



Minutes
Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA)
Vested Member Meeting
Monday, June 22, 2020
Remote

AOSCA Board of Directors President Ken Bertsch, North Dakota State Seed Department, called the 2020 AOSCA Annual Meeting Vested Members meeting to order at 10:02 AM Central Time, on Monday, June 22, 2020. Due to the COVID 19 situation, the meeting was held remotely.

Due to the remote nature of the meeting, in lieu of the invocation, Bertsch requested a few moments of silent reflection.

Bertsch called for any additional agenda items. Hearing none, [motion made, seconded, and passed to approve the agenda as presented.](#)

Prior to taking the roll call, Boruff reminded everyone there are two meetings running concurrently, the Vested Member and Certification Requirements & Standards Council (CRSC) Meetings. The roll call was conducted simultaneously for both these meetings. Foundation Seed Organizations were also recognized. Representatives of each Agency introduced themselves and other members of their delegation in attendance at the meetings. Jason, Goltz, AASCO President, was in attendance, as were Honorary Members, Stan Young, Daryl Strouts, and Jim Shearl. Chet Boruff, serving as AOSCA Board of Directors secretary, declared that a quorum of the membership was present for both the Vested Member and Council Meetings.

AOSCA Board of Directors President Ken Bertsch introduced the other members of the Board of Directors and the regions they represent.

Ken Bertsch, President	Northern Region	Doug Miller, Vice-President	Northern Region
Bill Foote, Past - President	Southern Region	Jim Bostick	Southern Region
Abed Anouti	Western Region	Doug Boze	Western Region
Eddie Goldschagg	Global Region	Glyn Chancey	Global Region

At past meetings, one regional representative gave a report on their respective regional meeting but since these were held remotely, the minutes will be available on the AOSCA website. The Southern region met on April 14th, the Western region met on April 15th, and the Northern region met on April 22nd.

Bertsch announced that the minutes of the last AOSCA vested members' meetings held on June 24, 2019, and June 26, 2019, had been distributed to the membership and made available through the AOSCA website. [Motion made, seconded, and passed to accept the minutes as distributed.](#)

AOSCA President's Report – Ken Bertsch

In thinking about a title for this report, the term “old dogs and new tricks” came to mind. This seems appropriate, given how our organization has been conducting business for the last few months; not that any of us is old, but we have been trying some new tricks.

I've finally (and stubbornly) accepted that the pandemic has forced AOSCA to operate without group meetings and discussions. We've had to condense, boil-down and prioritize to what's really, really important...and put everything else on the table. Taking an “it's good enough approach is disturbing for most of us who prefer to be detail-oriented, organized and objective-focused. My Grandpa's not-so-elegant saying for these sort of circumstances was “we ain't building a freaking piano here”.

Like it or not, AOSCA's business and this very meeting is all about prioritizing this year. We've hit the high spots- made sure the important things are covered- put the non-critical issues on hold and moved on. I've spent a fair amount of time worrying that all of our members wouldn't be heard in this COVID-driven virtual environment, and that we couldn't practice our customary due diligence in discussing business.

I hope we've seen otherwise. From the Regional meetings this spring to Committee meetings held two weeks ago, I believe that our members have had the opportunity to be heard. I also prefer to believe, rightly or not, that we've boiled things down to important decision-making and Dan Curry's Standards Council report should reflect this. We owe our gratitude to our staff, committee chairmen and regional meeting organizers for being professional, nimble, and to have made the business of AOSCA successful in a most challenging period of time.

 The hemp topic is the best example of this COVID-driven process. I could easily spend an hour on one issue, but will boil down to saying thanks to all of you that have responded to our members by devoting your time, expertise and organizational skills to moving this standards-process to the point of near-completion.

A shout-out to Tom Hardiman and Dan Curry: both of these gentlemen took on the tough tasks this year with Hemp VRB and Standards Council work, where we again have broken new ground with virtual discussions on tough issues. Both have done outstanding work for our organization. Many of you contributed to creating some highly technical and important standards in a one-year timeframe. The list of actors and authors is long- you know who you are. Well done.

 As a board, while we didn't come near finishing our intended work-list, we did make a decision in June that impacts our membership. In March, 2019 Chet offered the BOD an option: he proposed a retirement target-date to the Board, or another option that would have him reduce his work-schedule and extending his retirement timeline. The BOD digested, discussed and evaluated this proposal in operating and financial terms and agreed in principal at our June 2019 meeting to draft an agreement that outlined specifics of his service. For transparency sake, the details of this arrangement were provided to our members in a memo dated December 3rd of last year.

In hindsight; good move. Our inclination was that Chet's knowledge and experience with AOSCA would allow a part-time CEO role to work; this has proven accurate, especially given where we've been in 2020. With or without the upheaval in today's work-world, I'm pleased that we made that collective call and believe it serves the interests of the organization near-term. My thanks to Chet and the officers of the Board for bringing this plan and agreement together, and to our members for their trust in assessing our needs for the short term. The March 2020 mid-winter meeting would have been devoted to a great extent to evaluating this arrangement, and looking forward to the next phase of AOSCA's future in strategic planning terms. That will come.

With this and other important issues circling our organization, it's critical that our members communicate with the BOD. I can assure you of one thing: every discussion at the BOD level takes into account the needs of our members. This cannot happen in a vacuum; your thoughts and opinions must be the foundation of evaluating the future of AOSCA. I encourage you to over-communicate with your regional representatives especially during the next year or two.

Our organization has challenges to overcome. Declining use of certification programs and acres is the most apparent. Remaining relevant in a changing industry is an obvious challenge. Another is leadership. While we have outstanding veteran and younger members, our association in terms of age, gender and race isn't very diverse and consequently neither is our leadership. This observation isn't made to address today's social hot-topics: it's about having

diversity of perspective, which is brought about with a balance of experience, new ideas and differing world views. Going forward, it will be critical for our organization to bring a diverse perspective to all of the leadership positions in AOSCA.

Allow me to take a moment to thank so many individuals who have done so much over the past year.

- My thanks and gratitude to Jim Bostick, Abed Anouti and Glyn Chancey for their collective calm, thoughtful and professional approach to representing their regions and AOSCA. These individuals, along with the entire Board, have given of their time and wisdom for us and deserve better thanks than we can offer today. You've all been wonderful colleagues and servants to AOSCA. Gentlemen, we'll make it up to you someday.
- On another Board topic: we welcome Andy Altishin, Billy Skaggs and Doug Miller (Canada) to the BOD. All three join the Board following this meeting, and we look forward to the previously-mentioned "diverse perspective" being brought to the discussions and activities of the Board.
- Lastly, to our staff: Chet, Peggy and Lynn. Every President thanks them in their report, it's a well-deserved tradition. I will add this: you can't have adequate appreciation for the work they do until stepping a bit closer to the day-to-day activities of AOSCA. As I mentioned earlier, the years of experience represented by this team is a benefit to our organization. We see this consistently at regional and national meetings, you've seen it again in a different way this year, and I commend all three for their professionalism and ability to adjust to an entirely different way of conducting the association's business.

In these most uncertain of times I wish the best and good health for all of you. I have tremendous respect for each and every person sitting in this virtual room; your business expertise pales by comparison to the personal qualities of everyone associated with AOSCA. I hope to see all of you, in person, very soon. It is an honor to be allowed to serve, and I thank you.

AOSCA Chief Executive Officer Report – Chet Boruff, AOSCA CEO

Thank you, Ken, for your very kind remarks and for your support of the plan the Board and I developed for my work schedule this year. I believe it is working out very well, so thank you for mentioning that in your report.

When we all adjourned and left our last meeting in Chicago after celebrating AOSCA's 100th anniversary, there was no way in the world any of us could have ever imagined what life would challenge us with in the last few months. I've been thinking about this and how it has impacted me personally. If I get through all the current challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and don't learned anything, then it will be for naught. One thing I've learned is to never take anything for granted again. I'm never going to take for granted again the opportunity to go with friends to a baseball game at Wrigley Field. Or take for granted spending time in the hospitality suite and exchanging stories with friends I've worked with for many years. I'm never going to take for granted again the simple act of getting on a plane or in a car and going to a meeting. Or for that matter, simply calling up friends and family at home to make plans to go out and have dinner or see them in some way. There will be a day when hopefully things will get back to normal. I've learned that I'm not going to take that for granted again.

As I get back to my AOSCA report, there are going to be many topics that I'm going to mention that are similar to the last fifteen years that I've been making the report, but there are going to be some that are very different, as well.

So, let's talk about the things that haven't changed. I've said for a long time that it is a blessing to have Peggy and Lynn as colleagues as they work for you at AOSCA. These two ladies are indeed very, very dedicated to our membership. They do a wonderful job for you and there is no doubt that they are "all in" for AOSCA. That is something that I'm very pleased to be able to say year after year and how happy I am to be able to work with them.

Another thing that never changes from one report to the next is the commitment of your Board of Directors. Even though the Board members themselves change, they all bring to the Board the same level of commitment that Ken mentioned. All the Board members that have come before and I am certain that all those to come in the future, are very dedicated to this Association. We did not have a chance to meet in person at our mid-winter meeting. We were really looking forward to it because Doug Miller had invited us to Puerto Rico to visit the Illinois Crop Improvement farm down there in conjunction with our meeting. Had we gone, I think we still might be in Puerto Rico, the way things have turned out. We're hoping to be able to hold a future meeting there. As an alternative to meeting in person, we've had a number of conference calls and we will continue to do that in the future. AOSCA's business must go on.

Another thing that never changes is that AOSCA has a great working relationship with the other seed industry stakeholder organizations. We have a close relationship with Ernest Allen and all of his colleagues at the USDA lab at Gastonia. When we are working on things like changing the regulations to the Federal Seed Act or if we have a question on the OECD Seed Schemes, there is never a doubt we can pick up the phone and we can talk as colleagues and friends.

We also have a great relationship with ASTA, including Pat Miller, Andy LaVigne, and others that you've met from time to time. I can't say enough, especially in the past year, about how much we've appreciated ASTA's support for seed certification as it applies to the hemp industry. Without question, ASTA has supported the use of Certified hemp seed and that is very much appreciated.

We have a great relationship with the seed analysts through AOSA/SCST and the seed control officials, through AASCO. We have Jason Goltz on the line for this meeting from AASCO, and again, it is a benefit that we can always pick up the phone to discuss issues. We always appreciate their input and advice.

Those are things that really don't change much from one year to the next. But some things are much different this year and that's what I wanted to talk about,

A major change for all of us is meeting and working remotely. As it turns out, I haven't been going to the office since about the tenth of March. Peggy and I have literally not been in the office at the same time since then, but we've learned to work remotely. Our friend, Lynn, has taught us a great deal because she has been working remotely for years and doing it seamlessly. It's working for us and I imagine it's working for many of you as well. It's going to be interesting looking down the road for all our association and businesses, because I imagine there will be a lot of things that probably will not go back to the way they were. We're learning to work remotely and part of what I hope the Board will discuss in strategic planning in the future is what does that mean for an Association like yours. With systems that allow us to work remotely, perhaps there are ways we can rethink about the need for offices and how staffing might look in the future. Interesting times lie ahead for all of us.

I received a phone call earlier this spring with a question and a concern about whether or not seed certification and seed testing activities would be able to move forward this spring, in light of restrictions due to the pandemic. Would our side of the industry be able to perform during one of the busiest times of the year? With businesses closing down or social distancing, how would they do their work? In response, I sent out a survey to ask what your organizations were all

doing and not surprisingly, you were moving forward. You were being creative and you came up with common sense ideas on how to get the job done. I was able to assure the people that asked those good questions that they need not worry about it. Things were going to move forward and they in fact did. I really appreciate all you've done. I know it hasn't been easy on the local level. A lot of your people are out doing field inspections today, and they were social distancing long before it was popular. But when it came down to office and lab work, you've made changes and you've been successful. Thanks for a job well done.

Another thing that changes, but also remains the same, is that hemp continues to be an opportunity and a challenge for us. As Ken mentioned, we were able to put together a new hemp variety review board. They held their first meetings on May 27th and June 1st, remotely of course. The Hemp VRB looked at twenty-five applications and I think when all the back and forth is finished, we'll probably have about twelve or thirteen new varieties eligible for seed certification. We hope that the other applicants will be able to reapply in the future, once they have the documentation required. This is a new industry and a lot of what we required is new to them. We identified great people to work on the Variety Review Board. They worked hard and it's been an interesting new opportunity for us.

In the last year, we have answered hundreds of emails and phone calls dealing with hemp. Many people working in the hemp industry don't have knowledge about seed certification or what is required in developing a variety that is eligible for seed certification. These contacts have given us the opportunity to tell people what seed certification is and also, what it isn't. As you know, some people are mis-using the terms "seed certification" and "certified seed" to mean something entirely different than we do. The calls and emails have given us the opportunity to open up an avenue and conversations with a new industry and it will be interesting to watch the hemp industry mature as we time goes on.

With that, I want to conclude my report and repeat what I have said before. It is an honor to serve as your CEO and I'm pleased that I am able to continue in that role. I know the year ahead is going to be challenging and there will continue to be opportunities to play leadership roles as the world gets back to some sense of normalcy. Throughout it all, AOSCA has a diverse membership, with valuable skills and knowledge, it can depend upon. Some things I am certain will never change include your commitment to serve the seed industry well and promote the use of Certified seed, with the end goal of farmers getting the varieties that they've paid for and the quality of seed they expect. You are all doing a great job.

AOSCA Treasurer's Report – Chet Boruff, AOSCA Secretary/Treasurer

In addition to being the CEO of AOSCA, the Board has elected me to serve as the Secretary and Treasurer of the Corporation. Following are some brief remarks about AOSCA's finances.

The financial condition of AOSCA remains very strong. As in the past few years, we have retained a CPA firm in the Quad-City area to conduct a review of all our records to make sure that we conform to accounting principles and that they are accurate. The firm has reported to the Board that all is in order. I want to go deeper and give you a few specifics on where your Association stands financially.

Effective on January 1, 2020, we received the first assessment payments where an additional one penny per acre assessment fee went into effect. That helped our income stream and continued to put the Association in good shape on an operating basis. Beyond that, in the last few months we've had no travel or meeting expenses, so those expense reductions are going to have a big impact on the bottom line at the end of the year. I would guess that some of you will be able to say the same about your own businesses and some of the expense reductions you are seeing.

Over the years, AOSCA has been fortunate to accumulate cash reserves and the Board of Directors adopted a conservative investment policy that we follow very closely with the assistance of our investment advisor. Even though equity markets have been on a roller coaster ride the last few months, AOSCA's investment account portfolio has not suffered much, due mostly to that conservative approach. I'd be wrong to say the value didn't go down a little, but the investments have been made with a long-term view in mind for when the markets improve.

When the Board adopted the 2020 budget, it projected to show positive returns for the year. With the reduced expenses mentioned earlier, improved income from internal sources, and income received from a service project managed through the office, we think AOSCA will actually have a better financial year than projected for 2020. I look forward to reporting the results to you later and will be reporting our progress to the Board through the remainder of the year.

Respectfully submitted –

Chester S. Boruff, AOSCA Secretary/Treasurer

Recognitions and Tributes – Bertsch advised that we were not aware of any passings of our members during the past year and requested those in attendance to offer any they were aware of. Hearing none, the meeting continued.

Other Business – Ken Bertsch referred to the portion of the agenda dealing with other business and offered the following remarks:

“As you know, we were supposed to meet in Washington this year, in Seattle, and thank you again, both Paula and Lauren, for all the work you did with Chet, and Peggy, in terms of setting up that meeting. We've had a couple of these discussions at the Board level already, in terms of either moving the entire meeting schedule back by a year and looking at Washington again next year but we do have a contract in place with Minneapolis for the 2021 meeting and that's the official site of the meeting at this point. We're in a little bit of a limbo situation right now, but for today I think it is technically Minneapolis unless something changes either at the Association or Board levels in terms of those decisions. Do you have anything to add to that, Chet?”

Chet Boruff replied with the following:

“No, you're absolutely right, Ken. As all of you may know, we plan these meetings at least 2-3 years in advance and we were very fortunate that we were able to cancel our contracts, not only for the regional meetings but also for Seattle, without any penalty to the Association – that's a good news story. We're in the process of looking at options in terms of contracting for next year. I guess from a current events standpoint, when you think about Seattle and what's happening there with the occupied zone and Minneapolis and what's happening there with protests, we really have a great track record of selecting locations, don't we? Ironically, when I looked at a map, had we gone to Seattle, I think our hotel would have been about ten blocks away from that zone in Seattle, so things are probably working out for the better right now. Yes, Ken, you're right, it's to be determined. Right now it is kind of fluid and we may flip flop from going to Seattle to Minneapolis and then back. Hopefully, we can work with Lauren and Paula and be flexible as we all will have to be as we work through this. With the COVID crisis being what it is, that is about all I can say about it for now. We're on top of it as well as we can be.”

Ken Bertsch concluded with: “I used the word ‘nimble’ in my report and I'm afraid that all of us are forced into that position, to be a little bit nimble for at least the next few months until we can get plans together.”

New Business

Bertsch called for any further new business from the Association. Hearing none, he thanked everyone for attending and for all their hard work in a remote form for this year's meeting. He noted that much had been accomplished and offered his appreciation to all of AOSCA's members for their efforts in getting things done this year.

Bertsch declared the meeting adjourned at 10:58 Central Time, to be followed immediately by the Standards Council Meeting.