

Commission Meeting Minutes

October 1, 2020



Attendees

Heather Tallman, Dana Kosco, Angela Grant, Leah Harmon, Shelby Huff, John Roeder (LG office), Andrew Carty, Director Bruce Kettler, Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch, Natasha Cox, Nathan Shoaf (Sitting in for Tamara Benjamin), Jodi Golden (LG office), Seth Grant, Bob White, Thom England, Craig Baker, Marcus Agresta, 2-3 unidentified callers

Welcome & Introductions

Heather started the meeting off with a welcome and introductions of new faces - Natasha Cox – newest Indiana Grown Commission member

Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch Comments

“Thanks for sharing time on your schedule with me. I want to give a shout out to Indiana Grown and Heather. They are doing a lot to help members and farmers during this COVID-19 time period. We need to continue to do everything we can to help Indiana farmers and businesses. Thanks for having me on the call and I am happy to listen.”

COVID – 19 What have we been hearing at Indiana Grown?

We have been gathering information regarding COVID-19 from our members. We sent out a survey to all members and have received about 80 responses. We continue to hear feedback asking us to keep promoting local and spreading the word of buying from local businesses/farmers. Some members are surviving and pivoting to make things work and others are closing their doors. A lot of responses have been asking about assistance and CFAP. So, our team has been sharing all information we can on those topics. We also have been sharing a lot of information related to available grants. We have been directing everyone to visit the grants page via the ISDA website along with the Government assistance websites regarding the CFAP and other funds available for farmers/people in the ag community.

Commission member introductions/feedback about COVID

Craig Baker – Restaurant industry has its bright and dark marks. Some people are having the best weeks ever and other businesses are closing their doors.

Natasha Cox – Her first meeting as a new commission member. She is a Regional Vice President for Farm Credit as well as corn and soybean farmer. Since March FC has been working closely with many farmers and businesses to help them with various financial needs. Lots of stress in marketplace and they have seen an uptick in applications, especially as families are looking more to purchasing local/directly from the farmers.

Seth Grant – Eskenazi Health Director of Food Strategy. They have been very busy keeping dollars in Indiana to help support local and find local foods. Doubled their efforts to feed the hungry. Partnered with Gleaners and are helping distribute food boxes. They have feed over 200,000 meals to the community in the last few months. He would like to see more engagement with Indiana farmers/distributors. Some of his concerns around the food boxes are that they source a lot of produce from out of state, why aren't we using local products. Especially with farmers struggling and hearing them say there is no advocate for them. Indiana Grown has been in the trenches and without Heather I

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don't know where we would be. Seth would like to walk away from meeting with what can we do better, how we can help more farmers and support the local operations/local consumers.

Heather Tallman – Every week there is a food pantry call for food hubs/pantries/local food councils. Indy Hunger leads the call. We remind folks on the call that there are local farmers who have gleaned needs that might not be able to currently sell product.

Marcus Agresta – It has been an interesting last 6 months. They have seen a lot of customers close and the industry have changed drastically, along with consumers who are/aren't going out to eat. Folks can't keep their doors open with everything they are faced with. Piazza has extended terms and cut back service levels to help maintain their customers. They have had to lay off a lot of people. Currently about 70% of normal business, but at all time low they are 30% of business. Kids going back to school and students back in seats would help as then we can feed them. We need the people to come back into INDY for conventions and businesses/restaurants/hotels. It took Piazza 3 times to get into the USDA food box program and to get granted that business. The government did a poor job of awarding the box business. The project should be supporting local farmers. But it would be beneficial to keep it around.

Bob White – PR at Eskenazi Health is doing a great job they are always on the news. USDA dropped the ball with the food boxes. At Farm Bureau they called USDA to draw attention to the blind spots/missing links. It has upset the entire distribution and network. Processors with delay of getting animals in and some farms had to euthanize animals because of the bottle neck/delays at the meat processor facilities. Worked with Heather to get farmers markets opening and moving this spring. That was very important as getting those farmers markets open helped many farmers have a market/place to sell their products. Farm Bureau even involved DOT and allowing temp CDL workers/workers getting their licenses earlier this spring when all the branches were closed during spring planting/spraying season. Farm Bureau created a policy team over food issues to brainstorm ideas to take to the general assembly to get regulatory relief to get things going. Farm Bureau is trying hard to fight for the small farmers as well as all farmers.

Thom England – Ivy Tech is about 60% down on student size. Only 18 classes in person. The rest are all online. IUPUI numbers are up and more students are enrolled compared to last year. 43% of restaurants will probably close in the next 3 months or they are on the verge. Restaurants can't order as much product with lower numbers/lower sales. So this makes it harder on them to have purchasing power/making it harder for them to purchase local foods. Everything downtown is basically 0% business or still closed. Agribusiness/ag tourism is busy now this time of year and hopefully those farmers will pick up business as people want to get out and enjoy fall.

Nathan Shoaf – sitting in for Purdue's Tamara Benjamin → Purdue tried to react quickly to communicating with growers/farmers to get farmers markets open and provide guidance. Trying their best and be as available as possible to help farmers. They have been doing a lot of grant work and field work. Trying to connect farmers with optimal resources to help them the best they can. Extension educators are in each Indiana county and continue to be valuable.

ISDA Director Bruce Kettler – Appreciate the commissioners and your participation. Indiana Grown continues to grow and have new members join on a regular basis. Thanks to everyone for all your help and time commitment.

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ISDA Economic Director Andrew Carty – Appreciate the good discussion, we as a whole department recognize the frustration and the headaches with everything COVID-19 related. We try to share and connect people with resources as much as we can. We advocate and are very active with voicing ISDA to the national level. Normally these federal programs would probably take years to build and implement, but the government was able to roll these out in weeks. We are voicing the concerns and getting those up the chain. Food Alliance Network is working to make connections to connect farmers/businesses/food pantries etc. We are facing budget constrictions and how we can use funds. Any ideas to be creative to use funding to get more done, are greatly appreciated.

Current Indiana Grown Projects

Media outreach – We are only a team of 3 and trying our best to utilize was resources we have. We are pitching media and not paying for it. Every Saturday we have members on WISH TV segments. This is earned media that is free to us and members. Recently Channel 6 news - RTV6 has filmed a series over Indiana Grown members/farmers to share what they are doing and how they are overcoming COVID-19 difficulties. The RTV6 segments should air in the next week or 2.

Indiana Grown on the Road Videos – Check out our YouTube Videos. Heather and Dana show up at member locations to film about their operation to help promote members and what they do.

Looking Local with Indiana Grown – This is Indiana Grown’s public facing newsletter. We talk about seasonal produce and seasonal Agritourism operations. It is sent out to over 30,000 different sources monthly.

Produce Pointers – The produce one pager pointers are used in the Looking Local publications as well as they are shared on our website. We also will share these with Indiana Grown 4 Schools. Each one page Produce Pointer highlights a seasonal produce item such as sweet corn, asparagus, etc.

Instagram Takeover – Every Tuesday we give member’s coverage over our social media to help them share their stories/business by letting them “take over” our Instagram.

Indiana Grown Farm to School – The program and schools in general are thinking about how we can get packaged food in schools for kids. We need to be sensitive as they are looking more for safety such as packaged foods, but we also want them to utilize local when and if they can.

Upcoming Indiana Grown Projects

E-Commerce project – We are near completion of this project and are partnering with ISBDC to bring this project to life. This project will address a lot of comments and feedback we have received over the years and last several months. Helping provide COVID relief to allow members to sell their products online at no cost to our members.

IU Sustainable Food Systems Consumer Map Project – We are working with our partners at IU to build a map of members/non-members who sell products online, so that we can share with the public. This online map will live on our website and is being developed at no cost. There will be several layers (e.g., online sales, farmers markets, retailers/grocery stores who supply local Indiana products).

Open discussion

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Natasha Cox – How can we change our business model to sustain business especially without government subsidies? Hypothetically how do we survive this year but also thrive after this year?

Heather Tallman – We can elevate voices and concerns. We take a lot of calls and we build trust within ag community. They tell us things that they know we cannot help with, but we can voice up the ladder and help them be heard.

Bob White – Wants more details over the Meat Processor Grant. It's only \$4 M and they will take what they can get. Can the businesses/smaller lockers truly expand quickly enough to make a difference to help the farmers? What are the criteria and all the details?

Bruce Kettler – A lot of information is on the ISDA website. We are building out an FAQ. The application will be live on Monday morning of October 5th. Part of the funding can go to growth and expansion. The CARES dollars are not for brand new businesses/new brick and mortar. It is matching grant program. To best utilize these funds, we must think about what can lead to better resilience of the system. If they can build up their capacity – it can help the down stream farmers to have folks process more animals.