

Cochise County Extension Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2024, 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Coronado Dairy, Willcox, AZ

Chairperson Nathan Watkins welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 11:23 am.

A motion to approve the minutes of the previous 11/15/2023 meeting was made by Moiria and seconded by Ron.

Introductions, those in attendance included:

- Advisory Board members present: Alan Seitz, Ron Bemis, Amber Morin (Zoom), Nathan Watkins, Aaron Cardona, Moiria White, Dennis Moroney, Jason Zibart (Zoom).
- UArizona Personnel present: Kim McReynolds, Jan Groth, Carol Holden, Haley Chappell, Randy Norton, Ashley Wright, Tricia Dunham, Connie Forsyth.
- Guests present: Ted Haas

New Business

1. Extension Operations

- Personnel (Carol Holden)
 - New Hire Breanna McCormick, Community Outreach Professional II is focusing on Food Security. She has been in contact with Aaron Cardona to collaborate on programming.
 - Open Positions – (Cochise County Cooperative Extension is actively recruiting but is under a university-wide hiring freeze.)
 - Assistant/Associate Agent, Commercial Horticulture
 - Extension Assistant (4-H)
 - Luis Aguilar, Extension Assistant II resigned from his position with Cochise County 4-H
- Cooperative Extension Strategic Positioning (Ashley Wright)
 - The Strategic Positioning plan is a follow-up from the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Needs Assessment released in 2023.
 - The Strategic Positioning Committee will host listening sessions which will happen all around the state for faculty, staff, and stakeholders.
 - The goal is to know what direction Extension should head according to faculty, staff and stakeholders.
 - Closest sessions will happen in Pima County and Graham County, but stakeholders can attend any of the sessions. In-person attendance is preferred. Will compile data in July.
- ADWR-AMA (Carol)
 - Gail Griffin tried to petition to have a well grandfather date but was denied. March 1 is the cut-off date.
- County Annual Report (Carol)
 - Each program in Extension is represented. Carol will share copies with the Cochise County Board of Supervisors. This will be a good representation of Cooperative Extension programming in the county and will help with the request for an increase in County Funding. It has been about 8 years since the last increase in county funding for Extension in Cochise County.
- State of the Unit (Connie)
 - Cochise County Budget Review FY24 – This overview aims for the attendees to understand Cochise revenue sources, expenditures, and budget transparency.

Income Sources:

State/NEI/Smith-Lever Funds: 50% – *Faculty/Staff Salaries and Start-up funds*

Grand/Federal Funds: 30% – *Faculty/Staff Salaries, Operations, Travel*

County (Including carryover): 17% – *Staff Salaries, UArizona Sierra Vista Rent/Utilities, Operations, Travel*

Cash Style Accts/Other Funds: 2% – *Staff Salaries, Operations, Travel, Prof. Development, Retention*

IDC (Indirect Cost): 1% – Facilities and Administrative distribution

Gift Funds: 0.6% - *Operations, Other Activities, Specific Program-related expenses*

Expenses 2023

Staff: 55%

Faculty: 35%

Operations: 9%

Travel: 1%

ASC Administrative Service Charges/Tax: 0.1%

The largest projected increase in FY24 will be personnel costs due to salary matching to other similar positions nationally.

Projected 2% yearly increases in Personnel and Operational expenses, assuming no changes in currently funded personnel.

Miscellaneous Funds were discussed. Where they come from and how they are used program specifically.

Reports

1. Advisory Board Member Updates

Amber Morin: The newest member of White Water Draw NRCD and is also the Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape Partnership Coordinator. Currently, grants are in process: Sentinel Landscape Partnership – looking for grant opportunities in the Chiricahua expansion area. America the Beautiful Challenge Grants provided by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. There are NRCS Regional Partnership Grants available, and Dept of Defense Grants to help support San Pedro River work. Looking for opportunities to collaborate with Extension to work on grants.

Moiria White: Purchased 4 registered Hereford cows from Texas to add to the 40 cow/calf operation. Getting into seed stock production. 4-H is making headway and she has been busy helping Haley put on a county-wide small stock day, she is excited to see some programming and county-wide meaningful events.

Aaron Cardona: Currently growing onion, garlic, and carrots – winter crops. Pushing his Non-Profit to address issues for smaller growers that don't have resources, market, etc., and is attending meetings with USDA to focus on specialty crops and resources and continuing to connect with farmers in that realm. Finding resources from the federal government. Looking for established specialty crop/organic growers for these programs, not hobbyists.

Dennis Moroney: The drought has been difficult in the last 6 months. 2023 was a disaster for rangeland resources. Consequently, between October/December, he had to sell over 250 head of cattle. His ranch has gone from 359 sheep to 70. The market was very strong. But had the wrong kind of cattle to take advantage. Sold half of the cattle into sport cattle (roping).

Nathan Watkins: Drought is also affecting their family ranch along the San Pedro River. Due to his wife's upcoming retirement, they are selling all their sheep and pigs. Will be out of the meat business. Still raising hay for personal use and bailing for others. Growing Triticale and Teff this year.

Ted Haas – Guest: Thankful to be in attendance and thankful for Cooperative Extension. He served on Willcox/San Simon NRCD and Cochise County FSA Board.

Ron Bemis: Partnered with gentlemen who brought purebred Angus from Montana. Has a few Brangus left. Caught up in water issues and working in the district. Did well last summer rain-wise. A lot of surrounding producers had to feed a lot of hay.

Alan Seitz: Busy working on test plots, insect and weed control, and concentrating on water issues. Meeting with the Arizona Attorney General later in the day.

Jason Zibart: Is a couple of months into partnership with Southwind Farm and distributing CSA boxes to hospital and school employees. Taking delivery of mobile MRI to serve Benson, Willcox, Bisbee, & Douglas. The machine will be collectively owned and has a replacement plan, which means constant new technology for Cochise County. Working on the Rural Health Navigator Grant to expand social determinants of health in Cochise County, such as access to local foods, transportation, and things that impact people's health.

2. Faculty/Program Updates

Kim McReynolds: The University has appointed two new Range Management Specialists: Flavie, based in Tucson, who specializes in native grazing/herbivore management and is a former UA Grad Student, and Jake Hennig, based in Camp Verde, who focuses on public lands grazing with a background in wildlife-livestock interactions. Both specialists, known for their great personalities and ease of collaboration, hold statewide appointments. In Cochise County, the Sentinel Landscape will partner with the America the Beautiful Challenge grant to resurvey noxious weeds, updating the last survey from 2014. Additionally, Micheal Chamberlain, the horticulture agent in Maricopa, and I have been working on a two-year grant to study a new invasive weed, Stinknet, which has spread across much of the Sonoran Desert in Southern Arizona. We are conducting germination trials in Duncan, the Safford Ag Center, and the Willcox area to determine its potential to germinate in high desert areas. Although last year's trials showed no germination due to hot and dry conditions, the Safford Ag Center currently reports germination. We hope that hard freezes will eliminate the weed after germination to prevent it from choking out native wildflowers.

Jan Groth: The Master Gardener class, which runs from January to May with a maximum of 28 participants, has 29 attendees this year, 15 of whom are under 40, reflecting a trend towards younger participants. This class is essential for producing volunteers for our program. Our plant sale, a primary fundraiser for Discovery Gardens, is scheduled for April 20th. Recently held a successful Irrigation for Homeowners Workshop, and the Pruning Ornamental Trees Workshop is upcoming. There are five schools from across Cochise County scheduled for visits. We also participate in the Cochise County Farmers Market, distributing free seeds from the Seed Library. The Master Gardener program received a \$10,400 grant from the Legacy Foundation to install new plant signage with QR codes for the gardens.

Evelyn Whitmer (presented by Carol Holden): Fortunate to be fully staffed before the hiring freeze took effect. Our nutrition and school programs are thriving, with Building Healthy Communities initiatives visible throughout the county. The team has been certified in Positive Parenting, and our Financial Literacy staff member is now fully trained, collaborating with local CPA Andy Terry in Willcox to provide Financial Literacy classes, with another class being planned for Douglas. Evelyn is focused on Collective Impact, gathering valuable information for the Extension, and is actively seeking grant funding opportunities.

Carol Holden: Fifty percent of her job duties are dedicated to her role as an Agent in Economic Development. She is currently collaborating with organizations to secure grant funding for the historic preservation of buildings in Willcox. Additionally, she assists non-profits with accounting and bookkeeping to ensure compliance for successful grant applications and is exploring opportunities to facilitate workforce development programs.

Haley Chappell: In January, the Cochise County 4-H Council elected new officers who have been actively contributing ideas for programming. The dog show in Benson was a success with lots of community engagement. She has been revising the 4-H Building Rulebook and is preparing for Small Stock Day on March 23rd. Is serving on the State Stock Show Committee and will assist with the State Stock Show from March 1-3 in Pima County. On February 28th, two STEAM ambassadors will host a drone training session for the 4-H community, and Luis and Jerry Lopez have secured a grant to train 60 adults for a recreational drone license. 4-H Club Officer training is scheduled for March 9th, and two Cochise County 4-H members will attend the Ignite Conference in Washington, D.C., from March 12-17. A Building Committee meeting is set for March 23rd, followed by an in-person YQCA training in Willcox on March 30th. Todd Kesner, the new State 4-H Director from Montana State, attended Ag Day in Willcox on February 14th, where he met several 4-H volunteers and families. The Mother's Day Tea will be held in the Discovery Gardens in May.

Randy Norton: The State Legislative Funded Irrigation Improvement award has been approved by both the House and Senate for an additional \$30 million. This funding is designated for irrigation improvements and is open to all applicants with an easy application process. To qualify, applicants must demonstrate a minimum 20% increase in irrigation efficiency, particularly by transitioning from flood systems to higher efficiency systems. Eligible recipients can receive up to \$1,500 per acre, with a cap of \$1 million per applicant.

Ashley Wright: State Livestock Specialist Joslyn Beard resigned from her position, and there is an urgent need to fill the vacancy despite the current hiring freeze. The State Veterinarian position, which has been open since the retirement of Peder Cuneo, has cleared the hiring freeze, and there are hopes it will be filled quickly. The Equine Symposium took place in January, with 183 people in attendance. I attended the Willcox Ag Day Tradeshow on February 14th, where Nate and I demonstrated A.I. equipment. A panel of local beef experts, including Willcox Livestock Auction owner Sonny Shores and other buyers, discussed the beef market. The next Ag Day is scheduled for February 12, 2025. The upcoming Range Livestock Workshop will be held on April 5th in Willcox. I am working on the Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Grant, which provides three years of funding for a series of workshops aimed at small, beginning producers in Cochise County.

Old Business

1. University Financial Action Plan Updates
 - Still in a hiring freeze. We are waiting still to continue with the hiring of the Horticulture Agent Position, still many unanswered questions.
 - They are “centralizing” IT and HR. We are in the process of switching internet and phones from Valley Telecom to receiving internet from Valley but handled internally by UA IT department. We will be using University Zoom Phones. The final switch should take place on March 15th.
2. UA Meat Lab Update
 - Still hearing the reopening of the UA Meat Lab will happen in September. They got the funding and the project started before the University freeze and is still moving forward.
3. Sierra Vista Campus
 - Also in financial freeze, the University move is on hold.
4. Sulphur Springs Water Alliance
 - Hired Catherine Hamberger as coordinator/admin and secured funding for 8 hours per week. The position will be seeking grant funding and setting up meetings.

Next Meeting: Possibly in May, and in the evening. Will send out poll at a later date.

Future Agenda Items: Send to Carol. Please suggest any future guest speakers, tours, etc.

Alan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:31 pm, Dennis seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Tricia Dunham
Administrative Assistant