

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2023 Interim

September 21, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on September 21, 2023, at 9:00 AM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Jason Howell, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Jason Howell Co-Chair; Representative Richard Heath Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Gary Boswell, Matthew Deneen, David P. Givens, Damon Thayer, Robin L. Webb, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Chad Aull, Mike Clines, Daniel Fister, Derrick Graham, David Hale, Kim King, Matthew Koch, Shawn McPherson, Amy Neighbors, Michael Sarge Pollock, Phillip Pratt, Brandon Reed, Sarah Stalker, Cherlynn Stevenson, Walker Thomas, and James Tipton.

Guests: Dr. Nancy Cox, Vice President and Dean, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment; Dr. James Matthews, Associate Dean for Research; Dave Morris, Deputy Executive Director, Office of Agricultural Marketing, Kentucky Department of Agriculture; Dale Dobson, Safety Administrator, Education and Outreach Division, Kentucky Department of Agriculture; Dr. Cheryl Witt, Extension Specialist, Ag. Nurse, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment; and Laura Weddle, Extension Specialist, Family and Consumer Science, Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

LRC Staff: Stefan Kasacavage, Kelly Ludwig, Susan Spoonamore, and Emily Wiley.

Approval of August 24, 2023 minutes

The August 24, 2023, minutes were approved by voice vote, without objection, upon motion made by Representative McPherson and seconded by Senator Boswell.

Update on Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Programs and Projects

Dr. Nancy Cox stated that the University of Kentucky's (UK) Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment serves Kentucky in different capacities, including 120 county extension offices, academic departments, research farms, 4-H camps, etc. The General Assembly's financial support of the Martin-Gatton College yields dividends for Kentucky, creating a multiplier effect of returns on investments. She said that 2,495 students are enrolled in the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment and 56.4 percent of those students are Kentucky residents. Many out-of-state and international students in the college enroll in the equine program.

The Martin-Gatton College has received \$40.9 million in external grants and contracts in 2023. The Bill Gatton Foundation has committed \$100 million over the next 20 years to grow the college's human capital to achieve goals, such as fostering the next generation of Kentucky agriculture leaders, the human-animal bond, innovation, etc. Dr. Cox provided a list of buildings to be rebuilt or repaired due to natural disasters. She identified facility renovations for on-

campus buildings, including the Thomas Poe Cooper House and James B. Beam Institute for Kentucky Spirits. She said that there are dilapidated facilities that will be demolished to support the expansion of UK Healthcare, but those buildings will be supplemented with UK's capital request for an agricultural research building and a Meat and Food Workforce Development Center. Current facility renewals include renovations to Scovell Hall, Barnhart, and USDA-ARS Lab.

In response to Representative King, Dr. Cox stated that several researchers within the Agriculture Economics program are studying the utilization of agricultural conservation easements in the United States and in the world.

In response to Representative Aull, Dr. Cox stated that the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment employs about 2,000 people. She said that 1,000 of those employed are outside of Lexington.

In response to Representative Tipton, Dr. Cox stated that agricultural operations on the UK Coldstream Research Campus are being phased out. Operations at the C. Oran Little Research Center in Woodford County are aimed at serving the beef industry and other commodity groups. The college is focusing efforts to identify ways for UK to support the dairy industry. Dr. Cox acknowledged the recent passing of Dr. George Heersche and his contributions as a Dairy Specialist and Extension Faculty member.

In response to Chair Howell, Dr. Matthews stated that there are two roles of the college: high quality research, primarily funded by the federal government, and serving Kentucky's needs and commodity groups. The pricing per square foot of proposed projects is attributed to the need for providing clean air environments to separate different areas of research.

Overview of the Raising Hope Initiative

Mr. Dave Morris stated that the Raising Hope program was developed in 2020 to promote the health and safety of farmers who may be at an elevated risk for suicide and accidents. Mr. Morris outlined the prevention, intervention, and data surveillance aspects to support the Raising Hope mission. The program assisted with the 988 crisis hotline rollout, which included 2,141,355 impressions and 44,218 clicks on Raising Hope digital campaigns. This outreach led to 36 calls to the 988 hotline. Different training programs have been utilized to train community members how to approach agricultural mental health needs. The program has hosted events impacting 260,000 people, including over 2,500 health screenings. Mr. Morris stated that eight people are alive today due to the work of Raising Hope.

Raising Hope has projects planned to expand Mental Health First Aid training, health screenings, farmer appreciation efforts, and youth curriculum. The program has established bylaws and an advisory council will be appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture. The program is a collaboration with Mental Health America, serving as a fiscal agent to receive donations. Raising Hope has received over \$8,000 in a few months. Mr. Morris provided an overview of individuals involved with the Raising Hope program and recent events, including Farmer Appreciation Day.

Overview of Farmer Appreciation Day

Dale Dobson stated that the Kentucky Department of Agriculture hosted its first Farmer Appreciation Day on September 20, 2023, at the Kentucky State Capitol. Mr. Dobson recognized Representative Reed and Chair Heath for their involvement with the event. The event was

estimated to have hosted 700 people.

Mr. Dobson stated that, over the past year and a half, a number of high schools have taken part in Raising Hope's challenge coin initiative. The purpose of the program is to show individuals that they are appreciated.

In response to Representative Stalker, Mr. Morris stated that unknown stressors such as weather, markets, profitability, and input costs impact farmers' mental health. One priority of the Raising Hope is to reduce the stigma of discussing stressors. Mr. Dobson stated that the work of Raising Hope has allowed individuals to feel more comfortable discussing what is on their minds. He recognized 34 students from Seneca High School's Future Farmers of America chapter for their work in downtown Louisville. Mr. Morris stated that Raising Hope programs have only begun to scratch the surface. Additional funding would be beneficial in supporting the expansion of the programs.

Discussion on Farmer Mental Health

Dr. Cheryl Witt stated that Raising Hope has incorporated nursing students to provide health screenings to farmers. This opportunity enhances the student's cultural humility and provides hands-on experiences. Farmers have unique factors that require their own worker health model. Dr. Witt stated that Kentucky Farm Model has a synergistic relationship for the optimal health of the farmer which includes mental health, physical health, and safety. The deficit in farmers' health lies in the complexity of the culture of farming, rural health barriers, and overall health seeking behaviors of the profession. Much of the research performed around these areas focuses on male farmers. It is important to meet farmers where they reside. This is done through farmer-centered programs within Raising Hope. Dr. Witt said she believes that farmer-centered interventions work. It is difficult to measure this success other than self-reporting.

Laura Weddle stated that the UK's Cooperative Extension Service (UK Extension) already promotes programs to address farm stress and rural mental health. UK Extension has released a library of research and evidence-based mental health publications that are written on a reading comprehension level for an average community member. UK Extension provides educational trainings to increase knowledge about rural mental health challenges. Over 2,000 Mental Health First Aid certifications have been administered over the past year and a half as a result of UK Extension's efforts. Extension offices are also equipped with curricula and toolkits to assist agents.

In response to Representative Stalker, Mr. Morris stated that the use of funds for Raising Hope will be decided by the Raising Hope Advisory Board. Dr. Witt stated that there is a need for administrative and human resources to support the Raising Hope initiative.

In response to Senator Boswell, Dr. Witt stated that farming is the third-ranked occupation for suicide.

In response to Senator Chambers Armstrong, Dr. Witt stated that farmers' mental health will benefit from scientific advancements.

In response to Chair Howell, Dr. Witt stated that Raising Hope has worked to provide curricula to rural areas for health providers to utilize.

University of Kentucky Cannabis Center 2023 Report -- NO ACTION NEEDED

Chair Howell acknowledged the University of Kentucky Cannabis Center 2023 Report. No action was required.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.