

Healthy Soils Task Force (HSTF) Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020, 1:00 p.m. CST

Conducted through Zoom

Hosted by Chairman Keith Berns

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. CST.

Members Present:

Jerry Allemann, Keith Berns, Bob Bettger, Hannah Birge, Ron Bolze, Lisa Lunz, Mike McDonald, Nate Pflueger, Charles Shapiro, Jeff Steffen, Steve Tucker, Ray Ward, Steve Wellman, Greg Whitmore

Members Absent:

Richard Bartek

Ex Officio Members:

Senator Tim Gragert (present), Senator Julie Slama (absent)

Staff and Audience Attending:

Steve Roth, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Aaron Hird, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Alex Brechbill, staff, Senator Gragert; Alan Moeller, Nebraska Elder Climatology Legacy; Boone McAfee, Nebraska Corn Board; Kim Davis, staff, Senator Gragert; Eric Zach, Nebraska Game and Parks; Duane Hovorka, Izaak Walton League; Heidi Borg, staff, Senator Slama; Scott Ritzman, Nebraska Soybean Board; Becky Ravenkamp, Lewis & Clark Natural Resources District; Bob Hilske, Nemaha Natural Resources District; David Potter, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District; Laura Field, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Rich Russell, Arrow Seed; George Cunningham, Nebraska Wildlife Federation; Ashley Kohls, Nebraska Cattlemen; and Martha Mamo, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Chairman Keith Berns stated that the Zoom meeting was being conducted under the Open Meetings Act, and virtually as allowed by Governor Ricketts Executive Order No. 30-26. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is available upon request.

Berns also noted that a Public Meeting Notice was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on Dec. 1, 2020. An affidavit of the notice is available for review upon request.

The agenda was accepted by acclamation as presented.

Whitmore moved to accept the minutes from the July 22, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Steffen. The motion passed by acclamation.

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The following is the financial report provided by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. It reflects expenditures by HSTF to date:

Healthy Soils Task Force Expenditures

GL Date	Type Exp	Payee	Total
8/20/2019	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$10.18
8/23/2019	Mileage	Lunz, Lisa	\$145.00
9/6/2019	Mileage	McDonald, Mike	\$23.78
9/6/2019	Parking	McDonald, Mike	\$7.50
10/8/2019	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$10.18
10/8/2019	Mileage	Lunz, Lisa	\$162.40
10/8/2019	Mileage	McDonald, Mike	\$112.42
10/22/2019	Mileage	Shapiro, Charles	\$102.80
10/24/2019	Mileage	Sen. Tim Gragert	\$150.80
11/5/2019	Mileage	Whitmore, Gregory	\$110.49
11/5/2019	NDA Car Rental	TSB	\$27.49
11/7/2019	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$10.18
12/3/2019	Mileage	Shapiro, Charles	\$141.52
12/3/2019	Parking	Shapiro, Charles	\$8.75
12/4/2019	Mileage	McDonald, Mike	\$23.44
12/19/2019	Mileage	Whitmore, Gregory	\$227.94
12/19/2019	Parking	Whitmore, Gregory	\$2.00
1/7/2020	Mileage	McDonald, Mike	\$48.50
1/16/2020	NDA Car Rental	TSB	\$26.56
2/18/2020	Mileage	McDonald, Mike	\$23.58
2/20/2020	Mileage	Allemann, Jerry	\$298.12
7/1/2020	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$10.18
7/6/2020	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$9.61
7/10/2020	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$12.44
8/4/2020	Meeting Notice	Lincoln Journal Star	\$11.31
Total:			\$ 1,717.17

The financial report was accepted as presented.

Berns opened up discussion on the HSTF report draft that is to be finalized and submitted to the Governor's office and the Nebraska Legislature's Agriculture Committee. The report, written and edited by the HSTF Writing Committee, was made public prior to the meeting.

Berns had each HSTF member provide comments on the draft report and then allowed guest attendees to comment as well.

The majority of HSTF members had positive comments regarding the report, with a few suggestions for editing and/or additions. Those comments (summarized by Mike McDonald below) ranged from having more emphasis on economic benefits of improving soil health, providing more details on precision agriculture and the use of manure, and clarifying the need for members of the HSTF to be included on any entities created as a result of the report.

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Ron Bolz—Kudos to the Committee and Task Force. The livestock section is enhanced, and I like the report—enough said.

Charles Shapiro—I am favor of the document. The reference to 1% SOM of page six needs to be changed to reflect the correct figures.

Ray Ward—The \$50 million looks aggressive but this is .11 cents an acre over five years and it is good figure to work from. I am in support of the report.

Hannah Birge—I appreciate the work by the Writing Committee and putting it out in front of so many groups. It is hard to be specific but get broad enough. Kudos.

Nathan Pflueger—For the most part it is a good report, but I am concerned about possibly removing Task Force members from the next steps. This needs to be changed and we can discuss later in the meeting.

Senator Gragert—I have been following and reading the Task Force report. Much good work and effort are evident. I feel that this is a strong and well-thought-out report.

Steve Wellman—I really appreciate the work and the passion. A lot of hard work. The group has gone “above and beyond” on the input sessions. Steve Wellman said he would vote no on approval of the report and expressed his concerns.

Mike McDonald—I strongly support the report. The twenty-five (one hour) input sessions with thirty groups from the range of Nebraska agriculture (i.e., FCS, Farm Bureau, UNL Agronomy) reflected the high importance of economics. I feel this and livestock-manure could be stronger in the report. The Task Force members are encouraged to be involved after the report is submitted and the implementation steps need to list this.

Jeff Steffens—It is a good report. The focus on economics and involvement of others is strong.

Jerry Alleman—I am impressed by the report and I agree with Mike on the economics.

Bob Bettger—Thank you to all the workers but particularly Keith. I like the report. I would like it to be more comprehensive (i.e., erosion and soil sedimentation). We need to create a new and unique entity because it is needed. We need a baseline for measurables including economics and soil health. The Nebraska NRCS has not done a state assessment in 15 years—it is needed.

Lisa Lunz—A thank you to the writers. As I look at the report a lot of my concerns have been addressed. I do not support the report. A lot of things are changing, i.e., the carbon market. I look at things differently. I am more interested in the carbon versus soil health. Lutz said she would vote no for approval of the report because she felt some of the content could be interpreted as negative on agriculture. Her other concerns included: not enough emphasis or direction on economic impacts; the report could have been simplified; and it does not address the diversity of soil profiles across the state.

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Steve Tucker—There are many points that I would like to address. I agree with Steve on not creating a tax-funded entity; we need a new group to coordinate soil health. Everybody has a stake in soil. We have to learn from soil health. We need to do it and place Nebraska on the map. The report is not perfect, but we must go forward.

Greg Whitmore—I thank everyone. I echo what Steve just said. If we do not lay it out, then where does it begin? I support the report. Keith said it well...if some persons are uncomfortable then we are probably on the right track. I am proud to support the report.

Berns mentioned that the Task Force sought input from 30 different farm groups and felt the report addressed many of the concerns expressed by the groups. However, he added that he did not know if the various groups planned to support the report.

Pflueger and McDonald discussed the involvement of the Task Force members and the steps after the report is submitted. The rationale and addition of a third working group (Precision Technology, Economics and Natural Resources) was presented.

Task Force member Ray Ward said he had to leave the meeting due to another appointment.

Following discussion, Bettger made a motion to approve the report as submitted with additional edits for grammar and graphic layouts as deemed appropriate. Seconded by Whitmore.

Voting yes: Allemann, Berns, Birge, Bettger, Bolze, McDonald, Pflueger, Shapiro, Steffen, Tucker and Whitmore.

Voting no: Wellman and Lunz

Not present: Bartek, Ward

Motion passed 11-2

Following the vote, Berns said that additional editing and graphic design was needed to complete the report. He said that he had consulted with his daughter (Rachel Gnagy) to get an estimate on cost for the final editing and design since she had done similar work for his company. Her estimate was \$500 to \$600.

Steffen then moved to allocate up to \$600 to have Rachel Gnagy edit and supply graphics for the final report. Tucker seconded the motion.

During discussion on the motion there were concerns expressed that the editing and graphic work needs to be put out for bids in order to be in line with State procedures. Based on that discussion, Steffen withdrew his motion and Tucker withdrew the second. A decision was eventually made to solicit RFPs for the graphic and design work on the report.

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The discussion then turned to how the final report should be distributed and in what form. Wellman pointed out that the only requirement under the statute that created the HSTF, is to submit a report to the Governor's office, and electronically to the Nebraska Legislature's Agriculture Committee.

Several HSTF members expressed their desire to have copies of the final report printed and distributed. Berns said given the amount of time invested by members to produce the report, he felt that it would be appropriate to have a professionally produced report that could be distributed as requested. Questions were raised as to the cost of distribution. It was suggested that the reports could be housed at the Department of Agriculture and copies could be picked up at the Nebraska State Office Building for those requesting them.

A motion was made by Bettger to spend up to \$3,000 to be used for color and bound copies of the final report. The number of copies would be determined by the funds allocated. Costs and timetable to complete the project is to be explored with the State of Nebraska Print shop first, then the University of Nebraska printing department as the next possible source. If neither of those entities is able to complete the project in a timely manner, RFPs will be solicited from the public. The motion was seconded by Steffen.

Voting yes: Allemann, Berns, Birge, Bettger, Bolze, Lunz, McDonald, Pflueger, Shapiro, Steffen, Tucker and Whitmore.

Voting no: Wellman

Not present: Bartek, Ward

Motion passed 12-1

When complete, an electronic version of the final report is expected to be posted on the HSTF page on the Nebraska Department of Agriculture website.

Berns thanked members of the Task Force and others who contributed to the effort to produce a report for the Governor and the Legislature's Agriculture Committee.

This was expected to be the last full meeting of the HSTF, as by statute, the Task Force shall terminate on Jan. 1, 2021.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m. CDT.