

**LOUISIANA AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AUTHORITY  
(LAFA) BOARD MINUTES**

**October 13, 2023**

11:00 AM

Landry Vineyards

5693 New Natchitoches Rd., West Monroe, LA 71292

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) Commissioner Mike Strain at 11:08 AM.

**II. ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Christopher Lowery.

**Present:** Commissioner Strain, Kent Brown, Devin Davis, Ronald Petree, and Representative Chris Turner

Mr. Lowery stated there was a quorum with five members present.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Petree congratulated the Commissioner and Representative Turner for their recent election victories.

Nicholas Cole, LAFA Director, introduced Christopher Lowery as a new employee with LAFA who would be assisting with running LAFA properties, and helping with the board meetings.

Catrina Irvin stated that she would no longer be LAFA's accountant, having accepted a new role within LDAF. She introduced Darranasia Coleman, who would be handling the majority of LAFA's financial duties.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Commissioner Strain asked the board members to review the minutes from the June 14, 2023, meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to approve the minutes from the June 14, 2023, meeting. It was seconded by Representative Chris Turner

The motion passed unanimously.

**V. REVIEW OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

Ms. Catrina Irvin presented LAFA's financial statements to the board and answered the members' questions.

A motion was made by Mr. Brown to accept the financial statements. It was seconded by Representative Chris Turner.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **VI. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Strain gave an update on the LDAF's efforts in fighting the recent wildfires across the state. The commissioner presented two videos showing the fires and how the department is combating them.

He stated that six people have been arrested and forty fires are still under investigation.

Commissioner Strain also stated that the bill he presented to the governor for funds to combat the fires was at \$32,000,000.

## **VII. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Update on Certified Louisiana**

Kelly Ransome, Assistant Director of LAFA, gave an update to the board on the status of the Certified Louisiana program.

### **B. Update on SLRF Grain Bin Project**

Mark Pousson gave a report about the use of the \$3,000,000 line of credit, progress of work done on the project, and the timeline for expected completion by July 2024.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Bob Odom Loop Paving Project:**

Nicholas Cole and Alex Guillory, engineer with Bluewing Civil Consulting, gave a report on a proposal to pave a portion of the Bob Odom Loop at the Lacassine Industrial Park with the assistance of a \$400,000 grant from the Louisiana Economic Development via the Southwest Louisiana Alliance. LAFA would be responsible for providing a ten percent (10%) match on the funding, which would be \$40,000. The estimated cost of the entire project is around \$540,000.00

Commissioner Strain made a motion to approve the pavement of a portion of the Bob Odom Loop at the Lacassine Industrial Park, and to authorize himself as Chair to make a request for proposal under Louisiana Public Bid Law to identify and select an engineer and contractor to conduct the work needed, and to authorize the expending of funds

necessary to complete the 10% grant match and any funds above the 10%, not to exceed \$600,000 total project cost, that may be necessary to complete the project, and to execute all documents necessary.

Mr. Ronald Petree seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **B. Progressive Tractor Incorporated Proposal**

Mr. Cole presented Progressive Tractor Incorporated's—a tenant of LAFA's at the Lacassine Industrial Park—request for LAFA to expand their current building. Mr. Cole stated that Progressive Tractor is looking to add 5,725 square feet onto their current structure, with an estimated project cost of around \$245,000. He stated that a new lease would be required to cover improvements to the building—and that the construction costs would be incorporated into the lease. Commissioner Strain added that insurance and a low interest rate (2.75%) should be built into the lease as well.

Representative Chris Turner made a motion to authorize Commissioner Strain as Chair to execute all actions and documents necessary to amend the current lease agreement with Progressive Tractor to include the payment and construction of an expansion project on Progressive's current building, which shall include a long-term lease at a rate sufficient to recover the funds expended on the construction project.

Devin Davis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **C. Loup Logistics Lease Proposal at Lacassine Industrial Park**

Mr. Cole presented that Loup Logistics is seeking a short-term lease for one acre of land at the Lacassine Industrial Park as a staging area needed to coordinate a project with Rail Logix, a current tenant of the park.

Mr. Devin Davis made a motion to authorize Commissioner Strain as chair to enter negotiations and execute all documents necessary to lease a certain portion of the Lacassine Industrial Park to Loup Logistics at a fair market value for use as a short-term staging area.

The motion was seconded by Representative Turner.

The motion passed unanimously.

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#### **D. Modern Mill Presentation**

A representative from Modern Mill, Chris Guimond, made a presentation to the board explaining their agricultural by-products company. Modern Mill is a company out of Mississippi that uses rice hulls combined with other ingredients to produce everyday building materials. Mr. Guimond stated that Modern Mill is looking to build a 50,000 sq. ft. facility, possibly in Louisiana, and that the Lacassine Industrial Park would be an advantageous location considering the location of the SLRF rice mill, which can provide inputs, and the proximity to multimodal corridors such as rail, interstate, and deep water port.

The board discussed the possibility of LAFA leasing the land and potentially building the structure (up to a certain amount, depending on funding).

Commissioner Strain stated that LAFA would need a copy of the company's financials, as well as a written proposal.

Mr. Kent Brown made a motion to authorize Commissioner Strain as chair to begin negotiations with Modern Mill concerning the construction of a mill at Lacassine Industrial Park.

Representative Turner seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

#### **E. Resilient Food Systems & Infrastructure Grant Presentation**

Mr. Cole and Ms. Ransome gave an update on LAFA's partnership with the USDA to administer the Resilient Food Systems and Infrastructure Grant. They informed the board that LDAF/LAFA was awarded \$6.2 million dollars to help Louisiana agricultural businesses that operate in the post-production link of the food supply chain.

They stated that LAFA is currently in the phase of gathering stakeholder input to determine funding priorities for grant recipients.

#### **F. Silicon Ranch Presentation**

A representative from Silicon Ranch, Ms. Julia Parr, presented to the board that Silicon Ranch would be interested in leasing a portion of LAFA property in the Monroe area. Currently, however, that land is being leased by a Louisiana hay farmer.

There was no motion or further action.

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**IX. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Cole reminded the board, if they had not done so already, to complete their mandatory ethics and sexual harassment prevention training.

**X. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn was made by Ronald Petree.

Devin Davis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned around 1:15 PM.