

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2019 Interim

July 8, 2019

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 1st meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on Monday, July 8, 2019, at 10:00 AM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Richard Heath, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Richard Heath, Co-Chair; Senators Stan Humphries, Robby Mills, Dennis Parrett, Robin L. Webb, Stephen West, and Whitney Westerfield; Representatives Myron Dossett, Larry Elkins, Kelly Flood, Joe Graviss, Chris Harris, Mark Hart, Kim King, Matthew Koch, Brandon Reed, Rob Rothenburger, Steven Rudy, Dean Schamore, John Sims Jr, Wilson Stone, Nancy Tate, Walker Thomas, James Tipton, and Les Yates.

Guests: Amanda Robertson, Beginning Farmer Regional Coordinator, USDA - Farm Service Agency; Tamara Sandberg, Executive Director, Feeding Kentucky and Michael Halligan, CEO, God's Pantry Food Bank.

LRC Staff: Stefan Kasacavage, Kelly Ludwig, Nathan Smith, and Susan Spoonamore, Committee Assistant.

Beginning Farmer Program

Ms. Amanda Robertson, Beginning Farmer Regional Coordinator, Farm Service Agency, said the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was reorganized. The Beginning Farmer Program operates under Farm Production and Conservation Division and includes the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Risk Management Agency, and a new program known as the Business Center.

Ms. Robertson said that qualifications for a beginning farmer participant is solely based on the years that an individual operated a farm. It includes veterans, women, and minorities. A beginning farmer is an individual who has not operated a farm for more than ten years. An individual seeking farm ownership must not have operated a farm for more than ten years and does not own real estate that exceeds thirty percent of the average acreage in the county where the property is located. She stated the USDA supports veterans by focusing on employment, education and entrepreneurship. The USDA is committed to supporting diversity and inclusion in agriculture. Approximately one million women work

the land in the United States. According to a 2017 census from 2012 to 2017, Kentucky's number of female farmers increased by 37 percent. Youth programs are available including a youth loan program. Youth from the ages of 10 through 20 can receive up to \$5,000 if they are enrolled in Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H.

Ms. Robertson explained that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) benefits farmers and beginning farmers with farm loan programs, storage facilities programs, disaster programs, cost share programs and crop insurance. Beginning farmers identified as socially disadvantaged, limited resources, veteran farmers, female, or minority can qualify for waivers of administration fees.

Ms. Robertson explained that the USDA has direct operating loans with a loan limit of \$400,000; microloans with a \$50,000 loan limit, and direct farm ownership loans with a \$600,000 loan limit. Other farm loan programs include guaranteed loans, youth loans, and loans targeting minority and women farmers. Beginning farmers are encouraged to visit the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) to help create a Conservation Plan and to visit the Risk Management Agency (RMA) for crop insurance. She said the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) provides timely, accurate and useful statistics to United States agriculture through reports and surveys. In 2017, there were 674,940 beginning farmers, an increase of 20 percent from 2016. Another program within USDA is Rural Development. The Rural Development program helps to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America by focusing on purchasing or building homes in rural areas. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) helps to create marketing opportunities: farmers market promotion, local food promotion and cost-share programs for organic certification. The USDA is also committed to supporting the Farm to School Program. With agriculture changing, USDA saw a need for developing an Urban Agriculture Toolkit to help establish neighborhood gardens, hydroponic and aquaculture operations, rooftop gardening, and seasonal high tunnel programs. Ms. Robertson said there are 64 county offices with 16 farm loan teams.

In response to Representative Tipton, Ms. Robertson stated that beginning farmers can come from a background of no farming or was raised on a farm and want to re-enter farming on a small scale. She said there is still a program which helps to connect beginning farmers to retiring farmers.

In response to Representative Thomas, Ms. Robertson stated that growing crops in container crates and remodeling older buildings to produce hydroponic vegetables is becoming more common.

In response to Senator Humphries, Ms. Robertson said that FSA officials visit with military veterans. Individuals stationed at Fort Campbell have a significant interest in agriculture and those stationed at Fort Knox make up a smaller group. The Kentucky

Department of Agriculture also has programs for veterans and they reach out to work with interested individuals too.

Update on Feeding Kentucky Programs

Tamara Sandberg, Executive Director, Feeding Kentucky and Michael Halligan, CEO, God's Pantry Food Bank, spoke on the fight against hunger.

Mr. Halligan stated that medical expenses, job loss, or other unexpected events can contribute to persons being chronically hungry or hungry for a short period of time. There are approximately 600,000 people at risk of hunger in the state. Nearly 200,000 or roughly 18 percent of children are hungry. Magoffin, Clay, Elliot, Robertson and Breathitt counties have the highest child food insecurity rates. Magoffin County has the highest rate with 31 percent of hungry children year-round. Another group of people to be concerned about are those who near retirement age. Kentucky adults between the ages of 50 to 59, have the worst food insecurity rate in the nation at 18.6 percent.

Feeding Kentucky has seven food banks that cover the entire Commonwealth. Feeding Kentucky partners with food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters to provide resources for access to food. Over 50,000 people a week are served meals which equates to 64 million meals a year. The Farms to Food Banks program represents ten percent of the produce volume. In 2018, God's Pantry Food Bank's distribution of produce was 13.6 million pounds.

Ms. Sandberg stated the Farms to Food Banks program initially focused on fresh produce but now includes any agricultural product. The primary goals are to feed and provide nutritional meals to hungry Kentuckians, support farmers by increasing their cash flow, and reducing waste. She said that in 2018, the Farms to Food Banks program was able to access approximately three million pounds of produce which provided over five million supplemental meals. For the first time in several years, the Farms to Food Banks program was unable to distribute in all 120 counties. The program experienced a budget reduction by \$100,000 due to lack of funding by the General Assembly. Ms. Sandberg stated that 350 farmers, from 64 counties, participated in the program last year with an average payment of \$1,500 per farmer. A processing pilot program will begin this year in hopes of extending the fresh produce season. Farms to Food Banks will partner with the University of Kentucky at nine food pantry sites throughout the state to teach meal preparation. She said that the Kentucky Kids Eat program targets child hunger by connecting kids to healthy food 365 days a year. Another program is the Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Program which creates a financial incentive for summer food service sponsors to include Kentucky-grown fruits and vegetables in the summer meals they serve.

In response to Representative Rothenburger, Ms. Sandberg stated that Feeding Kentucky does not get funding from the Kentucky Department of Public Health, although

it is a member of the Kentucky Kids Eat Coalition, which supports the efforts to feed the hungry. Mr. Halligan said that God's Pantry Food Bank and the agencies supported are under the same guidelines as any other food distribution entity.

Representative Schamore suggested that the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association consider donating a culled cow for processing and distribution through God's Pantry and Feeding Kentucky. Ms. Sandberg said that Feeding Kentucky has funding from Agriculture Workforce Development Association to help pay for the processing fee.

In response to Senator West, Ms. Sandberg said there are different reasons for the disconnect between the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and hunger. The SNAP program has helped to keep Americans from starving on the street, but there are hungry people in Kentucky who do not qualify for federal programs. Mr. Halligan explained that the SNAP program is enormous. SNAP provides 12 meals for every meal at a Food Bank. The SNAP program is one of the least fraudulent programs in the country.

In response to Representative Harris, Mr. Halligan said that one of the biggest challenges in the summer for kids is how to replace meals that they lose when they are on free and reduced price lunch during the school year. The federal statutes require congregate feeding which means that a child needs to go to a site for supervision during the meal. In rural counties like Pike County, it does not work well. Federal legislation is being considered to be able to use an EBT card to purchase food for children in the summer.

In response to Representative Tipton, Ms. Sandberg stated that Hungry for the Hungry is a great program. The Kentucky Beef Council supports hunger relief by selling t-shirts as a fundraiser and the proceeds help Feeding Kentucky to purchase beef from Kentucky farmers. Funding is a key issue for purchasing or donating a product. A grant from the Kentucky Department's Hunger Initiative, founded by Farm Credit Mid-America, enabled the purchase of 200 freezers for food pantries, but more cold storage capacity is needed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.