Vermont Cheese Council

Annual Meeting

Tuesday February 3, 2015

von Trapp Lodge

Vince Razionale (CJH), Rachel Schaal (PHC), Peter Dixon(PHC), Michael Lee (TF), Meri Spicer (GVC), Stan Biasini (MMC), David Hugo (SF), Jeannine Kilbride (CHC), Lisa Battilana, Angela Miller (CBF), Laini Fondiller (LLF), Allison Hooper (VC), Jesse Werner (PAC), Molly Pindell (SFGD), Neil Urie (BF), Galen Jones(CC), Leslie Goff, Helen, Chris Gray, Jeremy Stephenson (SBF-online)

Minutes:

1. Meeting called to order at 9:37AM by Vince.
2. Welcome message from Vince – presentation of the 2 year vision collectively written by the Executive Committee.
3. Introductions around the room.
4. Slide show – the Year of Champions!
	1. Peter asked about whether the VCC can help sponsor individuals to attend ACS – Tom said that we will see what kind of funds we can come up with, or try and connect individual members with grants/funding opportunities. Molly asked what would be the best day to attend, if you can only attend one. Consensus is that Meet the Cheesemaker – question about whether a few members could share a table to save costs. Tom will look into it. Chris suggested potentially getting a block set aside where Vermont cheesemakers could all be together.
	2. Allison asked how many principal members we have – 43, which is roughly the same as it was the year before, a few members were lost due to selling their milk to other members instead of processing it themselves.
5. Diane Bothfeld from the Agency of Agriculture here to discuss the dairy impact study. Brand-new brochure put together by the Agency – sheep and goat industry is mentioned, but focus mostly on bovine dairy. Brochure just released last week, emphasizing how key dairy is in VT – $2.2 billion/year. Last study was in 2005. Went from $1million cash/day coming in to Vermont in 2005 to $3 million cash/day now – there are no other industries in the state bringing in this much cash. Economic impact of one cow - $1,500. Dairy is highly involved in tourism aspects – hard to quantify, though. 91% of Vermonters say dairy is important to our future. Tough time right now with water quality issues, but the impact is really positive. Reminder that deadline for trade show funding is this Friday. Chuck Ross and Agency working hard with FDA on FSMA changes – lot still up in the air. Greg Lockwood was given the Finley Award, for outstanding service in agriculture. Currently there are 3 plant inspectors for 121 milk processing facilities. Asking legislature for another plant inspector, still above the industry standard for plants/inspectors, which is around 25. GMO labeling update – hearing on the 4th. At this point milk and cheese on their own are exempt from labeling, but any adjunct ingredients that may have GMOs may require the product to be labeled. Diane emphasized that the Agency is here for us, if we need anything.
6. Treasurer’s Report – Michael. Biggest thing that the VCC did regarding finances was to set up a finance committee, to help implement procedures for better financial controls. Transition was a little awkward with a whole new board coming together as well as Tom just getting started, but Michael finding his footing. We have a good bit of cash to work with, finance committee has advised us to spend some of that down. Tom also worked on aligning the categories in the budget with how it’s actually used. Tried to make more space in the budget for Tom to work with and still stay within the budget. Allison asked whether we’ve done a cash flow projection – we have not, but by most guesses we have several years of operating money, and can use the vision to help guide us on a path to more balanced finances. David asked about our assets at this moment – Tom replied about $140,000, in a checking account. Finance committee advised not to put into a money market account. David advised looking into other options, based on experiences with other organizations. David also asked what we should be spending that down to, at this point there is not a number. David also asked whether any funds are earmarked, and that’s something that we’re working on. Jeannine suggested looking into a sweep account, as she had suggested when she was on the EC. Bill Malcolm and Bill Gilbert are the non-members on the finance committee, along with Tom and Michael. Meri pointed out that the vision laid out for the next few years is ambitious, and we’ll need to coordinate the finances accordingly. Peter asked whether -$11,000 is what we’re at, and this is something that we have funds to sustain. Allison asked what “ACS membership fee remission” is in the budget – that’s for the education stipend, which was used for ACS membership. Laini wondered whether we need to promote this more, though several members mentioned that has been brought up at past annual meetings. Molly wondered whether it could be used for ACS sessions – hasn’t been discussed but could definitely be a possibility. Tom can go into more detail with anyone upon request. Motion to approve budget by Meri, Allison second – all in favor. 2015 operating budget approved.
7. Bylaw changes – sent out to membership ahead of time. None of the proposed changes would go into effect until next year’s annual meeting. First change suggested is for voting rights – building in the ability for the Executive Committee to confer voting rights to an Associate Member for exemplary service to the organization. David suggested adding in the clause in Article IV Section 2 part 1 – “except as outlined below.” Meri motioned to approve this bylaw revision with David’s addition, seconded by Rachel. All in favor. Next bylaw amendment is for updating the dues structure – this was changed a few years ago but the bylaws weren’t properly updated. Allison motioned to approve, David seconded. All in favor. Next bylaw revision is changing the name of the President-Elect to Vice President. Laini motions to approve the bylaw revision, Meri seconds. All in favor. Last bylaw revision is to change the election cycle to two-year terms for each elected office, and rotate the positions to maintain more continuity in the Executive Committee. These changes would not go into effect until the next election cycle. David motions to approve the bylaw revisions, Rachel seconds. All in favor. All bylaw revisions have passed.
8. Elections
	1. The slate is as follows: Rachel nominated as president, Stan and Meri both nominated as president-elect, Angela as secretary, Michael as treasurer. Advisors are Jay, Andrew, Clay, Lisa. Most offices are uncontested, though there is an election for vice president. Meri and Stan introduced themselves to membership. Stan emphasized that he brings up the VCC and its members whenever he can, talking up our collective successes. Meri mentioned the Wyndham Foundation’s mission to support Vermont businesses and considers her work with the VCC fitting in with that and can bring her marketing experience to the table as a unique perspective. David moved to approve Rachel as president, Meri seconded – all in favor. Next election was for Secretary, out of order to help count the votes for the Vice President election. Peter moved to approve Angela as Secretary, Rachel seconded – all in favor. For the Vice President position, voting occurred by paper ballot, Meri won the vote 9-6 and is the vice president. Laini motioned to approve Michael as treasurer, Rachel seconded – all in favor. Peter motioned to nominate Stan as an advisor, Vince seconded – all in favor. David nominated the slate of advisors as outlined earlier, Rachel seconded – all in favor.
9. Lunch with Vermont Fresh Network members/Ed Behr
10. Post-lunch discussion. Presentation of new website, just live today. Streamlined and modern design, with a mobile/tablet friendly interface. Big line of work to update photography, copy, and content, but Tom will be working on that in the coming months. Will need input and help from members. Website designer has offered her help in photography, Tom will send her information on to members.
11. Tom presented the results from the member survey. Discussion moved towards the questions that ask what kind of programming members are looking for, and there seems to be a continued interest in technical advice, marketing, and industry networking. Peter suggested trying to bring back more of an industry focus to the festival, after Lisa said that she heard from feedback from a cheesemonger that it was difficult to interface with cheesemakers there. Good discussion around various possibilities, ACS was mentioned again as a good place to meet new buyers and make connections with industry folks outside the region. There will be a strong effort to try and get as many cheesemakers there as possible, Tom and the EC will explore all possibilities in the coming months.
12. Motion to adjourn at 3:10PM by Vince, Meri seconded – all in favor.