

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

DATE: 08/30/2021

MINUTES PREPARED BY: MIKE ZASTOUPIL

Attendance

Present

- **Andrea Vaubel**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Colin Laffey**, Staff Attorney, Agricultural Worker Project, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)
- **Kiza Olson**, CHS Administrator, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services
- **Nicole Blissenbach**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry
- **Kevin Paap**, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau
- **Gary Wertish**, President, Minnesota Farmers Union
- **Rodolfo Gutierrez**, Executive Director, HACER
- **Sarah Berry**, Public Health Director, Waseca County | CHS Administrator, Le Sueur – Waseca Community Health Board
- **Lorrie Janatopoulos**, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Carrie Rigdon**, Operations and Planning Section Manager, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Mike Zastoupil**, Food Access Associate, Minnesota Department of Health
- **Maureen Ramirez**, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Cinthia Martinez**, CareerForce Office Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Absent

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

- **Jim Gleb**, President, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189
- **Kristi Halvarson**, Executive Director, Community Health Service, Inc.
- **Tamara Nelsen**, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council
- **Emilia Gonzalez Avalos**, Executive Director, Unidos MN
- **Hamse Warfa**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Susan Bishop**, Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Health, and Migrant Agricultural Worker Response Lead, ICS

Guests Present

- Wendy Spanier, South Field Operations Supervisor – FPLS, MDH
- Blake Nordin, North Field Operations Supervisor – FPLS, MDH
- Angie Wheeler, Program Manager – FPLS, MDH

Agenda

- 1:00 PM **Welcome**
- 1:05 PM **Approve Minutes & Meeting Agenda**
- 1:10 PM **Guest Introductions**
- 1:15 PM **Committee Updates**
- 1:20 PM **Discussion of Housing Issues**
- 2:05 PM **Prioritizing Housing Issues**
- 2:35 PM **Migrant Services Consortium**
- 2:50 PM **Public Comments**
- 2:55 PM **Final Thoughts & Next Steps**
- 3:00 PM **Adjourn**

Meeting notes

Approve Minutes & Agenda

Sarah Berry moved, Kevin Paap second. Approved.

Discussion of Housing Issues

Question #1

- Availability
- Affordability
- Safe and adequate housing- Just because its available does not mean it is safe
 - Frequent Inspections
- Housing and employment tie- If someone no longer works in that location, what happens to their housing?

Question #2

- Does it make sense to have one entity that covers season migrant workers?
- Better coordination- It is not clean on who is doing what
- It is important for the people doing the hiring to be involved in this
- What sort of incentives can we offer the employers/owners?
- Affordability for both workers and employers

Question #3

- Legislative changes

Prioritizing Housing Issues

Technical difficulties with the Whiteboard function in Microsoft Teams prevented this activity from occurring. Carrie and Maureen used the time to document the ideas from the housing discussion in a Word document.

Migrant Services Consortium

The Executive Order states:

“The Committee will work with, and provide regular updates to, the Minnesota Migrant Services Consortium, facilitated by the Minnesota Department of Education(“MDE”).”

Susan Bishop has been giving regular updates the Consortium so far, and Rodolfo is also a regular attendee of the Consortium meetings. Now that the committee is in Phase 2 and developing policy recommendations, the Consortium would like to be more involved in giving feedback on proposed policy solutions. Noemi Trevino, who works at MDE and organizes the Consortium meetings, has invited any members from this committee to attend the next three

Consortium meetings (September, October, November) to have an engaged discussion about any proposed policy ideas with the members of the Consortium. Maureen Ramirez is taking the lead on this collaboration, so please contact her with any questions.

Public Comments

None.

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

Since we have a limited number of full committee meetings to draft policy recommendations by December 1st, we are going to establish a working group for each topic to spend time between meetings drafting policy recommendations. Since there are three topics (Housing, Workplace Safety, and Fair Labor Practices), the support staff asked for five volunteers from the committee to begin working on the “Housing” working group. The following staff volunteered:

- Colin Laffey
- Sarah Berry
- Nicole Blissenbach
- Kevin Paap (limited capacity)
- Gary Wertish (limited capacity)

Decisions

- None.

Action items

- Committee members interested in attending the next Migrant Services Consortium meeting on September 8th will reach out to Maureen for information on how to join.
- Volunteers for the “Housing” working group will meet and beginning drafting policy recommendations with the help of support staff.

Next Meeting

Monday, September 13th, 2021 from 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer or mobile app

[Click here to join the meeting](#)