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Oregon Tilth, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports and promotes biologically sound and socially equitable agriculture through education, research, advocacy, and product certification.

Oregon Tilth Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 17, 2014

5:00-7:15 PM

Board Members Attending:

Lynn Youngbar
Susan Schechter
John Haapala
Meta Loftsgarden
Steve Crider (joined late)
Ryan Wist (joined late)

Staff Attending:

Chris Schreiner
Erin O'Donnell
Ashley Covey (taking minutes)

Members/Public Attending:

Steve Patty

Introduction, Welcome to new board members, Agenda Review

- Meeting called to order at 5:05pm. New board members not yet on call but expected to join. Have a quorum of 4 board members. David Granatstein travelling and unable to join.

Membership Advisory Committee (MAC) Report

- There wasn't a MAC representative attending the meeting. Minutes from their May meeting were included in board meeting packet. MAC decided they will not continue their monthly meetings over the summer. Next meeting will be Sept. 23. Board will need to work with MAC leadership regarding MAC participation in the strategic planning process.
- Possible topic at the next board meeting—process for recruitment of new MAC members.

No Member/Public Comment

Consent Agenda

1. May 19, 2014 Board Meeting Minutes
2. June 2, 2014 Board Meeting Minutes
3. G6, Code of Conduct
4. EL 1, Treatment of Consumers
5. OTCO--response letter from Connie Karr on OTCO Management review report
 - G6, Code of Conduct *removed* from consent agenda. Susan will work on refining language further and share latest draft with board members.

- Meta moved to approve remaining 4 items on consent agenda. Susan seconded. **All in favor, motion passes. (4-0-0)**
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Susan will send Code of Conduct re-write

Executive Director's Monthly Report & Monthly Financials

- Grant award: Heard back from Oregon Dept. of Ag on Specialty Crop Block Grant proposal. It was approved for inclusion in the plan they send to USDA for funding. The project will work with large Oregon buyers (i.e. processors, food service for institutions, wholesale distributors) of organic specialty crops to identify supply chain gaps and signal demand for more organic farms / acres in those crops. Funding is expected in October.
- OR Governor's GE Agriculture Task Force: Task force has divided up issues by broad categories and for each one, break into small groups to brainstorm concerns, benefits, observations, data, requests. The challenge will be when the staff that's convening this group begins drafting report language. This report will become the final product that will be shared with the Governor's Office and Oregon Legislators. The Governor's office has requested the report by December 2014.
- Developing communications infrastructure: Board will be informed on progress. Chris Roddy will be doing outreach. Goal is tools to ensure consistent messaging. Board members are also spokespeople for the organization. Board members would benefit by having the same talking points as staff.
- Year-to-date inspection assignments: Congratulations to certification staff on improvement in inspection assignment numbers achieved. Staff is doing a great job on this. Addresses the issue clients have of taking a long time to complete their re-certification each year.
- Reporting on Funding Support of Education Activities: Discussion regarding on how best to provide additional information to Board about restricted funding (grants, donations) and the work it supports. Options considered included: sharing final reports to funders with the board; noting in the Exec Director's report which funders are supporting different activities. Discussion of being careful to not get into too much detail and create additional reporting workload for staff. Also noted that board doesn't want to get in role of "grantor." Consider including this board fiduciary oversight role as part of a board committee's work, perhaps part of Finance Committee or could set up separate committee if sufficient interest among board members to serve. In the interim, maybe we can come up with an approach that wouldn't be burdensome for staff but provides some information for the next board report.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Chris will speak with Sarah Brown, Education Director, about this topic and ask her to propose some possible options for consideration.

Set Date of 2014 Annual Meeting

- Discussion regarding decision to set date for our annual meeting. One option is to hold it in conjunction with Tilth 40th anniversary conference in Vancouver, WA., (Nov 7-9). Sunday Nov 9 is proposed to hold the Annual meeting, because that's when Tilth Producers of WA will hold theirs as well. Another option is the beginning of December. Lynn Y would not be in attendance in November due to pre-existing travel commitments. Also unlikely to have finished strategic planning work by early November. Question on expected number of Oregon members attending Tilth 40 conference. Oregon Tilth is an event partner for Tilth 40 conference and goal is to attract more Oregon participants by holding event in Vancouver.
- John moved to have the Oregon Tilth Annual Membership Meeting in conjuncture with Tilth 40th Anniversary conference in Vancouver on Sunday, 11/9/14 in the morning. Steve seconded. **All in favor, motion passes (6-0-0)**

- Further discussion on board's role in annual meeting. The board leads planning of the annual meeting and the staff handles logistics. Jessie did a great job last year. May not need as much planning this year. Board will need to develop an agenda. At next board meeting, identify volunteers to help draft agenda for the meeting. John is interested in helping.

Strategic Planning— Discussion facilitated by Steve Patty, Dialogues in Action

- Strategic Planning is best when we can identify the best possibilities and how can we meet those and maximize the potential impact of the organization. Also identify what are the primary challenges in front of the organization. Hour-long discussion ensued, outlined as follows:

Primary Opportunities

Education

- Education and advocacy
- Educational opportunities on the meaning, value, standards and process behind the organic label / certification.
- Both certification and education (as complement / enhancement to certification services)
- How we integrate education

Expansion

- Expand & grow the market / opportunities
- Grow membership

Identity

- Opportunity of national presence – how do we take advantage of that and grow it? Demand is outstripping supply (Not converting enough farms / acreage to keep up –our cert numbers for farms are relatively flat and grower certification isn't growing)
- Equate Oregon Tilth = integrity, advocacy, etc.

Certification

- Explain what added-value we offer to certification (and explain why in some cases, are more expensive).
- Providing best services to membership certification
- Other types of certification
- Greater share of organic cert market

Granting/Funding

- Granting / funding opportunities (public and private)

Membership Engagement

- Membership engagement
- Complacency w/ membership and movement as a whole.
- Helping our certified clients grow their customers / consumer base

Technology

- New technological opportunities (internet adoption – and sharing of knowledge and mgmt. of farms)

Outreach

- Engaging younger generation
- Rebranding - A "stronger" name / brand recognition for organization.
- Finding way to re-invigorate the community.

Primary Challenges

Membership Growth

- Membership is relatively flat
- Need to grow non-certified members
- Flat "growth" of farm certification

- Developing new members
- Membership growth
- Client retention and growth.

Advocacy

- Continuing advocacy role – need to constantly be in front of legislators, Congress and voters
- Really effective outreach and staying in advocacy arena both cost money (dedicated staff time, materials).

Member Engagement

- Membership disinterest
- Farmer frustration w/ cost and process. Drift of processors to other certifiers.

Technology

- Technological changes in ag. Fed and State regulatory changes.

Education

- General confusion about labels in marketplace.
- Debate w/in organic trade about process v. purity on this issue of GMO. GMOs, Pesticide residues, Food Safety – key issues and messaging to consumers and general public.
- *Bringing along members* as we identify new opportunities in that direction

Momentum

- Complacency in organic movement to fail to explain all benefits / values of “organic” label.

Competition

- Competing labels and certification programs (non-GMO). Expectation by regulators to take on more aggressive role in GMO testing.

Communication

- Messaging issue is a big challenge.

Emerging generation

- How to appeal to younger demographic?

Financial Stability

- Financial sustainability and growth. Regulatory changes.

Branding

- Branding of organization and technological changes.

Outreach and Engagement

- Bringing and keeping stakeholders / advocates for Tilth in this process

Reorientation

- Need to be aware of the failed merger and how members are feeling

Reach and Scope

- Geographic scope / services (regional v. national / international)
- Exclusively organic or broader “sustainability”

Who do we need to engage and hear from?

- Members, clients, policy makers, general public, educators. Clients and members more engaged than general public and policy makers, but to some degree would like to solicit public and policy maker value orientation as we go forward.
- Need to find way to engage MAC. Look for way to engage the whole group and perhaps recruiting an individual member of MAC for more engagement. Important to keep people we engage aware of developments in process, strategic direction *along the way* – so not surprised when a final plan comes out.
- Representatives from others is expected, correct? Yes, we will include representatives from various stakeholders in the planning input process, more broad engagement.
- Concept of other non-community stakeholders into our thinking as an act of engagement. Opportunity to bring new participants into organic world / community. Also a way to mitigate opposition to possible advocacy efforts. Examples: other membership-based orgs that participate in food and ag – what are their objectives and issues of sensitivity.

Dangers / hazards / warnings (things to avoid)

- Staff need to be engaged along the way too
- Need to look at our internal weaknesses and issues
- Look at the Policy Governance model and how well it's working for us.
- Ensure that Board doesn't get prescriptive w/ operational activities. Stay responsible for establishing vision, but stop short of implementation of that vision.

Next Steps

- Convene smaller task force / core group to guide process along the way. Task force to be comprised of Steve Patty; Lynn Youngbar and Ryan Wist as board representatives; Chris Schreiner and Connie Karr as the staff representatives. Also discussed having a stakeholder or client contribute at task force level.
- Task force needs to meet with Steve and map out outreach strategy / process - who to talk to, what to ask, how to use their input. - and set date for a planning retreat that will likely be 1.5-2 days that would include all of board, key members of staff, and possibly external stakeholder(s). Details on who to attend retreat TBD later. Probably mid-August to September to have retreat. Doodle poll will go out soon.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Chris will send out doodle poll to group to check available weekends in mid-August to September for retreat.

Confirm next board meeting date – Tuesday, July 15, 2014 at 5pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15pm.