

Meeting Minutes: Governor's Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers

DATE: 07/06/2021

MINUTES PREPARED BY: MIKE ZASTOUPIL

Attendance

Present

- **Hamse Warfa**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Rena Wong**, Director of Organizing, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 663
- **Maureen Ramirez**, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Andrea Vaubel**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Jennifer Christensen**, President, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189
- **Mike Zastoupil**, Food Access Associate, Minnesota Department of Health
- **Gary Wertish**, President, Minnesota Farmers Union
- **Colin Laffey**, Staff Attorney, Agricultural Worker Project, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)
- **Kevin Paap**, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau
- **Tamara Nelsen**, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council
- **Rodolfo Gutierrez**, Executive Director, HACER
- **Kristi Halvarson**, Executive Director, Community Health Service, Inc.
- **Carrie Rigdon**, Operations and Planning Section Manager, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- **Lorrie Janatopoulos**, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- **Susan Bishop**, Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Health, and Migrant Agricultural Worker Response Lead, ICS
- **Emilia Gonzalez Avalos**, Executive Director, Unidos MN
- **Kiza Olson**, CHS Administrator, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services

Absent

- **Nicole Blissenbach**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry
- **Sarah Berry**, Public Health Director, Waseca County | CHS Administrator, Le Sueur – Waseca Community Health Board

Guests Present

None

Agenda

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| 1:00 PM | Welcome |
| 1:05 PM | Approve Minutes & Meeting Agenda |
| 1:10 PM | Public Comments |
| 1:15 PM | Member Introductions |
| 1:30 PM | Data Updates |
| 1:45 PM | Cross Agency Work Group |
| 2:15 PM | Work Plan for Report Due to Governor |
| 2:45 PM | Final Thoughts & Next Steps |
| 3:00 PM | Adjourn |

Meeting notes

Approve Minutes & Agenda

Tamara moved to approve the previous minutes, DC Warfa seconded

Tamara moved to approve today's agenda, Susan Bishop seconded.

Public Comments

None.

Member Introductions

Jennifer Christensen – UFCW 1189

Jennifer's union represents members in the St. Paul metro area up to Duluth and to the border with Wisconsin. It includes workers from just about every essential industry – healthcare (EMT, hospitals, nursing homes), processing (beef plant, tannery workers), and retail & grocery. She has been a part of the union since 1990. Jennifer started as a part-time deli worker, and eventually worked her way up to being President today. She has been married to her husband for 18 years, and she has four kids and three dogs. She likes to garden and do pottery.

Kiza Olson – technical difficulties, couldn't do introduction.

Data Updates

Maureen compiled a list of all the data sources we have gathered so far. Mike will share Maureen's summary of data sources with committee members after the meeting.

Last meeting, Tamara suggested that we look into New Zealand's migrant worker program, which is internationally recognized for its successes, and see what we can learn from them about data collection and policy solutions. Mike is still working on summarizing the key findings and will plan to present the results at the next AWWC meeting.

Susan said that WI has successful programs too but what works in other states won't necessarily work in Minnesota. This is because of differences in governance, laws, and politics. Susan has pulled together a list of statutes, both state and federal, that we could use to inform this work. She can share this information at an upcoming meeting.

Cross Agency Work Group

This working group formed in Spring 2020 as part of the COVID-19 response, and its work led to the creation of this Governor's committee. The first primary task was to provide guidance for employers as well as provide consultations on how to respond to COVID-19. The working group includes members from five state agencies: MDH, DLI, DEED, MDA, and DHS. Successes have included the relationships built over time with employers, the consults for addressing COVID done at the local level, and the continuing work to uncover what issues exist. Since the working group began, the major "brick walls" they have encountered include housing issues (such as overcrowding), communicating with workers (including language issues). These struggles are common for everyone who has tried to help migrant and seasonal workers. The working group decided that a non-emergency Executive Order would be the best solution to tackle these "brick walls" regarding the safety, health, and wellbeing of agricultural and food processing workers.

Main question: Now that the COVID response is winding down, how can this working group shift to support this Governor's committee more? Who would like to join, or should join, who isn't currently part of the group? What are committee members suggestions? Suggestions from working group members:

- It seems like a good way to address theme #4, interagency coordination.
 - Working group already has good interagency connections, as well as connections with employers – no point in throwing that way now that COVID is done.

- Tamara appreciates this information and encourages this connection. Glad to hear that interagency coordination has been openly identified as a problem and is being worked on (rather than pointing fingers).
- This Governor's committee doesn't have anyone from DHS, but the interagency working group does. What is the difference between the working group and this Governor's committee? Would there be information that gets shared there, that doesn't get shared here?
 - The interagency working group had previously been operating separately and focused on COVID, but now there is the opportunity for the group to support the work of this Gov. committee. There would still be some work of the interagency working group that doesn't apply to this committee, but it could mostly focus on supporting this Gov. committee – specifically agency-related tasks. Basically, the support staff want to propose the idea that the Governor's committee will now direct the work of the interagency work group.

What are other examples of cross-agency work? Who has had experience with this?

- Tamara has worked with MDA-MDH collaboration on COVID testing. Before that, there was a good relationship of sharing information between agencies. It wasn't a formal thing, but the two agencies were able to share information routinely – about once per month.
- DC Warfa has experience with Governor's Workforce Board – which has people from industry, agencies, and other organizations. They are a large group, and work effectively together. He recommends connecting with them to ask what works well for them.

Report on Work Plan Due to Governor

Maureen shared her outline of the report due to the Governor on August 1st, which will summarize this committee's plans for achieving the objectives tasked to this committee. The report begins with the five objectives of the committee, then presents a timeline of the work done to date, and the plans for work moving forward. It shares the four priority areas that the committee decided to address through the survey results, and how we will use our meeting time and staff support to explore these priority areas and use them to find solutions for improving the safety, health, and wellbeing of agricultural and food processing workers.

Maureen will write a full draft of the report and share it with the committee members, so everyone can give their feedback at the next committee meeting. Then Maureen will finalize the report and send it to the Governor's Office by August 1st.

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

For next meeting, we will:

- Review the final report of workplan
- Focus one more time on data.

- Agree, it is very important. Could end data next meeting, and kick off housing discussion next meeting (split topic meeting)
- Ask for suggestions for housing experts

Colin attended a conference about worker housing, health, and safety. He obtained some good information, and he is wondering how to pass that around.

- Lorrie is working with other people at DEED to create a SharePoint site for sharing documents and information with each other
 - Would the site be subject to FOIA requests? Good question, DC Vaubel & Mike will find out.
- We could have someone from the Epi team at MDH share current vaccination data by race/ethnicity. Susan knows that Hispanic/Latinx vaccination rates are significantly lower than the total MN 18+ vaccination rate.
 - Emilia would like to see more data on geographic participation. She is doing door-knocking to get people out to get vaccinated. This data could help Latino-advocacy organizations, complement the data they already have.
 - Rodolfo agrees that we need very specific data to improve outreach efforts. Reaching the 70% goal is actually hurting efforts to reach populations that don't have the same success rates.
 - Rodolfo's organization is also purchasing data, like Emilia, to create their own "data universe." But agree that there is a need to coordinate efforts, share data.
- Emilia is concerned with our timeline to address the housing theme, because of the expiration of the eviction moratorium (set to expire at the end of July, 2021). Any data we have now will be out of date after that eviction moratorium is ended. Emilia's organization requested more information from MDH. Mateo (at MDH) was going to try to find the data. The eviction will likely affect many agricultural and food processing workers and their families, and that will affect this committee's efforts to improve their health and safety.
 - Susan will connect with Mateo to try to get the data shared faster with Emilia.
 - Maureen agrees, this is very important to consider.

Kristi moved to adjourn. DC Warfa seconded. Approved.

Decisions

- This Governor's committee will now inform the work of the previously created interagency work group on migrant and seasonal farmworkers, led by Susan Bishop.

Action items

- Mike will share Maureen's summary of data sources with committee members after the meeting.
- Maureen will write a full draft of the report and share it with the committee members, so everyone can give their feedback at the next committee meeting.
- DC Vaubel and Mike will ask legal staff about the SharePoint site and FOIA requests.
- Susan will connect with Mateo to try to get MDH data shared faster with Emilia.

Next Meeting

July 19th, 2021. 1:00 -3:00 PM Central Time

Microsoft Teams meeting

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