



## OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES

### **MAELC Board Meeting June 10, 2024 Northfield High School**

*The June 10, 2024 MAELC board meeting was called to order by Rep. Pursell at 10:02 a.m.  
Rep. Pursell assumed duties of the chair as both co-chairs were unable to attend.*

#### **Members Present:**

Rep. Paul Anderson\*, Patrice Bailey\*, Lindsey Brockberg, Brian Buhr\*, Sen. Gary Dahms\*, Pat Dingels, Nikki Flaaen, Sen. Heather Gustafson\*, Michelle Kamenov, Steve Olson, Chris Ovrebo, Craig Peters (on behalf of Terry Gaalswyk), Rep. Kristi Pursell, Amy Smith

**Members Not Present:** Sen. Aric Putnam, Rep. Brad Tabke

*Quorum was established.*

#### **Staff:**

Sarah Dornink (Executive Director), Kari Schwab (Program Coordinator)

#### **Guests:**

Tom Appel (MAAE), Ali Bouta\* (Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum), Ginger (Breen) Claussen\* (Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum), Gail Donkers (MFU), Amy Durand (South Central College), Nathan Hanel (Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence), Kristen Harner (Northfield Public Schools AFNR Advisory Committee), Matt Hillmann (Northfield Public Schools), Sue Knott (MAITC), Pam Koenen (MAAE), Tina LeBrun (Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence), Natasha Mortenson\* (Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum), Keith Olander (AgCentric), Eric Sawatzke (West Central Area Schools / MAAE)\*, Ann Marie Ward (MAITC)\*

*\*attending via Zoom*

#### **Welcome**

Matt Hillmann, Superintendent of Northfield Public Schools, welcomed everyone to the high school. He explained the background of how they started their agriculture program, including hiring T.J. Austin as the agriculture teacher.

#### Video Welcome

T.J. Austin, agriculture teacher at Northfield High School, provided a welcome via video. He was unable to attend the meeting due to a previously scheduled professional development conference.

#### Northfield Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (AFNR) Advisory Welcome

Kristin Harner, parent and AFNR advisory member, expressed her appreciation for MAELC grant support to help start agriculture programs and the continuing professional development opportunities through MAAE to support the agriculture teachers. The community has really enjoyed having an

agriculture program in the Northfield area, and they appreciate the continued support of the AFNR program.

### **Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

*Ovrebo moved to approve the agenda and minutes. Olson seconded. Motion prevailed.*

### **Post-Secondary Presentations**

#### Minnesota State Agriculture Centers of Excellence

Keith Olander, Director of the Northern Agricultural Center of Excellence (AgCentric) and Tina LeBrun, Director of the Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence (SACE), provided an overview of Minnesota State's post-secondary Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) programs and post-secondary students. More information can be found at [minnstate.edu/afnrcareers](http://minnstate.edu/afnrcareers).

Some of the challenges for post-secondary AFNR programs include recruitment and enrollment of students, finding qualified instructors, and convincing students of the long-term value in higher education (low unemployment rates are typically correlated with lower enrollment in two-year schools). FY25 enrollment has increased by 11%, however AFNR programs have flat to slightly positive enrollment.

Projects on the horizon include:

- National Science Foundation (NSF)/Advance Technical Education (ATE) Robotics and Automation in agriculture program. They will work with Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE) to develop secondary curriculum and train teachers across the country. This is a three-year project.
- Minnesota State University, Mankato will begin offering a four-year Agronomy degree. This is provided in partnership with South Central College. In the Midwest, it will be the most effective way for students to receive a four-year degree in Agronomy through either a 2+2 or 3+1 degree program, depending on how the student wants to work with the colleges.

It was asked how to better translate high school AFNR students into increased post-secondary enrollment. Olander explained that competition with healthcare and manufacturing career training is very strong. AFNR needs to do a better job communicating about the career opportunities and post-secondary training options available. Olander also mentioned that offering resources to students may assist with increased enrollment, such as financial support and opportunities to engage with industry earlier in the decision-making process. Peters noted it would help to get more students into high school AFNR programs, however, this can be challenging with all the required courses for high school graduation. Finding qualified instructors at the post-secondary level is also very challenging; individuals either do not have the degree or recency of experience to meet credentialing requirements.

*\*See presentation for more information (included in board packet).*

#### University of Minnesota-College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS)

Brian Buhr, Dean of CFANS, provided an overview of the college. He specifically noted there have been a lot of leadership transitions throughout the University including a new President who will start in July and Dr. Julie Grossman being named the CFANS Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs.

The college has been focusing on core strategies around recruitment, enrollment and attracting students into AFNR. Similar to Minnesota State, nursing and health careers are competitors, as well as

technical sciences (computer science, data sciences, electrical engineering, etc.). They are trying to raise awareness that AFNR works across these sectors.

Enrollment in CFANS remains strong. It is 2% higher in acceptance/admissions to date, although still lower than pre-pandemic numbers. It was asked if the UMN offers articulation agreements. Buhr noted that they are exploring a joint Agricultural Education program with the UMN-Crookston (UMC). There is a new 2+2 program in Nutrition with UMC the offers accreditation and licensing opportunities. This also allows students to seamlessly move into a master's program on the Twin Cities campus. There is a newly formed consortium of UMN-St. Paul colleges looking at investing in the campus as a "living laboratory" to build awareness within the Twin Cities about the importance of AFNR.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

### **Common Fund Grant Committee Report**

Ovrebo provided a brief overview of the Common Fund applicants. There were three applicants for the 2023-2024 Round 2 Common Fund grants, with two recommended for funding.

- **Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum – Agriculture Exhibits for the Mini Sota Museum** (requested amount - \$30,000; recommended funding - \$22,200.89)

Ali Bouta, Ginger (Breen) Claussen, and Natasha Mortensen presented their project. The vision of the Mini Sota Agricultural Children's museum is to be a destination in Benson, MN that brings individuals from all around to celebrate and investigate agriculture and create an environment where children of all ages can explore the diverse field of agriculture through interactive exhibits. Exhibits will feature child-led exploration, STEM concepts, and focus on agricultural literacy and career exploration.

*\*See presentation for more information (included in board packet).*

- **Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom – Strengthening the Food for Thought Geography Resource** (recommended full funding - \$23,660)

Sue Knott, Education Specialist with MAITC, presented their proposed project. The Food for Thought Resource is focused on connecting agriculture and geography. This will be the sixth edition of Food for Thought and will utilize the 2022 USDA/NASS census data to create maps and align with New Minnesota Social Studies standards that were adopted in March 2024. Most of the grant request supports GIS/GPS experts for map updates, and Dr. Nic Jelinski with UMN to develop components similar to Google Earth with agricultural components, making them accessible to high school students.

*\*See presentation for more information (included in board packet).*

*Ovrebo moved to approve the Common Fund grant projects as presented. Brockberg seconded. Motion prevailed unanimously.*

### **Grant Committee Report**

Brockberg provided an overview of the proposed 2023-2024, Round 2 Strategic Initiatives grant projects (Round 27-2). There were 16 applicants requesting over \$204,000. Twelve were recommended for funding, totaling \$99,468.

*Brockberg moved to approve the Strategic Initiatives grant winners as presented. Ovrebo seconded. Motion prevailed unanimously.*

*\*Dr. Buhr, Kamenov and Dr. Smith abstained.*

## **Scholarship Committee Report**

Smith presented the 2024-2025 Undergraduate awardees. She highlighted that MAELC has been providing student financial support through scholarships for 25 years. There were two applications received in the Diversity scholarship category, however the committee felt the applications were not of high enough quality to bring in for interviews and encouraged MAELC staff to provide feedback to both applicants with encouragement to apply again for the July 1, 2024 deadline.

## **Financial Report**

### Operating Budget

Dornink reported on the operating budget, explaining there will be a few final costs that show up at the end of the fiscal year, which closes on June 30, 2024. The two items under "Sponsorships" (line 30) include the Ag Policy Experience (APEX) and FFA State Convention. The MAAE Outstanding Teacher Mentor Award sponsorship will also come out of FY24 funds; the award is given out at the summer conference. All Undergraduate Scholarship dollars have gone out (line 36), and an additional Diversity Scholarship has been paid (line 39). There is still one other Diversity Scholarship to be paid, however, they chose to receive the funds in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025. Dornink reminded the board that the full award for these scholarships is \$5,000, however, half comes out of MAELC funds, and the other half is through anonymous donor dollars. If there are any carryover funds Dornink explained they would be utilized for the Listening Session and Blueprint expenses.

### Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)/Special Project Budget

Dornink reviewed the MDA/Special Projects Budget, explaining grants are awarded in two programs – Common Fund and Strategic Initiatives. Awardees receive 75% of funding up front and the remaining 25% upon the submission of a final report and invoice. Both the Ashby Public Schools (line 33) and Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association (line 38) grant projects came in under budget so those unspent dollars will not be requested from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) in the next reimbursement report. Letters for the upcoming June 30, 2024 deadline were sent in May (Round 26-2, lines 44-55). The new projects approved by the board for the Teach Ag Communications Project (line 75) and the Summer Internship (line 78) will have additional expenses before the end of the month. Finally, the paperwork and the invoice for reimbursement has been submitted to the MDA for both the first 75% payment of those grants approved in Round 26 and the final 25% payments of those grants approved in Round 25-2.

### FBM Budget

This budget includes funds for FBM Challenge Grants, FBM Additional Instructor grants, Mentor Program grants, and FBM evaluation. Dornink will submit a progress report at the end of the June in order to receive the second payment from the MDA. One payment has gone out for a FBM Instructor Capacity Building grant (line 21) to St. Cloud. Minnesota West and Alexandria have submitted invoices that may appear on this fiscal year's budget by the end of the month. Final reports are due from the four mentor programs and the professional development grants on June 30; upon receipt they can request their final 25% of funding.

*Kamenov moved to approve the financial report. Smith seconded. Motion prevailed.*

## **2024-2025 (FY25) Budget Approval**

Dornink reviewed the 2024-2025 (FY25) Operating, MDA/Special Projects and FBM budgets.

### Operating Budget

CFANS is covering the increased cost to salary, so the budget has increased slightly. \$10,000 is budgeted for graduate student scholarships as there will be two eligible students. Most of the remaining categories remain the same as they did for FY24.

### MDA/Special Project Budget

\$350,000 comes through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to MAELC for grants and special projects. Amounts within each overarching category (grants, Teach Ag Communications, and Internship) were approved last year as biennial projects.

### FBM Budget

Funding comes through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) for this budget, which runs over the FY24/FY25 biennium. The FY25 budget has been updated accordingly with the projects and amounts having been previously approved on a biennial basis.

*Olson moved to approve the 2024-2025 budget as presented. Ovrebo seconded. Motion prevailed.*

## **Executive Director Report**

Dornink thanked everyone for attending the meeting, including a special thank you to T.J. Austin and Northfield High School for hosting the meeting. The next MAELC board meeting will be held virtually in September, with an in-person meeting in December.

Dornink thanked Lindsey Brockberg for her service to the board. This is her last meeting as she transitions out as the MAAE President in July and will also be moving into a new role with the Minnesota Department of Education as the AFNR Education Specialist. Eric Sawatzke, agriculture teacher at West Central Area High School, will join the board once he becomes MAAE President-Elect.

Dr. Amy Smith's term is ending and the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) is next up on the rotation of Agricultural Education-Teacher Preparation Institution representative, however, UMC is in the process of hiring an Agricultural Education professor. Once they have selected their person, it will be decided whether they feel ready to serve on the MAELC board or if that should be delayed. One option would be to have Dr. Smith extend her term while the UMC individual gets settled.

Highlights since the December board meeting include Schwab returning from maternity leave in January. Dornink attended the MAAE Ag Tech Conference and had a booth at the Minnesota School Board Association where she hosted a roundtable presentation with Dr. T.J. Brown (South Central College) and Tim Barrett (MDE) titled, "Protect yourself from accidents this school year with the Minnesota Secondary School Safety Guidelines for laboratory and shop spaces." Dornink also presented to the agriculture teachers in the Teacher Induction Program (TIP) about funding their programs and Schwab hosted a panel at the Women's Agriculture Leadership Conference on agriculture policy. Dornink also served as a grant reviewer for the MDA's Urban Agriculture grant program. MAELC coordinated a tour of the Academy for Sciences and Agriculture (AFSA), with Senators Putnam and Gustafson attending to learn more about the school and MAELC's history with getting them started. Dornink thanked Keith Olander and Tina LeBrun for the opportunity to present to both the FBM Statewide Advisory Committee and to meet with the Deans of Farm Business Management

(FBM) program about the Challenge Grant, MAELC's FBM research projects, and the upcoming AFNR Education Listening Sessions. In addition, Dornink and Schwab have attended numerous advisory meetings where they serve as members including AgCentric, SACE, Southwest Minnesota State University, Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership, and Minnesota Ag in the Classroom. There has been a lot of effort spent on the Teach Ag Communications project and the AFNR Education Blueprint and Listening sessions.

Legislative breakfasts were co-hosted with MAAE around the state in early January. A snowstorm caused two of the locations to move to virtual; over 100 individuals attended including 16 legislators.

MAELC was again very involved with FFA activities during the legislative session. Dornink and Schwab assisted with the FFA Ag Policy Experience (APEX) conference and FFA Day at the Capitol. Fifty-one students attended APEX, and 240 students registered for FFA Day. This was an especially challenging year with the legislature shutting down for presidential caucus night, however, students still had a great experience at the Capitol with a tour of the House Chambers and hearing from a panel of legislative staff. The FFA State Officers were also able to meet with some legislators. Dornink thanked Senators Dahms and Putnam who stayed at the Capitol and provided special greeting to FFA members. Prior to FFA State Convention, Dornink assisted with the FFA Star in Agriscience interviews, and during the state convention staff brought greetings to members and helped coordinate the Teach Ag booth and signing event, which recognized 23 students who have committed to study Agricultural Education with the intent to teach in the classroom. Dornink congratulated Senator Gustafson and Flaaen on receiving their Honorary State Degrees.

MAELC facilitates the Minnesota Team AgEd group and hosted an in-person meeting in March. Work continued on the strategic focus areas, and also included discussion on targeted Issues. The top area determined to focus on was teacher burnout, which will continue to be a topic of discussion at the next virtual meeting at the end of July.

Minnesota renewed its commitment to participate in the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program; MAELC serves as the chair. STAR is a statewide committee dedicated to addressing the agriculture teacher shortage and focuses on recruitment and retention strategies. This past winter, gift cards were awarded to Teacher of Teachers and a "welcome" gift was sent to all new agriculture teachers in Minnesota. "Survival" gifts were mailed to all Agricultural Education student teachers in Minnesota, with a gift card delivered to each of their cooperating instructors. During MAAE's AgTech conference, MAELC helped sponsor the Midwest Regional FAST Symposium for 30 future agriculture teachers from five neighboring institutions. A "Change Lives, Teach Ag" workshop was held in March in Willmar, MN for FFA and 4-H members, along with a shortened version offered during the FFA State Convention.

The Agricultural Education internship program is in its tenth year and is up and running. Six students are currently out at high schools, working with their AFNR programs. Dornink and Schwab will have the opportunity to meet with them on an AFNR program tour of Faribault and Owatonna high schools. They will also meet with the interns during the MAAE Summer Conference. Each intern will also "takeover" the Teach Ag Minnesota's social media pages throughout the summer.

Other events include Dornink completing professional development around meeting facilitation (paid for by UMN-CFANS) and the Principal Investigator training to be able to apply for grants through the University of Minnesota.

Dornink asked the board to consider how the June and December board meetings should be offered (virtual, hybrid, or in-person). It was agreed that at least hybrid should be offered, with many members expressing appreciation for that option. Others mentioned they also appreciate the opportunity to attend and connect in person. MAELC staff will look into technology options and consider which future meeting locations will offer the best set-up for hybrid attendance.

#### Teach Ag Communications Project Update

An RFP was sent out in January to hire a contractor. Five proposals were received, with Vantage Point Marketing out of Morton, MN being selected and starting in March 2024. They are helping create a larger communications plan, social media, handouts, videos, securing stock photos, etc. to set up for future success even if legislative funding does not continue. The teachagmn.org website will also be re-vamped to build in better security features and navigability. Redwood Valley Technical Services has been hired for the website portion of the project and will work with Vantage Point directly.

#### Listening Sessions & Blueprint Update

True North Strategy (TNS) has been hired to facilitate the set up of the listening session processes, analyzing data received, setting-up for committee work, and possibly writing the 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint. Twelve facilitators have been secured to aid with the listening session breakouts. TNS helped write the facilitator guide, and training has been completed with the facilitators. There will be five sectors of discussion, including Agricultural Literacy, School-Based AFNR Education, Post-Secondary AFNR Education, Teacher Preparation in Agricultural Education Ed, and FBM.

MAELC staff have set the goals for discussion; listening session participants will provide feedback and strategies around these areas within a sector over the next five years:

1. Students – increasing access, awareness and participation
2. Programming – improving content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry
3. Instructors – recruiting, retaining and supporting highly qualified individuals

Committees will start their work in August; goal is to have it completed for the 2025 legislative session.

#### **Legislative Update**

Legislators had the opportunity to provide reflections on the recent legislative session. Items discussed relevant to MAELC included the Farm-to-School program being expanded, including increased access for early childcare. This will provide students with locally sourced food and healthy options, along with the opportunity for students to learn more about agriculture and where their food comes from. Additional funding was secured for the young farmers program. The definition of “farmer” was updated, which opens grant eligibility from MDA.

#### **Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators (MAAE) Update**

Brockberg provided an update about MAAE. They have been busy providing professional development opportunities to agriculture teachers and supporting non-traditional pathway teachers. The summer conference will be held July 8-11, 2024 in Plymouth, MN, and the AgTech conference will be held January 2025 in St. Cloud.

MAAE’s concerns include the growth in agricultural education and keeping an available supply of teachers. School districts are experiencing major budget cuts this year, and they want to help teachers

afford professional development opportunities. They also have a large concern with the process of applying for and receiving the MDE Agricultural Education Summer grant. This grant provides funds for extended programming in AFNR programs; the local district must provide matching funds. Flaaen explained the application process changed for this year's funding, becoming much more difficult. Tom Appel, Executive Director of MAAE, provided a brief history of the grant program and the issues that have occurred this year. Around 2012-2014, schools were making budget reductions and summer contracts were being cut. In 2016, MAAE approached the legislature to create a matching grant program for school districts; \$250,000 was allocated for the program providing up to 20 days per teacher (and then matched by the district for a maximum of 40 days). The focus of the grant is on a teacher's summer programming, such as leadership activities with students, SAE visits, county fairs, etc.

Major changes were implemented by the MDE for the FY2024 grant program, with the focus and process evolving away from the original intent. New in 2024 is a requirement for activities to be "credit-bearing" (tied to a course-code), however communication about what counts has as credit-bearing has been vague. FFA member specific activities have also been noted as not eligible for these grant dollars. Eric Sawatzke, agriculture teacher, explained AFNR summer programming focuses more on extended student learning but not necessarily a new credit-bearing opportunity, and that it has been very difficult to understand what would qualify for approval. Timeliness of the process and communication has also been an issue. For example, notification of grant awards went out in early May and no activities could be started until June 3 in order to meet grant requirements.

Olson asked if a rule revision process occurred. Appel was not sure; however, he noted the original legislation charged MDE to administer the grant process. Kamenov explained the MDE grant policies, as a whole, have changed so MDE was no longer seen as a flow-through agency, and could report outcomes, number of students served, etc. (so all grants likely saw some sort of change).

At this point, MAAE wants to make the board aware of these issues and is asking the MDE and the legislature to consider what will be done if there with unspent funds from FY2024, as the new requirements and time constraints make cause some districts to turn down an award. They also want to ensure the three-circle model/intracurricular nature of AFNR education is understood.

Legislators noted it can be helpful to utilize administration and state agencies to navigate issues that occur between legislation and implementation. It was encouraged that during the next legislative session, both the Senate and House Education Committees understand why summer programming is an important part of education and the issues that are occurring. All legislators on the MAELC board expressed they are happy to collaborate with the parties involved. Appel explained both Commissioners Petersen and Jett, along with Senator Putnam are aware of the situation. He clarified they are not asking for new funds, but the ability to utilize existing funds.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

### **Minnesota FFA Foundation Update**

Dingels provided an overview of the FFA Foundation and the work they do to support AFNR teachers, programs and students. She specifically highlighted the specialized agricultural license plate as one of their newer programs for raising funds. For student support, the Foundation focuses on youth leadership, leadership camps, teacher preparation programs, student scholarships for post-secondary education and the FFA state convention.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*



### **Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Update**

Bailey thanked legislators for their work supporting agricultural opportunities. The Emerging Farmer office has hired two new people. MDA has also spent a lot of time implementing the 2023 legislative initiatives.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

### **University Agricultural Education Updates**

#### Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU)

Dornink highlighted a few pieces from the written report. SMSU will be hiring an Agriculture and Business Outreach Recruiter; they are currently in the search process. They are also hosting a brand-new summer ag camp. Smith noted SMSU has a new work-based learning endorsement embedded in their curriculum. SMSU is concerned about enrollment numbers, having about five in Agricultural Education currently. Their goal is to have 15 students in the major.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

#### University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC)

*\*No written report was available.*

#### University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Smith highlighted the re-launch and refresh of their Agricultural Education Master's program. They have spent a lot of time focusing on recruitment and outreach within Agricultural Education overall. They will have seven student-teachers for Spring 2024 (5 undergrads, 2 graduate students). Finally, Smith will be on sabbatical for the Spring 2025 semester.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

### **Minnesota State & Farm Business Management (FBM) Update**

Peters highlighted a few pieces from the written report, including the Career Connections at the FFA State Convention being a great success. There have been a lot of faculty changes in FBM; about 15% are in transition; pay in education vs industry is a challenge. For the FBM database, there was an 8% increase in submissions.

Peters also shared comments on behalf of President Gaalswyk. Minnesota State's new Chancellor, Scott Olson, has been great to work with. The FAFSA changes have been a major issue for all post-secondary institutions. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a hot topic for discussion, including looking into the possibility of offering a certificate program.

*\*See handout for more information (included in board packet).*

### **Other Business/Announcements**

The next board meeting will be held virtually in September 2024. Upcoming dates of events and activities were highlighted (included on the back of agenda). Dornink encouraged people to register for an AFNR Education Listening Session. Kamenov noted the CTE Summit will be held November 19 and 20.

*Rep. Pursell adjourned the meeting at 2:14 p.m.*