

**Rutherford BARN (Building Agricultural Relationships Now)**  
Board Meeting – November 13, 2019, 10:00 am, Cooperative Extension  
AGENDA

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Brandon Higgins called the meeting to order.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

October 9, 2019

**3. OFFICER REPORTS**

Treasurer's report

Brandon delivered the Treasurer's report on behalf of Wendy. He will email copy of report from Wendy out to members of the board (Appendix A.) There are still some funds outstanding from the Health Department for David's salary, but that will be paid and then the \$20,000 from RHI will be for his salary going into 2020. There is still a bit of a learning curve about SNAP/EBT as that program gets started, with a new account to cover expenses related solely to SNAP. General fund dollars and SNAP dollars have to be kept separate for audit purposes. Next meeting or first of the year we need to have and approve a budget for 2020 so that we have a good plan to go by for the year.

Officer reports

David read a letter from Stephanie to the board. (See Appendix B below for complete letter.)

Steve Govus said that he would like for us to have a strategy to get Strawberries, Peaches, and Apples to the Farmers Market.

Manager's Report

David presented a report on the first winter farmers market. There are over 500 flyers around town promoting the market, as well as facebook, newsletter, and print advertising. Main Street Market is doing breakfast and mimosas at the farmers market. Three new produce vendors were at the market on Saturday, including Overmountain Vineyards, Beverly Aiken with Maple Creek Farm and Apiary, and Under the Sun Farms.

David discussed the food network meeting that will be held later (same day). BARN is trying to create a team to collaborate on how to reduce food insecurity in Rutherford County and how to improve farmer viability through the Food Network Subcommittee.

Hannah Bundy shared information about the state-wide agritourism app that is launching through the NC Department of Agriculture. The McDowell County Extension Service applied and got funding for the app to be available for Polk, McDowell, and Rutherford Counties. More updates will come as soon as farms are eligible to go on the app.

#### 4. OLD BUSINESS

##### Capping New Vendors for Winter – Summer Vendor Category Structure

Brandon led a discussion on how the structure could be moving forward. Some markets do have a structure, and some do not, but some structure could be useful for the numbers of different types of vendors that will be allowed at the market. Brandon gave a handout of his proposed numbers. (Appendix C.) David read Stephanie's proposed structure she included in her letter. (Appendix B.) Amy Bridges suggested that collaborative partnerships between farms could be encouraged to help everyone at the market overall.

Brandon suggested that at our market competition across products, specifically meat, hurts the meat sellers.

Bob offered insights of different markets, and said that each market is unique and some things do much better at one place than another and that no hard and fast rule applies to all markets.

Bill asked if there was anything wrong with our market at the moment. Brandon responded that there was nothing wrong with the current numbers and types of vendors, but that craft vendors were constantly approaching and asking to become a vendor. That's not a bad thing, but we should probably establish ourselves as a food-centric market.

Bill suggested that since there aren't any current issues with the current mix of vendors, that we just make it a bit tougher for new vendors to enter rather than introduce several regulations.

Brandon recommended making the policy that no one who sold at the market in the 2019 season be turned away for the 2020 season, even if the ratios go above the percentage that we designate.

David asked about an attendance policy for craft vendors.

Amy said that at the Shelby market the location you get in the pavilion is dependent on the attendance, and that preferential treatment should be given to vendors who attend. Amy also spoke about how to jury and select the highest quality handmade products.

David suggested enforcing a rule that if you are a food vendor, 75% of products you have on your table each week be food rather than crafts in order to keep your food vendor status.

Food 85%

Non-Food 15%

Steve Govus made a motion to accept the Food 85% Non-Food 15% cap with the caveat that no one who sold at market in 2019 will be turned down for 2020. Bill Coxe seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

##### SNAP update

David gave a report for the SNAP progress so far. There will be a big marketing push to tell people about the fact that we are accepting SNAP at the market, and be pursuing funds to double SNAP dollars at the farmers market. Jenna will be working on marketing products specifically for SNAP.

Steve asked about an update from Forest City about new pavilion structure. Amy provided an update about the progress. Currently they are working on the designs for a new pavilion and then they will be seeking out funding for it. There is no immediate threat for the current farmers market location or shed to move.

## **5. NEW BUSINESS**

Board member elections – One vendor member and one individual member up for election

Brandon said that at some point before the spring market opens we will need to elect board members - Tiffany's vendor seat is up and we need to elect individual members. Steve Govus said that he felt as though his work was done and he would give up his individual spot for someone else. Election can take place in person at the annual meeting so that there is not any confusion for email.

David has copies of the board member applications for those who would like to be nominated.

## **6. ADJOURN**

Amy Bridges made a motion to adjourn. Steve seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

Appendix A.

Appendix B.

November 13, 2019

Stephanie Rzonca

Due to my absence, I am putting my opinion comments in writing and submitting them to the board for review.

A farmers market serves many members of the community – the grower/producer, the artisan, the chef, the family, and the activity-seeker. A farmers market is a hub of activity and a place where community as well as economy can grow.

There are some perplexing things about farmers markets, and counter-intuitive methods to ensure their success. An example: restricting items to those grown on farms that are registered and certified, so that no “reselling” of crops or products is taking place. While this restricts the types and quantities of crops available to the consumer, it ensures credibility and trust – what you see at the market is what was grown by the farmer. Some consumers need that sense of trust, some do not. Our market's decision to value integrity over quantity was a sound one, because it ensures that consumers can trust what they find at the market to be grown by the farmer and enhances the quality of the experience for everyone.

People feel good about their purchases, and they come back for the warm and fuzzy feeling of purchasing something directly from the grower.

A second counter-intuitive practice is this: “pile it high, and watch it fly” – growers who pile their tables with as many vegetables as they can will always sell more. Consumers will not take an item if they think it’s one of the last ones left. The perception of lack will make them think that they would be doing someone a disservice by purchasing the last one. Even if there are 20 more hiding under the table – they do not know that, so they will not buy. The perception of plenty tricks people into buying more.

The same is true on a greater scale. The more vegetable growers or food producers that come to the market, the more consumers will come as well. The ratio of vendors to customers is very important and is like a see-saw: the more vegetable & food producers present at a market; the more consumers want to attend. Consumers who see quantity and variety will come back again and again because they know they will always find more. The reverse, that farmers won’t come unless customers are there, is also true, so farmers markets can easily wither away into nothing. Capping produce vendors to increase sales of the two or three produce vendors that are already present is a strategy that will lead to market failure. Fewer produce vendors will be fighting over fewer customers. The more produce vendors can be convinced to attend, the more customers will also attend, and the more sales will increase for EVERYONE. I realize that this is counter-intuitive, but human psychology isn’t always logical. (As we know. We are on a farmers market board.)

This does not work the same way with crafts or artisan products. The more crafts or artisan goods that are at a market, the less people will come to shop for food. While artisan goods can augment a good market, they should never be the main focus.

Meats are tricky. There can be too much of a good thing. The meat vendors who are successful are those who are using alternative marketing practices and who are tapped into what their consumers want and how to communicate with them to encourage loyalty and consistency. (All farmers market sellers ultimately benefit from deepening their relationships with their customers.) Meat sellers who only sell meat are at more of a disadvantage than sellers who have a diversity of products, like vegetables.

My suggested vendor structure is this:

85% Food products – vegetables, value-added, meats

15% Artisan products of any kind – to be juried. Preference given to consumable personal care goods made with locally farmed products.

Of the 85% total food products:

Vegetable growers have priority. Vendors who have a diversity of products including vegetables are counted as a vegetable grower.

25% of all food sellers may be meat-only sellers.

10% of all food sellers may be a value-added product seller

Meat growers or value added product sellers can give themselves a competitive edge by working with another farm in our approved region to become a certified seller for that farm. (See Deer Valley/Green Family Farm as an example.)

Appendix C

Vendors	30	
Produce/ fruit	35%	10.5
Baked Goods	10%	3
Processed foods	10%	3
Beef	5%	1.5
Pork	5%	1.5
Chicken	5%	1.5
Dairy	5%	1.5
egg	5%	1.5
Crafts	20%	6
	100%	30