



# West Central Michigan Horticultural Research, Inc.

*Board Meeting 3/25/2025*

## **Board Members:**

**Andy Riley**  
**Jordan Walsworth**  
**David Hackert**  
**Emily Lavelly**  
**Richard Raffaelli**  
**Gerrit Herrygers**  
**Nichole Wilcox**  
**James Averill**  
**Todd Jensen**  
**Scott Swindeman**

## **Non-Voting Attendees:**

**Patricia Parsons** – *Administrator*  
**Ashley Fleser** – *Farm Manager*  
**Justin Adams** – *Assistant Farm Manager*  
**Dr. Bates** – *MSU Ag Ext*

**Location:** West Central Michigan Research Station

**Start/Finish:** Call to Order 5:00pm / Motion to Close 7:13pm

**Attendance Called:** Attendance taken 5:02pm

**Agenda Approved:** *Board Confirmation email received. / Motion to amend agenda to move Dr. Bates to the beginning of the meeting. Amended Agenda approved 5:04pm.*

**Minutes Approved:** *Board Confirmation email received of meeting minutes. / Motion to approve Minutes 5:03pm.*

## **Topics of Discussion & Old Business:**

1. Dr. Bates – Updating Board
  - A. Reopen position regarding the Dean for the extension (IPM). Conducting a new search. Strong pool. Focus on only IPM in Region.
    1. Apple Specialist – A position we can't seem to fill. Not a lot of those kinds of candidates.
    2. It is not desirable to focus on 1 crop. Closed that position search.
    3. Tree Fruit Extension Specialist - Multiple crops based in West Central as a specialist position only on Horticulture. Wanting to have it based in Hart. Exclusion horticultural in region.
    4. Open to only internal candidates. Consider if someone from board wants to be on the search committee. The position will open on Monday.
    5. James Averill will be on search committee chair.
    6. How does this effect Emily's Job?
      - a. If Emily is hired into the position then the educator position will be eliminated.
      - b. Emily is not positioned, she will keep her current position.
      - c. Internal posting hope for key personnel that you would open a way for them to move up and take on more and in line for the growing season.
      - d. Position open for 2 wks starting Monday.
      - e. Gerritt will join the search committee and James will give Dr. Bates Gerritt's information.
2. Financials – Motion to Accept Financial / Motion Approved 5:29pm
  - A. General Ledger of expense & deposit presented for year 2024 and 2025 up to March 1st.
    1. Checkbook balance as of 3/12/2025 \$239,311.20
    2. The position we would like to be is at least a quarter of a million in the bank.
    3. 2024 Annual Ledger was presented to board.
      - a. Presented the 2024-2025 Annual Budget
      - b. 2024-2025 Budget motion to approve/ Approved 5:28pm
  - B. 2025 Expenses



1. How many sponsors are committed in writing or optimistically?
2. These were committed agreements for 35k.
3. Highlighted will need to renew agreements on expired commitments.
4. We need money from the gold tournament.
5. 2024 changed the dynamic because of the new barn and donations from Tree Fruit.
6. Projecting roughly \$123,000 and projecting break-even with no projects and we pick up fruit money.
7. Heavily reliant on the crops or pick up a donor to match.
8. Tax exempt and Green Stone conducts tax accounting filing for organization.
9. Last payment of heated barn in beginning of 2025.

### 3. Defenders Club

1. Those of you who come in contact ask for donations.
2. We are right at the breaking point this year.
3. Send David Hackert the donor sponsorship form for golf for Indian Summer.
4. Ask for donations of \$500 or less from every grower.
5. PFI cannot support the full station.
6. MSU standpoint – Ashley would be providing a quarterly report and share digitally.
7. Board missed this past end-of-year push of funds or certain items.
8. Someone from the board needs to ask for an operational fund.
9. PFI pulls out at the end of the year.
10. Significant fruit production is about a few years away. When pulling a block got to think the financial impact.
11. Tree Fruit money for 4yrs. Labor contractors are an untapped source.
12. Hort Society has funding. Not charging plot fees yet.
13. Working on a plot fee structures and is about a year out.
14. MSU Ext is heavily support g Bio Research. Ho do the other stations continue their revenues. User fees.
15. We are charging researchers for fees. Ashley about 15k that is covering hard cost. We have expenses that covered only under grant funding.

### 4. Heated Barn Project

1. Completed structure of a 146k Heated Barn
2. 25k-30k for pole barn amenities. Tree Fruit paid.
3. Feedback – Love the barn. Ready for water & septic.
4. Fits nicely in the compound and saved 4k do landscape work with farm hands.

## New Business:

### 1. Assistant Farm Manager

#### A. James Averill – Agreement

1. Original agreement coming up for renewal for spring. Kept in the same format.
2. Asst Manager 1/3 for org
  - a. Provide operations and maintenance of center
  - b. Assist with acquiring equipment and supplies
  - c. Utilities of new shop
  - d. Ground Maintenance – org responsibility
  - e. Added Audits – cost of the audits (org responsibility)
  - f. GAP audits for fruits – Pear not sure
  - g. Propane workshop, electrical, & Irrigation well going to MSU Ext for the new building.
  - h. Unable to say if we can pay less with this new agreement. Federally unknown funds.
  - i. Asparagus need more info or does not have an agreement yet. Not ready to commit today.
  - j. Asparagus is looking for allocation of where Justin's time is going on the funding percentages and needs more information.
  - k. Can MSU help more with boots on the ground.
  - l. Can only talk for Ag Bio, not able to talk Ext. AgBio pay for MSU portion of personnel labor costs



- m. No other stations fund their station staff like we do. Went through the history of how the process began with org paying for staff positions. Due to budget restraints from MSU.
- n. Shortfall 65-70k w/ PFI pulling out. If we pay ½ a year can Tree Fruit cover the other half? No
- o. Do op funds get moved? Probably 15k per station as usual for 6 stations.
- p. Commit for 1 1-year agreement that will cover this year since we are budgeted for that cost for 2025.
- q. Private events need to keep pushing for a new consultant to help with revenue.
- r. To support the agreement as written for 1 year, as long as Asparagus agrees to the 1/3 cost. Approved 6:21pm

B. Moore Estate

- a. Jon & Sandra Moore large realtor couple in the area looking to part ways with one of their estates.
- b. Have been in discussions with MSU and us to present to them.
- c. Meeting next Tuesday. It's a back-and-forth on funding.
- d. Looking to allow Andy and Richard to go to the discussion and work on setting up an endowment to come back with a proposal.
- e. They want the house to be used for researchers, allow painters, and music for a creative space.
- f. The Jon Moore station to live on for decades.
- g. This is renovating, a new roof, and remodeling.
- h. Going back and forth on the property and cash.
- i. Dave asked for an update from Andy & Richard after the meeting.
- j. This would be a 2.5 million endowment that will be interest-funded annually.
- k. Politely declined MSU's offer

C. Tree Fruit Commission Ask

- a. 3 Asks were given
  - i. Tellis & expenses – Mutual Evercrisp Apples
  - ii. Smart Orchard – demonstration high-density apples
  - iii. Proof of Concept – Alvotech trials
- b. Is there any way to combine them, not as the same block, but at the station? Combine Smart Orchard and Proof of Concept together.
- c. Will discuss in the meeting next week.

D. Research Committee

- a. Outline has been approved.
- b. Project Green Approved with Project #3.
- c. Want to support more peach research. Peach trees are declining.
- d. Emily will be sending approvals for final board approvals in the near future.
- e. Full-time funded technician for the lab.
- f. Grants & Ashley op's budget will pay for her cost.
- g. Caleb emailed the research committee and Andy challenged other members to contact the research committee if you have any ideas or projects you would like to see.

E. Farm Updates

- a. Celeste Wheeler residue testing on cherries
- b. We are ahead of the game on pruning.
- c. Cherries done, ½ apples. TreeFruit requests of Mitchell variety trial, alternate root stock 1000 trees.
- d. Significant funds would be needed for a smart orchard.
- e. Grant-funded work for sensors anywhere on the farm. Panels 15ft (9 panels) for Agrometrics. Tower couldn't pour concrete due to frost restrictions. All the money we asked for was to put trees in the ground.
- f. Ready to go with equipment for season. Hudson & Reeman equipment for this year.
- g. Scott - What's on the agenda for next year? It will be determined & driven by the financial funding cycle.



- h. The research team has their wish list to help drive what we are planning.
- i. Scott - Really need to push to develop a 5yr plan. Even with changing that's fine, but having the foundation of planning for future sustainability & many apples are being pushed out of the market.
- j. The larger the station the harder to determine whether the research is a future vision than a flop.
- k. This would give us a better understanding of our budget projections.
- l. Scott Cautioned - Keeping up with new strains & rootstocks. Avoiding varieties like Ambrosia, becoming a disappointment & costly.
- m. Cost reduction - Is there any equipment that can be liquidated, but keep bringing it to the board?

F. Other Items

- a. Golf Fundraiser - We are working on getting the invitations out to the annual golf outing.
- b. Need to have the board keep in mind of replacing the admin for the organization. For other stations, does MSU furnish an Admin for the station? MSU does support the admin at other stations.
- c. Ashley would see a benefit of an admin located at the station regularly.
- d. Ag Bio usually pays 25% admin op cost. Some go through grant money.

### Motions Voted On:

1. Motion to Amend Agenda – Motion to approve the agenda as amended.  
*Moved: Gerrit – Support: Richard – 10 yes votes (Andy, Jordan, David, Emily, Richard, Gerrit, Nichole, Scott, Todd, James) - passed 5:03pm*
2. Motion to Approve Minutes – Motion to approve previous minutes.  
*Moved: Richard – Support: David – 10 yes votes (Andy, Jordan, David, Emily, Richard, Gerrit, Nichole, Scott, Todd, James) - passed 5:03pm*
3. Motion to Approve 2025 Budget – Motion to approve the projected 2025 Budget as reported by Patricia Parsons  
*Moved: David – Support: Todd – 10 yes votes (Andy, Jordan, David, Emily, Richard, Gerrit, Nichole, Scott, Todd, James) - passed 5:28pm*
4. Motion to Approve Financial – Motion to approve financials as reported by Patricia Parsons  
*Moved: Gerrit – Support: Todd – 10 yes votes (Andy, Jordan, David, Emily, Richard, Gerrit, Nichole, Scott, Todd, James) - passed 5:29pm*
5. Motion to Approve – Motion to agree to the Assistant Farm Manager agreement with MSU AgBio for one year as long as Asparagus agrees to 1/3 cost.  
*Moved: Richard – Support: Todd – 9 yes votes (Andy, David, Emily, Richard, Gerrit, Nichole, Scott, Todd, James) - passed 6:21pm **Abstain: 1 Jordan***
6. Motion to Adjourn – Andy Adjourned 7:13pm