



6/17/2024

***East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District Special
Board of Directors **APPROVED** Meeting Minutes***

Monday, June 17, 2024

5:18pm- Call to Order

Zimmer-Stucky called to order the special Work Session meeting of the EMSWCD Board of Directors at 5:18pm on Monday, June 17, 2024, at the EMSWCD Headwaters Farm in Corbett, Oregon.

5:18pm- Introductions, Review/revise agenda, Review previous action items.

Zimmer-Stucky conducted introductions for the record. The following persons were present:

Board of Directors: Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky (At-Large 2 Director, Chair), Laura Masterson (Zone 2 Director, Secretary), Mike Guebert (Zone 3 Director, Vice-Chair), Jim Carlson (At-Large 1 Director, Treasurer), Joe Rossi (Zone 1 Director)

Staff: Kelley Beamer (Executive Director), Julie DiLeone (Rural Lands Program Supervisor), Rowan Steele (Headwaters Farm Program Manager, Asianna Fernandez (Executive Assistant)

Guests: Mary Colombo (Wild Roots Farm), Madeline Tucker (HIP Farmer), Aaron Kerr (HIP Farmer), Jen Aron (HIP Farmer Support), Nicki Passarella (HIP Contractor), Catherine Nguyen (Former HIP Farmer), Rodrigo Corona (HIP Contractor)

Changes to the agenda: N/A

5:19pm- HIP Overview & Updates

Zimmer-Stucky This is a Work Session meeting, with the purpose being to give the Board a chance to talk with each other and do deeper dives into topics. There is no deliberation or decision making at Work Sessions, thus there is no public comment taken either. (To the members of the public who attended: If there's something you think we missed or you'd like us to consider, please write it down and follow up via email to Beamer or Steele. Thank you for attending today).

Beamer is excited to have everyone together today to hear from Steele, and collectively level-set about the condition of the program right now. Along with Steele's presentation, DiLeone will be taking notes about any ideas that come up from the Board to be recorded.

Steele Thanked the Board for the opportunity to share this information with the Board. He hopes that after today, everyone leaves with a good understanding of what we're working on at the farm. There are four key topics he discussed in his presentation: Farmworker Assessment, Outreach Plan, Graduate Bridge Award, and our Soil Health Assessment. All four topics are intertwined and come together to make up the services we provide for farmers. We also have some questions for the Board around recruitment of future Headwaters farm Incubator Program (HIP) farmers and supporting incubator farmers post-HIP.

5:28pm- Forward Looking Discussion on Opportunities for Growth

1. Farmworker Assessment:

Steele About a year ago, the Board addressed interest in staff researching opportunities for farm workers at Headwaters Farm (HWF). It makes sense since farmworkers are the largest population in farming, as skilled farm owners and operators. They're one of the constituencies that we're not actively engaged with, and they have the most need. One of the datapoints that stood out to him was that the lifespan of farm workers is between 49-50 years old, which is heartbreaking, and some of this is due to the health



of the workers and the health of the land that they're working on or living on. So, this shows a clear nexus between soil and water health and human health.

We would benefit from working with farm workers in our effort to steward farmland, and they'd benefit from the resources that we offer. We commissioned Rodrigo Corona to conduct the HWF Worker Assessment, he interviewed stakeholders, reviewed two prominent incubator programs that cater specifically to farm workers in the west coast, and interviewed a few farm workers. The results:

- Half are interested/very interested in starting a farm business.
- At least 2/3 didn't know about any programs that support beginning farmers.
- Over 75% have at least 5 years of farming experience and over 50% had 10 years of farming experience.
- The biggest obstacles to launching a business were access to land and capital.
- Business administration and marketing experience were big barriers.
- 50% said they'd travel 30-60 minutes to participate in a farm business incubator program, and more than a fifth said they'd travel more than an hour.

Steele There would be some additional considerations that we'd want to think about, and programmatic elements that would need to be expanded or adjusted for us to properly serve farmworkers. The recommendation that came out of this report was that by the 2026 growing season, we could bring in a cohort of exclusively farm workers. So, we'd select those applicants in the Fall of 2025. The rationale is that for a cohort, it would be easier for us to provide services for multiple people instead of just one or two farm workers, and it would create a built-in community for those farm workers on site, showing our commitment to their success. Until then, we'd begin translating materials, shifting program elements that would work better for the broader population, conduct targeted outreach, and build capacity (staff or partnering with organizations or contractors). And the last recommendation was to explore land opportunities for post-HIP, as it's a specific need for the community, and all beginning farmers.

Zimmer-Stucky This is exciting, HIP facilitates a specific kind of farming, so was it a part of the conversation with the farmworkers around interest in moving into a different kind of farming (if they're coming from conventional agriculture or otherwise)?

Steele At HIP, we're open to any kind of operation that works in the five-year program.

Corona One of the tools that other programs used to bring in farm workers were classes on growing practices and how to prepare for potentially different kinds of farming.

Masterson How many farm workers were surveyed and where do they live?

Corona talked to 17 farmworkers. Five were in Hillsboro, part of the Western Farm Workers Association, and the rest were known from his previous work in the Mollalla valley. His outreach was to anyone interested in serving an ag-based business.

Masterson What are the next Steps? Was the 2026 goal recommended by staff?

Beamer Corona came to a recent staff meeting to share results. We're still in the digestion phase, so the next phase is thinking through how to operate this, ensuring that we have the resources for Spanish speaking workers, and being slow and thoughtful about the process. The 2026 recommendation was for the earliest possibility, instead of a formal recommendation to run with.

Steele The recommendation was from the report, based on what's most viable. We certainly wouldn't be able to do it this year.

Zimmer-Stucky Does this research request come from the strategic plan?



Beamer The research Corona is leading is called out in the District's Strategic Goals document. We all want to see this farm be successful, bringing in successful businesses, improving soil and water health, and this is a part of what's necessary to think about when considering how we build a robust HIP cohort. In terms of the Strategic Plan, this is under the sustainable agriculture big-picture success path for Headwaters Farm, so this is the first step.

2. HWF Outreach Plan

Steele has been working with the CO&E team on a HWF and HIP outreach plan, leading from our work with Susan Laarman last Fall, based on some of the systems she put in place. The outreach boils down to two objectives: recruiting twice the number of qualified farmers, so we can choose the readiest farmers or the best fit for the program, and raising awareness for HWF, HIP, and the District as a whole. Right now, we're focused on expanding out media engagement, through standing ads in the Capital Press, Press Releases, and reaching out to local media with stories that we put together, and our online social media presence. We're also updating all of our outreach materials for on-farm and in-person events. We're thinking about doing another HWF Open House when it's warmer. Overall, the goal is to do more storytelling, especially about the consistent themes like soil health, challenges to beginning farmers, conservation farming, etc.

A strong HIP Farmer Candidate (same model we've used since the program started):

- a. Limited resource farmers (can't afford to start their own farm business)
- b. Three or more years of farming experience
- c. One or more years of farm management experience
- d. A clear vision of what they want to farm
- e. A dedication to farming for soil and water health
- f. An expectation that they're going to stay local after they graduate

Steele Once they're established, they can tap into all of the USDA services – SARE, NRCS, FSA, SWCD and Extension resources. From here, they can also begin hiring folks who could then come into the program later too.

Four avenues for farmers to come to us:

- a. Local farm development pipeline
- b. Other farms within the region
- c. Farms outside the region – this is a harder sell.
- d. Farmworkers

Steele The idea here is that we can run anybody from any of these groups (with good experience and approved through the above model), and they would graduate as skilled, conservation forward/minded farmers with an established farm business. The program is flexible enough to do that, but the point is that just as recruitment for these groups would vary, the needs of the individuals from these groups is going to vary as well. There's a higher need for resources among the staff and with more diverse types of farmers, in order to provide more resources for them all.

Masterson expressed that she is still hoping for applicants with more experience and would like to see the District reaching outside of the region more if we're not getting the applicant pool we're looking for.

Steele That's been a challenging area for us to understand what the best avenues are to accomplish it, but it is something we're doing.



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Guebert It's a very interesting story that might be hard to get across in short social media campaigns, but one great idea is to reach farmers through podcasts, as that's what many are listening to while they're working.

Zimmer-Stucky is hoping Steele gives this presentation to other colleagues. She sees so many interconnected opportunities coming from it, that if the whole district leaned into this, instead of just HIP, there could be a huge shift. For example, for the next two years, focus on farmworkers in almost all programs, and see how that works.

Beamer We do know that word of mouth works best for farmers, and we can see our staff as ambassadors when they're on the ground and in the fields.

Masterson How does the farming conference schedule line up with the HIP application process? She could see Steele presenting at farm conferences for more outreach for HIP farmers.

Steele asked the Board, are we missing any key farmer groups for recruitment into HIP? Where do we focus? All the groups, or some over others?

Guebert If we put the wide net out there, would we not catch the smaller net too?

Steele Structuring a program that supports farmworkers would look different from a program that supports farmers from other parts of the country. We can do it, but it'll be an added complexity. Who we're working with impacts the exact level of services we provide and the program structure, which has changed over time because the demographics of the HIP farmers has shifted over time. Are you open to us being flexible with the program in order to recruit and meet the needs of a wide range of farmers?

Zimmer-Stucky Recruitment and program management for groups 1,2, and 3 look almost the same, but for group 4, it looks very different. Are we discussing 123 vs. 4?

Steele For groups 123, the message is the same, but the geographic focus is the difference. Groups 2 and 3 are the most similar out of them all. Group 1 looks like a whole range of people too. We're looking at this as a program structure.

Masterson It seems like the Board would need to look at group 4 separately to think about what it would require in terms of budget, staffing, changes to the program, and if HIP is the place that could meet their needs. The assessment seems like the first step in that direction, but how do we go forward with it, separate from this year?

Rossi It seems like we should find our mission, define who we are and what we offer people, and then cast in their direction.

Steele The mission is the same for all of the groups, but the difference is the program structure and the support we offer.

Steele confirmed that the Board feels good about pursuing groups 123, and then continue having the conversation about farmworkers, and having staff bring a plan, budget, etc. to the Board soon, and show profiles of farmworkers who might be interested in joining.

Carlson Agrees casting a wide net feels important, but also making space for farmworkers who would be interested.

Zimmer-Stucky There are now 15 or so farmworkers who know about the program, and we shouldn't let perfect be the enemy of the good, so if there's interest from them, they should still be able to apply, and we could let them know that we don't have the full program set up for farmworkers yet. We



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shouldn't be operating under the assumption that any farm worker couldn't walk in the door and be the most qualified candidate. She does not want to continuously say later, later, later.

Rossi has concerns about what HIP farmers are landing into. With the HWF's high weed bank taking a while to get rid of, he wouldn't take the project on at the rate it is now, because taking time weeding depletes energy and time. He also suggested think about implementing a once-a-week farmer program. For example, he hosts one on Saturday mornings, as a four-hour workshop with master gardeners, and walks them all through the season, showing them how to strategize, make farm decisions, etc. It's low commitment and it's a way to get to more people.

Steele Aaron had a similar idea, on how to keep the folks who don't make it into the program in the loop and continue teaching and getting them ready for the program.

Beamer Last season, we had five applicants, with three of them being qualified. This next year we're hoping to double those numbers. It would be good to remember that we're putting a lot of work into the weed eradication project now, meaning we don't have space for many additional farms, but by then, hopefully we can. Equipping staff as ambassadors for the program, the podcast idea, and the farm conferences were great ideas.

3. Post-program Supports

Steele HIP Grad Bridge Award: A \$20k award to support graduating HIP farmers in their transition (onto their own farm). This could also be used as a hook to get more applicants, once incoming HIP farmers see that there are resources on the backend of the program too. This award would also support the program's structure and participant buy in.

HIP Graduate Criteria (to graduate, and to receive the award):

- a. Developed Farm Operations Plan: business overview, production approach, financials
- b. Established Markets in East Multnomah that they'll continue to serve
- c. Land stability: purchased land or leased land
- d. Weed Management: successfully at HIP
- e. Current on all payments to the District
- f. Cleaned their HIP plot, leaving it in better condition than they received it.

Guebert Is there a timeframe they need to adhere to, to receive the award?

Steele Yes, three years.

Zimmer-Stucky Do these criteria feel like enough for compliance? Is there anything else you considered adding to these criteria, or that addresses the concerns from the HIP Manual?

Steele There are other elements that could've been included, but they weren't necessary because there are other incentives we could use to achieve those goals instead of graduation.

Masterson We offer a large amount of support already at HIP, which should be an incentive as well. If folks don't have the ability to maintain a baseline for their farm business, maybe their lease doesn't get renewed, especially since we are putting so much work into weed management. She loves the idea of a HIP farmer who is ready to graduate and continue their business successfully to have a bit of capital when they do.

Steele If the graduate can't get the three-year land lease, they can still get half the award, since it's a hard thing to do. Asked the Board, are there other supports we can or should provide graduates to help



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ensure their success? We know land access remains the biggest limiting factor for new growers, but are there better ways to address this issue?

Masterson FSA seems to be a way to fund farmers, but it is a daunting process, from what she hears. Are there ways through HIP staff that we can build a bridge to access FSA application support?

Rossi The new FSA liaison has been attending the Farm Bureau Meetings, and he seems to be very energized and great to work with.

DiLeone Shipkey is thinking of holding a workshop for farmers who are looking for available resources.

Zimmer-Stucky Thinking of LLP, she suggested that one of the criteria to add to our land purchase evaluation could be if they're a HIP graduate, it would count as another positive factor. It would be like how folks out of the military get an extra point when applying to government jobs. It allows beginning farmers another way to go through with buying land instead of the FSA process or raising capital which all takes a long time. She's also trying to think about ways in which the other programs might also be able to be tweaked to benefit HIP graduates.

Masterson If they graduate from HIP, they should have the qualifications to buy property from LLP.

Guebert Even with an easement with a lot of restrictions, farmers still need a lot of outside income to make it work. Maybe we start by with some more non-purchase options like helping landowners become more aware of programs like Oregon Farm Link. A lot of farmland seekers know about it, but he doesn't think many farmland owners with farmable fallow land know about it, or similar programs, to get their land into production.

Rossi Agrees, there are many historical landowners that no longer have family members who want to farm the land, so an idea like that would keep the land in the family, and we can be facilitator between groups. Sees the District being a farm community connector. There's a big benefit to leasing land first too, with trial and error on the land before you buy it, creating community in the area, etc.

Masterson farmed almost 10 years before owning property. When you start farming with intrigue, the story you hear is, "I'm not a farmer if I don't buy a farm," but in so many ways its more sensible to lease. How do we change the story to show that leasing may be the better option to build your business?

Steele Does the Board see a role the District can play in the future to facilitate leasing opportunities, either on land that we own or land that's been passed off to a partner organization who would make it accessible to incubator farmers alongside anyone else they're leasing to?

Masterson Lets exhaust all other options first. We've dabbled in that before, but we haven't built all the relationships we can yet. It's also not unreasonable to think that some of the HIP grads could farm farther away and still serve our District.

Steele We had a partnership with the county, when they were sending letters to land owners about renting their land to beginning farmers so as to not lose their tax deferral status. At one point the list was 60 properties long, but they were not great properties which is why it was not working for them. Asked Rossi would there be an opportunity for the Farm Bureau to create a list of farms that aren't in operation but could be somewhere for new farmers to go, with a tax and work the land benefit.

Rossi Definitely. The members are aging out and holding good land. HIP could plug into historical farmers' newer generations who have equipment, as a partnership with Farm Bureau. The historical farm members have known more about our programs lately.



Zimmer-Stucky to the Board, if the historical farm community sees HIP as a success, that's where the relationship building will be strengthened. We want the HIP Grads to be known as some of the best applicants for leasing/owning/working their historical land.

4. Soil Health

Steele To understand how we're doing, you have to know where we were. When the District bought Headwaters Farm in 2011, it had bad soil structure, compaction issues, poor drainage, and weeds. We removed the nursery stock, as there was no market for it in 2011-2012, cleaned the property, and began stabilizing the soil with field buffers and other features to protect the creek. We worked with OSU Extension on a cover cropping program and with Marion Ag on our soil amendment program. Regardless, the soil structure and crust still hasn't recovered to this day. We were doing a lot of disking and tilling passes to cut weeds back and what we saw was the composition of weeds changed, but the overall pressure remained. We've been stuck here for the last four to five years. Even cover crops sometimes struggle in some fields, but he remains hopeful and optimistic that HWF is on the right track.

Steele Jen Aron created the HWF Site Assessment & Soil Report. It is her own personal intellectual property, so we ask that you do not share it without her permission. Jen was one of 20 farmers selected globally to work with Nicole Masters on an eight-month intensive soil health course, and she chose to do the project on HWF because she knows the program's challenges and believes in its work. Underlining findings are that HWF is void of good soil biology, impacting our soil structure, our water infiltration, plant nutrient uptake, our resilience to pest and disease, crop productivity, and our wind pressure. The goal is to bring back biodiversity, especially fungi, in order to restore the carbon cycle and heal the land.

We plan on doing this by using multi-species blend of cover crops, biological inoculants, mineral balancing, and optimizing tillage. The goal is to not let weeds go to seed. All of the cover crop seed that's been sown so far has been inoculated with Bio coat gold, causing bigger starts and crops, and all of the HIP farmers have been supplied with it as well. In some areas, we've been using the rip and drip prototype, a combination subsoiler that drips good soil biology into the soil profile. We're also generating our own good soil biology through a vermiculture system and Johnson feed composting system, with the feedstock coming from Guebert's farm.

Our nutrient composition isn't bad, but Calcium, Phosphorus, and Potassium are high. Calcium and Phosphorus aren't plant available even though there's a lot because of the lack of soil biology. Molybdenum, Boron, Sodium, and Manganese are low, which we'll be applying conservative amounts of again as a baseline application the entire farm.

We're not becoming a no-till farm, but we're trying to find ways to lessen our use or reduce aggressiveness. This is the hardest one for him, based on lack of tools, and tillage systems are his expertise. We're thinking about alternative approaches to getting fields ready for planting that don't always involve tillage, or at least less tillage. He's optimistic due to seeing fungi in the soil, which we've never seen at HWF before. We're also seeing roots that are twice as long as any roots that we've seen in previous sampling, and we're seeing our first rhizosheaths, which are the buildup of soil on the outside of roots where good soil biology is colonizing, showing a symbiotic relationship between roots and the microbes. With rip and drip, we're seeing greater pack, less compaction, and larger root systems.

We'll be tracking what works best and doubling down on that. He is asking for collective patience, and the ability to balance any disappointment of what we see in the fields with excitement and optimism about the kinds of processes we're trying. It's too early in the process to infer anything yet, but we



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know this land wasn't degraded overnight and it's not going to heal overnight either. It might get worse before it gets better.

Finally, this is our story, the land, our farm, our incubator program, our SWCD, and this isn't something we want to hide, we want to lean into the story, show what's working and what's not, and there's more farmers and constituents out there who are interested in it. He's looking forward to the day that we can bring people out here, but we're still seeing the inklings to get there.

Masterson thanked Steele for all the time and energy spent in finding solutions. This plan is a great step forward, everyone has the same goals in mind, and hopefully this will start to get us there. What are the data points, the exception, and our commitment to this plan?

Beamer The plan is to put forth a year for trial and setting up the framework for some of these nutrient infusions, and planning a time to come together after November, for course correcting, and coming up with the plan for the next year.

Steele The weed management plan and soil health plan need to happen together, at the same time. We'll need at least this season and more data to see where we're at and determine if we've made any progress, but the weed assessment has more clarity around what success looks like and a clear plan for what we're going to do. The goal is to keep the Board informed about where we're at with the soil health plan along with the weed management plan updates.

Guebert It would be exciting to try more animal treatments. When you disc in a cover crop, it takes energy away from the soil to break those plants down. He would suggest keeping an open mind about sheep or cattle on HWF, short term as a trial, like we're doing with the pigs.

Masterson There are a lot of livestock farmers who don't have irrigation, but we do, so can we contract someone for mob-grazing?

Steele Livestock does seem to be the missing piece of the holistic system. Maybe we can build some partnerships with more livestock experts in Guebert's network.

Catherine Nguyen left at 6:50pm.

Rossi appreciates the level of transparency and honesty in this operation. When you acquire an asset, usually it slowly gets better over time, but here there's been a reverse trend. He appreciates we're at this point now because he's been bringing this up for a while. Thanked Steele for his work with outside folks.

Carlson Is there a drainage system in place on the farm?

Steele most of the farm has terracotta tile system, but it can create a weird hydrology, but it's still functioning.

Carlson Any idea why the soil health was degraded at the beginning? Maybe due to the large use of herbicides with nursery crops?

Steele That's a thought we had when we tested the soil, but we don't think there are any traces of it still in the soil.

DiLeone The soil was fumigated, which can have a long-term impact on the soil biology, and it hasn't seemed to bounce back from that. The winter harvest is hard on soil structure, there was a lot of tillage, and in the last few years with the prior owners, especially towards the sale to us, their management declined more.



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Steele The Soil map says there should be 60 inches of topsoil here down to the fragipan, but we find it at 36 inches.

Masterson Is there anything else standing in the way of executing this, that the Board could act on, to help move this forward?

Steele If you can join me in collective patience, that's the extent of his ask.

DiLeone The staffing this season has done a great deal of help as well, with Pfeil, Passarella, and Aron. In future years, we might ask the Board to help us maintain the amount of people and time on the farm.

Beamer These are all interrelated questions in terms of building up soil health and getting the fields ready for more cohorts. Eventually we'll have more fields we can hand over to farmers.

6:55pm- Announcements, Action Items, and Adjournment

Masterson thanked everyone for the info.

Zimmer-Stucky To the members of the public who attended, if there's anything else you want the Board to know, please email herself or Beamer, who can pass it on to everyone else.

Action Items: N/A

Zimmer-Stucky adjourned the meeting at 6:55pm.