close us out by talking about our next steps. I do want to continue to get feedback from you guys. There's feedback we need to hear. We definitely want to hear that. So, Sarah, I'll turn it over to you to close this out here.

Sarah Gatti [01:25:11] Sure. As Dan mentioned earlier, we had about 20,000-page views since the County Executive announced it on April 7. The feedback has been really positive. We've added a few features, a spot for people to submit recipes, and preservation tips on how best to preserve food. We have a blog feature. We haven't really utilized that yet, but I'm hoping to do featured blog posts by the Food Policy Council, Cornell Cooperative, and maybe the Land Conservancy. It's still evolving and growing. If anyone has run into any issues, I'd appreciate any feedback. We don't have to talk about it now, but you can e-mail me at any point.

Brett Kreher [01:26:06] Thanks, Sarah. Twenty thousand hits, that's a great start.

Dan Castle [01:26:13] It's been interesting every time it gets mentioned in the media, we get this spike of people checking it out. What we want to do is continue to add features and upgrade the site. So, each time we do that, we can get another blast out there in the end, whether it's Twitter or social media, LinkedIn, whatever. So

definitely looking at ideas on how we can continue to get more exposure and then benefit really from farmers, because that's really what where we want. We've had some interest with the local food cooperative markets particularly wanting to be listed and included. So, the more we can do to do that by local, the better off we'll be.

Sarah Gatti [01:27:12] One last thing I forgot to mention is we've had approximately 40-45 new submissions since April 27.

Dan Castle [01:27:34] Real quick, Sarah. Our next meeting is in August and that'll be kind of be kind of kick off the agricultural district program?

Sarah Gatti [01:27:41] Yes. August 20th is our next meeting. I did get some guidance from the State Department of Agriculture and Markets on how to handle open enrollment during COVID and how to handle the public hearing and everything. Not sure where we'll be in the fall winter, but we may have to do that a little differently too.

Brett Kreher [01:28:12] Thank you for getting that research for us, Sarah.

Rachel Chrostowski [01:28:18] Before we adjourn, I just had one sort of upcoming thing that I wanted to mention, is now a good time?

Brett Kreher [01:28:24] Yes, it is. Thank you, Rachel.

[01:28:27] So the 2020 round of farmland protection grant funding is usually announced in May. I've heard that that will be announced in May, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed and hoping that we get a grant and a grant round announced in the near future. I have a number of farmers in Erie County that are interested in pursuing grants, so I well, I think we in the past had agreed that the Chair of the board of the AFPB would be authorized to provide letters of support for those grants. That is required submission as part of an application. But I'm happy to share maps and information about all of that with the rest of the board. If you feel that, that would be helpful. I don't have any grant rounds yet, so I don't have anything to share specifically. I just sort of wanted to put it out there that that would be coming up soon, hopefully with this of the state's budget with Corbett. It's possible that that round of funding may not happen, in which case it'll be really wonderful to talk about future ways of funding projects like that, because our farmland is going to be even more under threat than before. So just something to keep in the back of our heads.

Brett Kreher [01:29:53] Thank you, Rachel, I think because these have been things that the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board has been in support of, I think that I've just been signing those and then and then keeping the Board apprised after the fact. If I'm not mistaken, they weren't controversial issues.

Rachel Chrostowski [01:30:21] That's what I thought, too, so I'm glad to hear everybody remembers doing that.

Dan Castle [01:30:29] Well, Mr. Chair, with that, I will turn it over to you to adjourn the meeting.

Brett Kreher [01:30:36] All right, is there any other business to be discussed tonight? All right, then I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

Brett Kreher [01:30:45] Thank you, folks. Thanks, Sarah, for organizing.