

RAIN Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

31 March 2016 at 19:00

Laird Hall, Pumpkin Point Road West, Echo Bay, ON

In Attendance: David Thompson (RAIN Project Coordinator), Christine O'Reilly (RAIN Research Technician), Dave Trivers (OMAFRA), Errol Caldwell (RAIN Co-Chair), Nadine Roach (Thessalon First Nation), Gord Hacker (Algoma Cattleman's Association), Tamara Ashawasega (Thessalon First Nation), Melissa Watson (RAIN Infrastructure Coordinator), Shawn Heard (East Algoma Community Futures Development Corporation), Edith Orr (Johnson Farmers' Market), Judy Hughes (Algoma Maple Syrup Producers), Ken MacLeod (Algoma Federation of Agriculture)

Regrets: Karen Speers (NOHFC), Arik Theijmeijer (FedNor), Alf Roberts (Algoma Soil and Crop Improvement Association), Jason Koivisto (Algoma Federation of Agriculture)

EC opened the meeting.

1. Review minutes of 5 May 2015 Advisory Committee Meeting
 - The only action point from that meeting was investigating raising the producer administration fee for the infrastructure project. The fee has no changed.
 - GH motioned to accept minutes as read. Seconded by EO. Motion passed.
2. Overview and purpose of RAIN's Advisory Committee
 - D Thompson outlined how Advisory Committee can be involved going forward by providing accountability to RAIN's purpose
 - EC elaborated on RAIN's current relationship with SSMIC and NORDIK: is RAIN going to move towards becoming a standalone organization?
 - D Thompson introduced revised vision statements to guide 2017 – 2019 initiatives. EO liked second option as it suggested connecting producers with opportunities beyond the north. SH says funder money goes into projects with vision statements that have the right buzzwords. D Trivers agreed, but added that the vision statement must appeal to funders and local agri-businesses, a difficult balance to strike when choosing words. SH pointed out that currently federal and provincial government priorities are closely aligned, which will narrow the field re: types of projects that receive funding. Suggested buzzwords from the meeting for potential inclusion in new vision statement include: innovation, market, build (not facilitate), sustainable, job creation/retention, value-added. Comment from D Trivers: get rid of "-ing"
 - D Thompson outlined four focuses of the pilot project: farm research, farm business development, market development, and knowledge transfer. He also summarized staff changes since previous meeting.
3. Evaluation of the pilot and past research and development projects

- D Thompson summarized results of pilot project: money leveraged, acres involved in infrastructure projects, SNAPP, impacts of market development projects Algoma Table and Eat Algoma Food Festival
 - D Trivers wondered about tracking non-government funding leveraged in future. EC pointed out that is harder to track but very important. Need to develop a feedback mechanism.
 - RAIN is unable to fund Eat Algoma food festival this year, but would like to see the event run. Are other organizations interested in taking it on? D Thompson has spoken to Algoma Farmers' Market. D Trivers suggested approaching other local community clubs as well. EO suggested August not a good time for market gardeners, that the event needs a clear target audience, and that exhibitors should know what the goal of the event is to deliver a clear and consistent message to attendees and the press. D Trivers suggested including wild food in a future Eat Algoma, because it is important locally. EC added SNAPP grant recipients may be a good fit as exhibitors. JH did not like last year's restaurant focus.
 - Buy Algoma, Buy Fresh. EC wants to see a label/marketing in stores so consumers can find produce from Algoma. EO asks how many people are local farmers feeding in Algoma District?
4. Current status and commitments for projects 2016-2017
- CO'R presented summary of field research for 2016, the (re)structuring of the funding/focus of the on-farm research program, measuring success in the research program, and ideas that are being investigated for 2017 – 2019 projects. See attached slideshow for project summaries.
 - GH comment on research program: farmers want more original projects, and less duplication of existing knowledge. Topics of interest include market opportunities and crop diversification.
 - Question about cover crops for corn (in response to cover crops following barley project idea): D Trivers said information is available from other areas of the province on that topic.
 - EO suggested that the proposed sulphur trials would lend themselves well to vegetable production as well as perennial forage crops.
 - D Trivers added that corn under plastic mulch has been tried at NLARS, TBARS, and possibly Kapuskasing. Need to conduct literature review before pursuing further.
 - EO would like to see more market R&D, as many market gardeners lack marketing experience to pursue initiatives on their own. EC said challenge was to find funding for those types of projects. SH has seen a co-operative model of R&D be successful for similar projects, rather than a non-profit shouldering the project. GH asked if the local farmers market have an organization to represent their common interests, JH said a meeting between the 6 local markets had happened recently, and GH wondered if pursuing a marketing organization collectively may help the farmers' markets.
 - D Trivers and EC suggested creating a separate on-farm research steering committee.
5. Reviewing producer priorities
- EC asked what feedback we have on farm infrastructure projects? D Thompson said survey last year indicated on-farm storage and processing equipment were two highest priorities.

- EO suggested abattoirs need to lead conversation about capacity expansion and processing capabilities. D Trivers offered to bring that feedback to them.
 - Finding out what is important to local producers has always been a challenge. Suggestions on ways to collect that information included sticker votes at meetings, on-line and mailed-out surveys, and more education on how the funding system works and the realities of lead time for projects.
6. New project/program development to address producer priorities
- As information on priorities was limited, no discussion here.

Action points:

- D Thompson and CO'R to try and get research priorities for 2017 onward by April 30 to allow lead time: development of research steering committee
- D Trivers to stop by 3 greenhouses and ask them about their research priorities.
- EO to ask her farmers' market members about their research priorities
- Next advisory committee meeting will be scheduled after research priorities have been collected (likely May or June 2016)
- Research relevance review panel will need to be assembled, to include end-users of on-farm research, experts in agricultural topics related to the research, and scientists conducting similar work. To give annual report card on research program to see how well it aligns with RAIN's vision and mission.

EC closed the meeting at 21:10.

Attachments:

D Thompson slideshow "Summary of Pilot Project"

CO'R slideshow "Looking Ahead: Ag Research Program"