**Polk Extension District Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

**February 6th, 1:30-3:30pm, Polk County Extension Office Conference Room**

Called to order by Commissioner Pope at 1:38pm. All commissioners are present.

Approval of the agenda made by Commissioner Ainsworth and seconded by Commissioner Wheeler.

Approval of the minutes made by Commissioner Ainsworth and seconded by Commissioner Wheeler.

Approval of consent calendar by Commissioner Wheeler and seconded by Commissioner Ainsworth.

*Speaker Forum Presentations*

Wei Yang: District berry crops Extension Agent

Wei’s position is blueberry extension (85%) and research (15%) program for commercial growers. Wei conducts field visits, workshops, newsletters, and other methods to provide Extension Education programs. He also conducts research on the 160 acre North West Research and Experiment Station site.

The Northwest Berry & Grape Website <http://berrygrape.org> provides information on all berries. It gets about 4 million hits a year. About 35GB in downloads per year. A very popular site. Wei informed us that the funding has currently ceased to support this website and staff are doing their best to keep it up to date. Commissioner Pope challenged Wei to share with Polk County Commissioners the cost of maintaining the website so that perhaps additional resources could be secured so the website continues to be maintained as a valuable resource.

Wei helps with the writing of production guides to help potential growers determine if they should grow a certain crop. Wei spends about 7-9 weeks of his year in the field meeting with growers and addressing/learning about their concerns.

Polk County has 5% of the states 8000+ acres of blueberries. Blueberries are a fast growing industry. Oregon just became #1 in the nation in blueberry production. Biggest disease issue for berries is the Spotted Wing Drosophila. Wei conducts research to assist in knowledge of preventing this disease from devastating crops. Growers often have to apply treatments 7-9 times a year to prevent infestation.

The fresh blueberry market is pretty stable. Processed blueberry markets are growing. China is an important market for our blueberries. Because of his past history and connections growing up in China, he builds relationships with his colleagues there to help promote processed blueberry exports to the Chinese market.

An exciting project for Wei, is the work he has been doing in developing blueberry trees at NWREC. Trees vs bushes help with the yield as much of the bush crop is left on the ground in the harvesting process which would almost be eliminated in a tree structure. In about 3 years, these trees will be available in the marketplace.

Tonya Johnson: Instructor in Family and Community Health (FCH)

FCH programming focuses on Healthy People (Nutrition Education and Healthy Aging); Healthy Families (Parenting and Family Finance Resources); Healthy Schools (Work Wellness) and Healthy Communities (Food Systems and Partnership Development).

Tonya provides leadership in Marion, Polk and Yamhill for the SNAP program. SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program, formerly known as food stamps. The purpose of Extension’s involvement with SNAP is to provide educational programs/resources to help people eligible for SNAP make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestlyes consistent with current dietary guidelines. Education efforts focus on Youth, Parents, and Families.

The Marion, Polk and Yamhill Unit reaches 4,400 students monthly with lessons during the school year. Budget cuts will affect this in the future, but at this point these reductions will probably not affect Polk County programming efforts. In Polk County, the school based programs are in Independence Elementary School, Henry Hill Elementary School - reaching 500 students. There is also family nights at IES and HH and also use of the Food Hero website (<http://foodhero.org>) and resources to reach families.

The SNAP program is designed to reach low income families so schools that programming is done in, are chosen based on their ability to meet the requirements of the program, particularly the percentage of youth on free and reduced lunches.

In terms of impact of the program, a survey was given to parents of participants in the program. Parents surveyed say that 80% of students shared what they learned about healthy eating with their families. There were 74% of the survey respondents saying that they made at least one of the recipes at home.

Another program effort is EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) funded through USDA, funded by a grant from USDA. This program focuses on adults with children. Desired goals of program being measured are: increase fruit & vegetable intake, increase meal planning, and increase in food safety practices. In Polk County, EFNEP programs will be held in conjunction with a parent class in Independence and with a teen parent class at Central HS. The Commissioners raised questions and Tonya explained how these efforts are being dovetailed with efforts of the Health department.

Tonya then engaged Commissioner Ainsworth and the audience in an interactive food experience around sugar and nutrition labels. We discovered, visually, how much sugar was in many popular drinks and also practiced math and measuring. This modeled what students are asked to do and discuss in the classroom setting.

Richard Reagan, Associate Professor Nursery Crops Focus

Richard focused his talk on "Connections". Connections between himself, Polk County, and Oregon State University. His daughter went to Perrydale and now goes to OSU. He is a Track coach for Perrydale High School. His wife is an Instructor for IES working with Tonya. Richard was hired in Polk County by Roger Fletcher (Roger was present). He then moved to OSU where he teaches three classes; helps with the horticulture club; and helps align students with internships experiences.

He also focuses a lot of his efforts nurturing a working group environment with other faculty. Part of this energy has focused on the development of a website – that is very integrative to the needs of growers, students, and general public. He also feels it is an important way to preserve and share past research, articles, curriculum, and paper. The website is nursery.oregonstate.edu

This website also includes information on greenhouse and Christmas trees. Currently includes around 700 publications which this nursery working group keeps up, reviews, and adds to in size. For example there are pictures of landscape plants for identification, production and management, and other resources.

The hope is that this site can be used by growers, students, general public, nurseries, etc. to help everyone. The entire database is searchable. The website now also provides training modules for nurseries to utilize.

*Updates*

Derek Godwin – Regional Administrator

Derek provided a brief quarterly financial and program update. In terms of state level funding, OSU Extension will be asking for a 7% increase, which is a similar request to others in the University system. This increase though would really only provide for stable funding as it expected that increased health care costs will be approximately 6.7 %. Our federal funding for general Extension is not known at this time. The SNAP program received a 28% reduction (back to Oct 1, 2012 during the fiscal cliff negotiation at the beginning of January. This might amount to at least a 10% reduction felt by this region in programs offered. The county budget shared was just a report on the Extension portion of the budget which Derek oversees. It does not reflect the county portion for which Greg Hanson keeps record. Barbara Nichols expressed concern about the telephone line item, stating that there is only 13% of the budget left and we still have almost half of the year yet to go. The Commissioners stated they would look further into this issue.

Position updates: A new field crops agent is slated to start March 1st which will serve Benton, Linn, and some of Polk County. There are many upcoming retirements including: Dan McGrath, area vegetable crops- date not yet determined but maybe next January 1st. Bob McReynolds, NWREC will retire this year. Ross Penhallagon, who does Orchard Crops in the southern mid-willamette valley retires this month - which may have implications for Jeff Olsen who serves this area. Linda McMahon, Hort agent in Yamhill retires this summer (Neil's counterpart). Gail Miles, in our office who's position is to support Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver programs, will be retiring at the end of April.

Barbara Nichols – Chair of PECAN (Polk Extension Citizens Advisory Network)

Barbara presented a brief update on behalf of PECAN. Since the last quarterly meeting, the PECAN group met in Independence and worked on narrowing their goals of the organization for this year. Darrell Ward agreed to serve as Vice-Chair. The Extension Office has started a custodial contract with Garten service for cleaning once a week. Our conference rooms are being utilized frequently with 33 uses being noted from Nov 27th through Feb 5th. Neil is also working on plans for low maintenance, drought tolerant landscaping for the front of the building. We also got the last of the signs posted on the building and people have remarked that the signage is appreciated.

Announcements: Pamela reminded everyone that the next District Quarterly meeting and Speaker Forum was set for April 10th. Speaking at the next meeting will be Chal Landgren, Christmas Trees; Bernadine Strik, Berries/Grapes; and Amy Garrett, Small Farms.

Meeting adjourned at 3:25pm.

Recorder, Pamela Rose - Polk County Leader.