

## CHRISTMAS TREE PROMOTION BOARD

### Board Meeting

January 7, 2021

Via Video Conference

**Welcome and Roll Call:** The Meeting was called to order at 11:05 a.m. Eastern time by Vice Chairman, Roger Beyer.

**Board Members in Attendance:** Mark Schmidlin, Derek Ahl, Gary Westlake, Charles Fowler, Bill Brawley, Roger Beyer, Jane Neubauer, Renee Campbell, Chuck Berry, Bob Schaefer, and Larry Downey

**Board Members Not in Attendance:** Mike Cocco

**USDA Representative(s) in Attendance:** Sue Coleman, and George Webster

**Staff in Attendance:** Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

**Guest(s) in Attendance:** No guests in attendance.

### **Welcome and Introduce New Directors\***

Board members and Staff members introduced themselves and shared a little about their background.

- East - Charles Fowler, Gary Westlake, Renee Campbell\*, and Chuck Berry\*
- Central – Derek Ahl, Jane Neubauer\*
- West – Roger Beyer, Bill Brawley, Bob Schaefer, Mark Schmidlin, Mike Coco\*
- Importer – Larry Downey\*

**Board Officer Elections** – USDA representative Sue Coleman was asked to run the meeting during the election of officers. Coleman read recommendations for Board officers from the Nomination Committee:

**Chairman:** The Nomination Committee recommended Roger Beyer, and Sue Coleman asked three times for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Roger Beyer for the Chairman position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Vice-Chair:** The Nomination Committee recommended Derek Ahl, and Sue Coleman asked three times for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Bill Brawley and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to close nominations cast a unanimous ballot for Derek Ahl for the Vice-Chairman position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Treasurer:** The Nomination Committee recommended Bob Schaefer, and Sue Coleman asked three times for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Westlake and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Bob Schaefer for the Treasurer position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Secretary:** The Nomination Committee recommended Gary Westlake, and Sue Coleman asked three times for any additional nominations. There were none.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Gary Westlake for the Secretary position. **MOTION APPROVED.**

### **Approval of Agenda:**

Marsha Gray requested to add “FOIA Request” under Management Staff Update.

Roger Beyer requested to change Announcements to “For the Good of the Order.”

It was **MOVED** by Bill Brawley and **SECONDED** by Bob Schaefer to approve the Agenda with the additions. **MOTION APPROVED.**

### **Meeting Minutes:**

It was **MOVED** by Gary Westlake and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to approve the December 21, 2020 Board Meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

### **Committee Reports**

#### **Finance:**

- Mark Schmidlin shared that there are no new items to report. The December Financial statements will be presented at the next Board meeting.

#### **Research – Cyndi Knudson**

- Research Proposal Recommendation – Dr. Rich Cowles at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station submitted a proposal for year two of a two-year project which began in FY2019-2020. Dr. Cowles has completed the first year of this project, with very promising results. Cowles is requesting funding to start year two with a budget of \$22,000. The Research Committee has met to review the proposal and recommends that this proposal be funded.

It was **MOVED** by Bill Brawley and **SECONDED** by Mark Schmidlin to approve the Cowles Research Proposal for \$22,000. **MOTION APPROVED.**

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Gary Westlake to fund the \$22,000 Cowles Research Proposal out of the Research Reserve Account.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Gary Westlake to amend the motion to deplete the current Research budget (approximately \$2,400) and fund the remaining balance from the Research Reserve Account. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- Letter of support – Justin Whitehall, a new researcher at North Carolina State University, is applying for a USDA SCRI (Specialty Crop Researcher Initiative) Grant to sequence the genomes of four different Christmas tree species. Whitehall has requested no funds and is explicitly looking for a letter of support from the CTPB as a representative of the industry.

It was **MOVED** by Mark Schmidlin and **SECONDED** by Larry Downey to approve a letter of support for Justin Whitehall at North Carolina State University.

Discussion: NCSU is working on the CRISPR project and the gene-editing of Christmas Trees, does this project tie into the CRISPR project? Knudson stated that it does not directly tie in together – but the genome sequences will help with the CRISPR project. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- The seedling Survey is almost completed. There are still a few larger producers we hope to get data from to provide a complete picture to the industry.

#### **Industry Relations:**

- Gary Westlake shared that he had no new items to report. The Committee is planning to meet before the next Board meeting.
- Cyndi Knudson provided an update on the co-project between Research Committee/Industry Relations for the Research Portal placed on the CTPB industry website. Knudson shared that we have received many research project reports from researchers. The CTPB industry website has grown significantly, so adding the Research Portal to the website has been delayed until decisions are made regarding website modifications.

#### **Governance:**

- Bob Schaefer shared that he had no new items to report.

**Promotion:**

- Bill Brawley shared his pleasure with the 2020 campaign.
- Marsha Gray shared Concept Farm is working to prepare the campaign summary video that will be shared with the industry. The agencies will be participating in the next board meeting to recap the year and provide detailed results of the campaign. There will be time for questions from the Board.
- Question was raised about the State Association meetings and how the campaign summary video will reach all Growers? Marsha Gray stated that when the video is completed, approved by USDA, and posted to the website - an announcement will be shared through an e-newsletter and possibly a postcard.
- Marsha Gray is currently scheduled to attend four State Association meetings via Zoom. Later this month, Gray is looking to host a State leader meeting to share the campaign summary video, get their feedback regarding the Retail Locator, and answer any additional questions.
- There was Board discussion regarding the appropriate time to issue an RFP or get bids from new agencies. Discussion to be revisited later this Spring.

**Compliance Committee - Marsha Gray reported.**

- Certificate of the exemption – Gray and Sue Coleman worked together to create an updated letter that acts as a certificate. This certificate was sent in December to anyone who has completed an Application in the past. Also included with the letter was a 2020 Assessment Form in case they are harvesting over 500 trees.
- Question was raised if exempt growers should complete an exemption form yearly? Gray shared that it would be easier for growers to complete the form online when/if we get an online reporting system. Due to staffing limitations, this would be difficult to request at this time.

**Management Staff Updates – Marsha Gray reported.**

- Conflict of Interest and Lobbying disclosure forms were sent via email and need to be signed and emailed or mailed back to Marsha Gray.
- State meeting presentations – Campaign Summary Video is being developed. Reaching growers through various avenues to help them understand where their assessments are being spent from a promotional perspective.
- Gray shared the importance of participating in state meetings this summer to answer questions, encourage sign up for the retail locator and e-newsletter.
- Assessment Collection update – Marsha Gray provided a verbal collection report, and as of January 7, a total of \$163,775.00 has been received. Before the next Board meeting, an Assessment Collection Report will be emailed to all Board members.
- Marsha Gray requested a copy of the U.S. Customs Report on Monday, January 4<sup>th</sup> from USDA.
- FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) - Sue Coleman shared that Research and Promotion Boards are subject to FOIA. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Agricultural Marketing Service office received a FOIA request from Oliver Dunford with the Pacific Legal Foundation. The attorney is requesting monthly financial documentation from 2015-present, congressional appropriation (the Board doesn't receive any funds), and CTPB approvals from USDA for the Promotion Campaign. Marsha Gray has provided the monthly financial statements to USDA.
- Board discussion regarding the FOIA request and who is paying for USDA's time. Coleman stated that FOIA dictates who must pay usually, there are no fees paid by the requestor and that CTPB would pay for USDA time.
- The Board does have an insurance policy for directors and officers.

**New Business**

Roger Beyer presented his Committee Chair appointments:

Promotion Committee: Bill Brawley  
Research Committee – Mark Schmidlin  
Governance Committee: Charles Fowler  
Compliance Committee – Derek Ahl

Finance Committee: Bob Schaefer

Industry Relations Committee: Gary Westlake

- Roger Beyer requested that the new Board members think about which Committee they would like to serve on and let him know within the next week.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Bob Schaefer to approve the Committee Chair appointments. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**USDA** – Sue Coleman shared she has no new items to report.

**For the Good of the Order:** No New items to report.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- The next Board Meeting of the CTPB will be on January 28<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. Eastern time.
- The Board is considering the possibility of an in-person meeting in April with a location somewhere in the Pacific Northwest.
- Summer Meeting: August 5<sup>th</sup> in Jefferson, NC. Our meeting would be in conjunction with the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association Summer Meeting (August 6-7) and the Christmas Spirit Foundation and National Christmas Tree Association.

**Adjourn:**

It was **MOVED** by Bob Schaefer and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Roger Beyer adjourned the meeting at 12:55 p.m. Eastern time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gary Westlake

Secretary