



## Meeting Minutes: Governor's Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers

DATE: 12/06/2021

MINUTES PREPARED BY: CINTHIA MARTINEZ

Attendance

### Committee Members

#### Present

**Andrea Vaubel**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

**Colin Laffey**, Staff Attorney, Agricultural Worker Project, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

**Dan Glessing**, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

**Emilia Gonzalez Avalos**, Executive Director, Unidos MN

**Gary Wertish**, President, Minnesota Farmers Union

**Jim Gleb**, President, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189

**Nicole Blissenbach**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

**Rena Wong**, Director of Organizing, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 663

**Rodolfo Gutierrez**, Executive Director, HACER

**Sarah Berry**, Public Health Director, Waseca County | CHS Administrator, Le Sueur – Waseca Community Health Board

**Susan Bishop**, Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Health, and Migrant Agricultural Worker Response Lead, ICS

**Tamara Nelsen**, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

#### Absent

**Hamse Warfa**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**Kiza Olson**, CHS Administrator, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services

**Stephanie Low**-Interim Executive Director/ Chief Medical Officer, Community Health Service Inc.  
Guests Present

**Staff Present:** Cinthia Martinez, CareerForce Office Coordinator, Minnesota Department of

Employment and Economic Development; Jessica Grosz, Director of Labor Standards and Apprenticeship, Minnesota Department of Labor, and Industry; Lorrie Janatopoulos, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Maureen Ramirez, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Mike Zastoupil, Food Access Associate, Minnesota Department of Health

#### Agenda

1:00 PM **Welcome**

1:05 PM **Guest Introductions**

1:10 PM **Approve Minutes & Agenda**

1:11 PM **Updates**

1:30 PM **Governor Visit**

1:45 PM **Celebrate**  
2:00 PM **Promotion and Outreach**  
2:10 PM **Plans for AWWC post- report**  
2:15 PM **Public Comments**  
2:20 PM **Final Thoughts & Next Steps**  
2:30 PM **Adjourn**

## Meeting notes

### Guest Introductions

**Governor Tim Walz**, Governor of Minnesota

**Jennifer Lor**, Public Engagement Liaison, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan

**Michelle Manivel**, Public Engagement Liaison, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan

**Noemi Trevino**, Migrant Education Program Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education

### Approve Minutes & Agenda

Approved.

### Updates- DC Vaubel

With the retirement of Susan Bishop, Erik Zabel will be taking her spot in this Committee. Erik has been with the Department of health on and off since 2001 and is looking forward to being part of this committee and the work to come.

The AWWC recommendations report was submitted on time on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Thanks to Maureen Ramirez for her great work in compiling the report. Thank you to all members of this committee for their work.

This is the last meeting for 2021, and the next meeting will be held on January 10<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting there will be discussion about the next phase of the work of the committee and frequency of meetings going forward.

The next Migrant Services Consortium meeting will take place on Wednesday December 8<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting, committee members will have a chance to share the report, reflect on some of the recommendations, and gain input from Consortium members. AWWC members are invited to attend if they are able.

### Governor Visit

Governor Walz expressed his gratitude to the staff and Committee members. The next step is a senior staff meeting to begin planning implementation. The Governor indicated that he can't stress enough the difficulty of the past 20 months including the incredible pressure, dangers, and health risks faced by agricultural and food service workers. He is proud that Minnesota took a strong stand, from producers, union reps, advocates, and state agencies - that food supply matters and workers should not be asked to

put themselves and their families at risk without proper safety precautions. The committee learned of the good work that was being done, but also where gaps existed. The members of this committee are all busy people, but they know best what is critical regarding this work. Governor Walz stressed that his office takes shaping policy very seriously, and these recommendations offer something that can be done. What was learned was that when the workforce is taken care of, paid fairly, and have the resources to maintain safety – it is the best way for employers to keep employees and run a business. Members of the Committee and staff shared highlights and experiences with Governor Walz and expressed their gratitude for his efforts in assembling this group.

## Celebrate

DC Vaubel mentioned that she and DC Warfa would like to extend their gratitude to the Committee members and the support staff for taking time out of their busy work schedules to be present and putting in the work. It has been an honor to work together as a team.

Committee members took this time to go around and give Kudos to each other for all the hard work and dedication that was put forth through these eight months and in putting together the recommendations report.

Staff and Committee members would like to congratulate Susan Bishop on her retirement and for all her help and expertise shared during these months, as well as her role in forming the initial cross-agency group. Susan Bishop expressed her pride in this work, offered some reflections on the path to this point, and thanked all those involved.

## Promotion and outreach

The report has been shared with the Governor and his staff and will be put on the public website. State agency communication staff are coordinating with the Governor's communications staff to develop a press strategy for the report. Part of that plan will include translation into languages spoken by agricultural and food processing workers. Please stay tuned for updates.

## What's next?

Committee members were asked to share ideas and thoughts on how to prioritize time in 2022, and what efforts to focus on.

Committee Questions and ideas:

- Is there a handle on the federal infrastructure bill or in the state program that might be available to investigate to improve housing?
- Working together in the communication piece and making it clear and accessible for everybody.
- H2A Visa reform and Immigration reform.
- It is important for the organization to continue to push on some of the recommendations that require legislative action in terms of access to health care.
- How are we building relevant policy that can help prevent another health crisis in the future?
- Looking closer to reinstating or creating some housing standards for agriculture workers.

## Public Comments

No one from the public commented.

## Final Thoughts & Next Steps

As mentioned before, the next meeting will take place on January 10<sup>th</sup>. The committee will be discussing the frequency and length of the meetings moving forward. Joni Scheftel will be joining to do an update on COVID-19 efforts.

## Adjourn