**North Star Farm Tour Board of Directors**

**Minutes – April 5, 2020 Approved April 18, 2020**

**Via Google Hangout at 7 p.m.**

**Welcome** by President Melodee Smith at 7:05with an acknowledgement that the Covid-19 Pandemic has altered life as we know it, worldwide. She invited each member to reflect as we reconnect for the first time as a full board since the all-day technology workshop on 12.7.19.

**Roll Call:**

Melodee Smith- *This won’t last forever but we need to make the best of what we can. Our farm has cancelled everything for 2020.*

Diana Weinhardt-Treangen-*We are both working at the Zoo as essential workers. Tigers can contract Covid-19 so we now have protective measures with animals, too. There are bills to pay and many canceled events. Some lambs were born early and more to come.*

Sue Wiegrefe-*I’m still working at Soil & Water Conservation. Hazelnuts are blooming and lambs are born. Trying to figure out how to sell virtually at a time when I can’t even see my Mom, my sister can’t travel from the hospitals, & buyers won’t travel. I don’t know how to evaluate risks.*

Wendy Wustenberg-*We have taken all recommendations serious to stay home. The agritourism plan & construction project are on hold. We need testing and a vaccine before I will change what we’re doing. It could be our finest hour to prove digital agritourism works. A test of Facebook Live during shearing drew hundreds of visitors.*

Jessica Anderson-*I’m working in conditions of constant change as a floater & there’s a chance I may be working inpatient. On the farm I’ve canceled events and will be shearing with family members.*

Teri Quamme-*We are both still working, but distance learning is presenting a big challenge. The farm hasn’t changed. I don’t see changes this fall except for one event with two busloads of people that may not happen. A grandchild is coming in Wisconsin and it’s difficult to imagine not being there.*

Brett Pauley-*I’m home with 17 & 19 teens: son lost his restaurant job; Jen & I are working remotely; daughter was distance learning already. We canceled events in June & July and have said “no” to tour requests.*

**DECISION TO ADOPT CONSENSUS VOTING FOR THIS MEETING:**

After discussion about the importance of moving forward united, motion by Wendy, 2nd by Sue to adopt consensus voting with roll call voting for the meeting. All members voted in favor.

**SECRETARY’S REPORT was tabled by the President at the Secretary’s Request**

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

The end-of-year balance in 2019 $1418.72

Deposits were verbally reviewed by Sue to include Mayo Clinic Health Systems ($1400), U of M ($500), 2nd Year SADG ($8695).

NOTE: Expenses included $150 to IMAA for translation services, $80 to Farmers’ Union for signs, $180 to Go Daddy, and the bill for Johnson Sanitation submitted by Dougherty’s for hosting the LSP class during the 2019 tour. A full transaction list is in the Treasurer File.

Current balance: $11564.44

Projected Membership Fees for Renewals $ 2400.00

Projected operating balance within 30 days $13964.44

Block Grants to 10 Farm Cooperators for SADG $ 6150.00

Projected operating balance for 2020 $ 7814.44

Motion by Wendy, second by Brett. All members voted in favor.

**2020 TOUR DECISION**

To comply with the Governor’s Executive Order and recommendations of the Center for Disease Control for personal protection during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Executive Committee recommended cancellation of the 2020 Tour scheduled for Sept. 19-20, 2020.

Board discussion included the following:

* NSFT’s reputation as the leader in agritourism public health & safety would be jeopardized.
* Raising money for an event that draws thousands of people would be impossible.
* There is serious speculation that professional sports will not be held through 2020 unless a non-spectator option is offered and approved by the federal government.
* Mass-testing, contact tracing and effective vaccine manufacturer will not be achieved for months, perhaps 2021. Some public health experts suggest 2022 is more realistic.
* Our families, animals and farms deserve the protection of NSFT best judgment.

Motion by Brett, second by Teri to accept the recommendation to comply with state and federal guidelines and cancel the 2020 Tour. All members voted in favor.

**2020 LAUNCH OF FARM AGRITOURISM VIRTUAL & ENTREPRENEURSHIP (FAVE)**

The enthusiastic Board working session about website redesign on Dec 4, 2019 leads the Executive Committee to recommend investing in virtual agritourism for the following reasons:

* The MN Dept of Agriculture Grants Director approved diverting excess funds to the website and authorizing the block grants to be spent however the farmers choose in Year 2.
* The 2019 Website SADG Grant application was unsuccessful, but with revision there may be many new sources of funding now that virtually all public events have been canceled.
* There is a capable NSFT team available willing to work as professional volunteers to design and build the website, manage qualified consultants, and enhance social media platforms.
* This is an opportune moment to link consumers isolated at home with farmers who have an abundance of products to sell and talents to share even though they also are isolated at home. Shepherd’s Harvest, Textile Center, and other events are closed.
* Our SADG Grant compels us to explore how association with a nonprofit educational organization might improve profitability and enjoyability of farming, and we think this project can be an innovative, entrepreneurial gold mine instead of a disastrous year.
* The University of St. Thomas Enactus Club will focus efforts on a business plan for the new website.
* Vermont Law School’s Center for Food & Agriculture and the University of Minnesota’s Tourism Center approved that this hypothetical change will not jeopardize the evaluation.

Motion by Teri to go digital in 2020, second by Brett. All members voted in favor.

**COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTS**

PROMOTIONS: Brett shared his professional assessment that NSFT needs to be reframed as an “evergreen” organization instead of an event. When the website is redesigned with social media as a consistent voice for the organization it frees us up to move in a new direction at a critical time in societal history. The Promotions Committee will explore a push campaign to promote new features, like virtual tours. His recommendation is to move quickly so we can announce our decision about the 2020 Tour and simultaneously create news about creative NSFT farmers working to flourish in the face of adversity.

EDUCATION: Melodee reported that Ingrid Christiansen’s firm is working to complete the translations of the posters. A conversation with UMASH and MDH will be held soon to discuss options for distribution/sale of those posters. The Farm Safety & Health Project feature at the International Agritourism Workshop in Vermont this October is likely postponed to 2021. The MDH canceled the spring “Fun on the Farm: Agritourism” dinner. NSFT can feature the policy and program that was put in place in 2019 on the new website and serve as a resource on the subject of zoonotic disease prevention and handwashing at a time when suddenly it’s necessary and not just nice to do. The new focus of activity will be development of valued content as we focus on the educational mission. New partners will be consulted including MDA’s Ag in the Classroom department, Like It Was Yesterday (the startup Virtual Reality business run by St. Thomas entrepreneurship student Enzo Vinholi), Shepherd’s Harvest (a virtual festival on our website?), Land Stewardship Project, and more.

DEVELOPMENT: We need resources to make this happen. A revision of the existing website grant is necessary and then fast solicitation of major sponsors. A revenue plan for the website needs to be developed to fuel continued programming of NSFT and, ideally, make this so successful that members receive revenue sharing.

Motion by Sue to accept the committee reports, second by Teri. All members voted in favor.

SADG GRANT REPORT

The first year evaluation was well received by everyone as a rare insight into what matters to family farmers. The MDA was not concerned that three farms opted out or that one of the control farms didn’t take the survey. Our engagement with St. Thomas Enactus Club won strong support as a progressive way for NSFT to serve members with important skills in business management. We will send out block grant checks after we receive confirmation from member farms that they will remain members in good standing and satisfy the expectations of the grant in 2020. Excess funds will be allocated to the FAVE Project; block grants will remain the discretion of farmers so as not to skew the integrity of the evaluation.

ANNUAL MEETING OCT. 25, 2020 – IN PERSON OR VIRTUAL

It is absolutely imperative that every member mark the calendar now for that date and protect it as a must-attend event. The 50% attendance last year was unacceptable as we almost failed to accomplish a quorum.

MEMBERSHIP 2020

The board discussed 2020 membership and concluded that it is desirable to open the door to new members, including members who are dedicated to agritourism but don’t have fiber animals. The Development Committee will discuss how to structure fees to ensure that the set-up costs are covered at the time of first enrollment.

Motion by Brett, second by Sue. All members voted in favor.

There being no further business, Wiegrefe moved adjournment, second by Weinhardt. Approved Unanimously. Adjournment was at 10:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted for Board Review,

Wendy Wustenberg, Secretary