



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

**DATE: 11/14/2022**

**MINUTES PREPARED BY: CINTHIA MARTINEZ**

Attendance

### Committee Members

#### Present

**Andrea Vaubel**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

**Elise Sporre**, Project Manager and Outreach Coordinator, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services

**Erik Zabel**, Epidemiologist Principal, Minnesota Department of Health

**Rodolfo Gutierrez**, Executive Director, HACER

#### Absent

**Kiza Olson**, CHS Administrator, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services

**Lorrie Janatopoulos**, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**Tamara Nelsen**, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

**Dan Glessing**, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

**Emilia Gonzalez Avalos**, Executive Director, Unidos MN

**Gary Wertish**, President, Minnesota Farmers Union

**Jim Gleb**, President, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189

**Nicole Blissenbach**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

**Rena Wong**, Director of Organizing, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 663

**Sarah Berry**, Public Health Director, Waseca County | CHS Administrator, Le Sueur – Waseca Community Health Board

**Stephanie Low**, Interim Executive Director/ Chief Medical Officer, Community Health Service Inc.

**Staff Present:** Cinthia Martinez, CareerForce Office Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Prairie Bly, SPA Director/Labor Standards Supervisor, Department of Labor & Industry; Valerie Gamble, State Program Admin Principal, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

### Agenda

1:00 PM Welcome / Introductions

1:02 PM Approve Minutes & Agenda

1:05 PM Updates

1:15 PM Housing Work Group Update

1:20 PM Employer Engagement Group Update

1:25 PM Root Cause Coalition

1:30 PM Next Steps-AWWC member discussion

1:40 PM Public comments

1:45 PM Adjourn

## Meeting notes

### Welcome/ Introductions

Guests present:

Cristela Moe, Clinical Manager, Community Health Service Inc.

Patrice Bailey, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

### Approve Minutes & Agenda

Approved.

### Updates:

Patrice Bailey will be taking over Deputy Commissioner Vaubel's role in this committee.

Patrice Bailey serves as one of the two assistant commissioners at MDA and is looking forward to amplifying the agriculture worker wellness issues that we have within the state.

Andrea would like to express how incredible it has been to see the work that has been done and will still try to drop in at future meetings.

There were some legislative initiatives that the committee had last year, and we remain hopeful that they will be reviewed in the next budget. We are still waiting to hear on what will be in the Governor's budget in the next session, more guidance is expected later this month.

### Housing Workgroup Updates

The attorneys on the AWP of SRLS team put together an extensive list of the different scenarios that they were aware of when it comes to ag worker housing, or employer provided housing etc. In early December the workgroup will be meeting with several state agencies as well as a couple of local folks and USDOL's wage and hour division to go over housing jurisdiction.

The workgroup finished the survey previously discussed with several key direct service providers of migrant seasonal farm workers about housing and transportation related issues. Those responses informed a focus group that was facilitated by Lorrie Janatopoulos and attended by the rest of the workgroup. With the input, the plan is putting a meeting with staff from Minnesota Housing and DHS's Office of Opportunity regarding any possible solutions to the issues that were raised.

### Employer Engagement Work Group Update

The AWWC Employer Listening Forum is scheduled this Thursday November 17, from 1-2:30pm, on teams with Tamara Nelson as the facilitator. Committee members are encouraged to join. A high-level overview of this meeting is to talk about the legislative recommendations, mainly focus on affordable housing, what it would mean to codify the committee in state statute, and the ombudsperson office. Another main topic is to look at the status of housing, opportunities, and innovations. Lastly is to look at communication. If we have time, we will discuss the future of agriculture in Minnesota, because one thing that has come up is automation and we are curious to see if that is changing for workers or where they see that going.

### Root Cause Coalition

The Root Cause Coalition is a national summit social determinant of health that took place on October 4<sup>th</sup>. Stephanie Devitt reached out to the group to do a panel presentation on the work of the committee and lessons from the pandemic. Jessica Grosz, Sarah Berry, Mateo Frumholtz, and Valerie Gamble were on the panel, and went over an overview of the committee, how it was founded, and work during the

pandemic. The audience included more healthcare systems workers, and they had more questions on policy protections for the workers, the health system for the workers. There were two people that brought up the expansion of the committee's membership to include insurers or private sector groups such as Blue Cross.

## Next Steps -Member discussion

### What next steps or questions do committee members have?

Erik Zabel: Being the health person, I am interested to learn more about the safety issues for ag workers, especially farm workers having a lot of safety issues. At the Department of Health, we are trying to get more of a handle on data on workers that would be considered underserved.

Rodolfo Gutierrez: We are trying to work with this community of workers on getting them the COVID vaccine. We did conduct a survey for us to know what the percent of them was vaccinated, and the deficiency among them was very high, so there are a lot of them who have yet to be vaccinated. We also asked about health care services for them, and many of them do not have access because they do not know what there is available for them. They are also not informed about different opportunities coming to their area. So, the communication piece is important. There are also people who are not informed about these resources regardless of their background or where they are from.

Patrice Bailey: Erik and Rodolfo made me think about how many people don't know that the state does have full ethnic councils. Maybe these councils are the ones we need to reach in terms of the constituency that they represent. I don't think they talk enough or have enough representations about agriculture that come through there very often, but we have the same dilemma over here in reaching people in nontraditional media. Just thinking about how people respond about different news. Those ethnic councils I know they underserve in terms of access from other state agencies and resources. That could be a way to bring them to talk about these issues, but also reaching that target audience that they work with on a daily basis.

Rodolfo Gutierrez: We are working in a large coalition of Latino in serving the organizations with the MN council of Latino affairs. We will be announcing some meeting materials and are moving forward very much into talking about these issues.

Elise Sporre: Our appointments expire in April of this next calendar year, so I am wondering what the process is for being reinstated, or for swapping folks that are not around. For the longer time members are there some positions that need to be approached for reevaluating to see if there is someone else can take over that.

Is there someone leading workplace safety and initiatives from last year? I know that there is some near future movement with the communication piece.

For the public comments, I heard from some stakeholders that they had not felt welcomed in terms of voicing their concerns during this time, so we should make sure that they are welcomed.

## Public Comments

None.

## Adjourn