



Ag Innovation Workgroup (AIW) Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 15, 2021 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Attendees

AIW Members:

John Dicks, Chair	Chris Moran
Michael Aerts	Tyra Phillips
Sergio Alvarez	John Rivers
Joe Cardenas	Martha Roberts
Justin Dunlap	Tori Rumenik
Daniel Flynn	Timothee Sallin
Susan Harper	Meital Stavinsky
Eric Levin	Gary Wishnatzki
Dr. Carl Lewis	
Wendy-Lin Bartels, PhD	
Seth McKeel	
Kati Migliaccio	

Interested Partners:

Josh Aubuchon
Kevin Claridge
Matt Donovan
Michael Dukes
David Kniseley
Rosa Shores
Sara Wander

FDACS Staff:

Commissioner Fried
Shahra Lambert
Stephanie McClung
Helen Miller
Alan Brock
Dick Crockett
Shelby Scarpa
Kathryn Holland
Jessica Anderson
Portia Sapp
Christopher Pettit

Meeting Minutes

1:03PM - John Dicks, Chair called the meeting to order

Gave brief remarks on the passing of Dr. Conti

Introduced new AIW FDACS staff – Helen Miller, Dick Crockett, Alan Brock & Shahra Lambert

1:05PM - Commissioner Fried gave brief remarks on the passing of Dr. Lisa Conti and thanked the group for their continued efforts.

1:07PM - John Dicks, Chair – turns the meeting over to Shahra Lambert.

1:09PM – Shahra Lambert gave a report on AIW's Future Plans.

Shahra said a few words regarding the passing of Dr. Conti, as it was both a professional and personal loss here at FDACS. The Department will continue to do the AIW Newsletter, which was something Dr. Conti always loved putting together and sharing. Shahra explained the importance of continuing to put out the AIW Newsletter as a means of sharing/networking information. Shahra is working with the FDACS Division of Marketing to produce quarterly newsletters that will be a catch all of both AIW and FDACS more broadly. She encouraged members to share the newsletters as they come out. Shahra touched on highlighting the innovations within the Department regarding our response to COVID-19, as we had to innovate in order to determine how to serve constituents and the ag community.

The next update Shahra gave was in regard to the Interactive Portal for Ag Innovation, which is currently a work in progress. She is actively working with the Department's IT team in revamping the website to incorporate this function. Shahra mentioned that a Mach form has been created, which will roll out as a questionnaire/survey to help build this out and access what resources, innovative tech, etc. that we already have available in Florida. The goal is to streamline the portal so that it becomes the clearinghouse for these resources.

Shahra also spoke about how Commissioner Fried has charged the FDACS team to partner with the Biden-Harris Administration. FDACS created a 31-page proposal plan discussing many items that the Department hopes to partner with the Administration on. Specifically noted are ag innovation, grants, water, energy, trade and hemp. The proposed

plan mentioned is titled “Biden-Harris Administration Partnership Plan: Keeping Florida & America Growing” from January 2021.

Shahra then turns the call over to Alan Brock.

1:15PM – Alan Brock gave a report on the Florida-Israel Agriculture/Technology Innovation Summit.

Alan Brock praised the Summit, which took place over the course of 4 days in mid-November. Due to COVID-19, the Summit was done virtually rather than in person as planned. Over 200 people attended and because it was virtual, more farms were able to be included and showcased. The main focus of discussions were hemp and artificial intelligence/robotics, as well as the availability of funding and the challenges created by COVID-19. Alan noted that he viewed the summit as a success and hopes to continue to grow these kinds of partnerships in the future.

A link to the agenda and summit is below.

Florida-Israel Agriculture Innovation Summit Agenda: <https://www.fiba.io/agsummit/>
Virtual summit: <https://vimeo.com/fibatampa>

Alan then turned the call over to Helen Miller.

1:19PM – Helen Miller introduced herself as the main FDACS contact for AIW and started her portion of the Ag Focus Group Workshops and Summary report

Helen opened the discussion of the Focus Group Project Summary, Dick Crockett will also be reporting on this matter.

In January 2020, FDACS External Affairs conducted 9 focus groups with about 100 people. The participants were asked to share innovations they’ve done and what barriers they’ve encountered and/or successes they’ve seen. Helen noted that we received great feedback and emphasized the importance of being able to hear directly from them. She also noted that we would continue to do so.

Helen then turned the call over to Dick to give more detail on the report and finished her portion by saying it will serve as a guide to AIW.

1:21PM Dick Crockett started his portion of the Ag Focus Group Workshops and Summary report

He started by noting that he was able to participate on some of these focus groups and echoed Helen’s sentiments. Dick expressed his excitement to be involved in AIW work group and looks forward to the work we’ll be doing. Dick noted that within these focus groups there were three main buckets - Communication, Funding & Research.

Communication – He noted that some of the feedback we received was that producers, farmers, ranchers feel like they don't do a good job at selling themselves. There was interest expressed in the Department helping with that. Dick said that he is soliciting input from folks on that subject. Dick noted that the Department has updated lists to hit all corners of the state to try to include folks up and down the food supply chain as part of communications/outreach.

Funding – Dick started off by noting that the Department does not have this function outside of some cost sharing for equipment. With that being said though, he wanted to point out that the Department is looking to be a conduit/clearinghouse for federal (USDA) and private sector dollars.

Research – Dick noted something similar for these categories by stating that research is not one of the Department's primary functions. The Department is hoping to become a conduit for this as well, by helping connect folks to federal resources and other entities such as UF/IFAS and FAMU.

Helen and Dick concluded their report; turned the call back to Chair John Dicks.

1:28PM - John Dicks reviewed subcommittee projects and delivered closing remarks.

The Chair praised the Israel/FL Summit and noted that it may serve as a model for being able to do this with other similarly situated groups/connecting with other industries as well.

He noted that the goal for today's meeting was to get everyone back together, facilitate ideas and think about what direction the AIW group wants to go. He then informed attendees that he would like the group to come together and participate in that either during the meeting or by following up with staff.

Next the Chair said he would like to now find a way to synthesize the information from this meeting and inform everyone of what he thinks it's telling the group as whole. He then recounted when AIW had its first meeting in Aug of 2019 at the fairgrounds in Tampa. From that first meeting, he specifically talked about the brain storming session and the few key themes emerged, with subsequent subcommittees. The two themes were public/private partnerships and finance/outreach/communications.

The Chair talked about the feedback from the focus groups conducted by FDACS, outside of the AIW group. He noted that while it was expressed by the focus groups that they want help on research, he does not think that's a need that FDACS/AIW can serve. However, he does believe that FDACS/AIW can help with the two other needs expressed, which are Communication and Funding. He noted that both were two of AIW's goals, which further confirmed for him that those areas are where the groups can focus. He mentioned that as of now we don't have access to funding, but the group can help to feed information about funding opportunities from this group's network. He also noted that within this group there are multiple networks as well as a robust and capable staff focused on outreach. He also mentioned the newsletter as one of the aspects of helping with communication.

The Chair also expressed that he would love to see the AIW group, during a non-pandemic time, to be able to sponsor an Ag Innovation/ Ag Tech showcase at the Florida State Fair. He noted that this showcase would be an opportunity to bring a hands on, tangible agricultural innovation to the public. He also noted that he would like the group to work on a “shark tank” style event where AIW can vet innovators to come and pitch their idea to venture capital/hedge funds/etc. folks. The goal for this type of event would be to help the group connect the innovators with the funders. The Chair also expressed that he would like to invite an innovator to each of the group’s meetings going forward to engage with them on where they need help and hear their successes.

1:37PM Chair Dicks then opened the call to feedback/ Q&A from the group.

John Rivers, Faces of Florida Farmers brought to the group’s attention that Florida High Tech is teaming up with a local healthcare system and pitched the idea of partnering with Florida High Tech in the future.

From John Rivers to Everyone in Chat:

Helen....we are shooting a documentary titled “Faces of the FL Farmers” to promote our FL Farmers and help tell their story. We’re working in hand with the Dept’s marketing team. Happy to coordinate the effort with your and Dick’s efforts to promote our Farmers.

Daniel Flynn, Florida Atlantic University informed the group that UF has an AI processing machine that processes images very quickly and creates large databases. He noted that this includes LIDAR images of hydration and could have a number of other uses as well. He stated that UF has made it available at a 50% sub rate (university rate) to folks. This could also be used perhaps in the space corridor and is unique to Florida.

Matt Donovan added to Daniel Flynn’s subject and explained that he would like to offer to be the connector to the marketplace for this kind of technology.

Kati Migliaccio, UF provided the following link for more information on the new supercomputer technology. <https://ai.ufl.edu/> She also offered to help direct anyone to get the right person at UF if someone is interested in this device.

Joe Cardenas commented that he thought one of the most helpful aspects of the original meeting was a good balance of folks from those in the field, academic, govt., operators, industry, etc. At the meeting the group was asked what the needs were, and he thinks doing a brainstorming session like that again would help make sure the horse is in front of the cart.

Chair Dicks highlighted the great content of the whitepaper draft and thanked those who contributed to the document.

Shahra Lambert then briefly discussed updating the website, part of which would allow for any producer/farmer/rancher within the portal to input their need. It would show them relevant information to help meet those needs. She did point out that this will be phase 3 of the website enhancements.

Susan Harper expressed that she is willing and interested in helping in any aspect she can.

Rosa Shores, Block Chain Tech informed the group of the project proposal out in partnership with USF / Black Farmers and Ag Assoc. This project is in appropriations in the FL House. She would like to share the draft with anyone interested and will be sending the details to Helen to circulate to the group.

Michael Aerts requested follow up information regarding the status of the proposed center for innovation in the Newberry area. Chair Dicks responded that we supported their grant application but is not sure about the current status. Helen/Dick will follow up to get an answer to Mr. Aerts.

Kevin Claridge, Mote Marine Lab, wanted to check in about aquaculture. He would like to offer for Mote Marine Lab to come back and do a presentation on Ag Innovation. Note: Joe Cardenas is a producer in this area, the group would love to highlight it more and have Mote come back to present.

Daniel Flynn, FAU, expressed interest in being involved in that and stated that FAU recently got USDA funding for that area.

Helen Miller announced the upcoming FDACS/USDA Crop Insurance Town Hall on Wed. Feb. 17th. Michael Aerts requested that Helen circulate the details with the group.

Justin Dunlap spoke next and explained that he supports a lot of SE FL farms by purchasing from those farms for donation programs. He has come across young farmers and newcomers, who say it's very difficult to get crop insurance, especially because many exclude hurricane/storm insurance. He would like to see this be a focus of FDACS/AIW. Justin also mentioned the importance of keeping agricultural zoning intact and protecting farmland from new development. Would like to see some sort of policy on this.

Shahra Lambert responded by noting that the acting undersecretary of USDA RMA will be on Wednesday's call. She also said that both the Biden-Harris Administration and Commissioner Fried have noticed that with crop insurance. Florida has a litany of 300 commodities and specialty crops, so this is an important issue to our state. FDACS wants to let USDA know where we are on this and the uniqueness of Florida agriculture. Shahra also said that FDACS wants to create a new system for RMA for Florida. She noted that timber in North Florida post hurricane is an example of why we need this as well.

David Kniseley, a Chief Development Officer, was the last to speak in this portion of the meeting and shared with the group about a kind of weather technology he can provide and a partnership with UF/IFAS. He would like to do a brief presentation on that particular predictive weather technology. Note: He has already talked with the water policy folks.

2:01PM Chair Dicks turns it over to Helen to give some details on Wednesday's event

Helen Miller told the group that Alan Brock has sent out the information for the town hall on Wednesday. Helen is accepting and collecting questions ahead of time and said she looks forward to working with everyone.

2:03 PM Chair Dicks thanks everyone for joining today and called the meeting to a close.