

**USHBC FOOD SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
February 29, 2008**

Committee Chairman Keith Mixon called the meeting of the USHBC Food Safety Committee to order at 7.35am on Friday, February 29, 2008. The meeting, held at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia, was attended by committee members Parm Bains, Frank Bragg, Denny Doyle, Keith Refsnider and Juan Silva as well as USDA AMS R&P representative Rafael Manzoni and USHBC staff members Mark Villata and Mary Nezbeth. It was reported that committee member Peter Jensen is no longer with Naturipe and his position has been assumed by Michael McCartney. Given this staffing change, the committee agreed to add Michael McCartney to the USHBC Food Safety Committee in place of Peter Jensen.

The first order of business was a discussion and prioritization of the strategic goals assigned to the Food Safety Committee in the updated 2007 to 2011 USHBC strategic plan. Mark Villata reviewed the goals, which are as follows:

Food Safety Committee Strategic Assignments

Be the Industry Food Safety Leader

- Determine where we want to be in 5 years
- Conduct commodity specific risk analysis
 - California Strawberry Commission efforts may be a template*
 - Encourage tracking/trace back system*
- Educate Industry
 - Communicate the importance of GAPs and GMPs; becomes part of lifestyle just like quality and pesticide practices*
 - Food safety standards need to be followed through the entire supply chain*
- Inform opinion leaders, including legislators, of our efforts
 - USHBC provides the leadership to encourage industry to follow food safety protocols*
- Develop minimum voluntary standards for blueberries
 - NABC to establish the voluntary safety guidelines which include standards and will consider a certification process*
 - USHBC to encourage the industry (domestic & international) to follow the NABC guidelines through education*
- Maintain and participate in crisis plan

The committee noted that all of these activities are either in place, or will be addressed shortly, and that all would receive the same priority ranking, given that many of these activities will be conducted simultaneously.

The second agenda item was an update on committee actions taken to date. Villata reported that food safety publicity actions taken thus far have been the placement of an article in the November

2007 edition of *The Bluespaper* to make growers aware of food safety concerns and the activities planned by the Food Safety Committee. He also noted that an article on the USHBC Food Safety Committee had appeared in the December 3, 2007 edition of The Packer.

Villata reported that the USHBC Food Safety Questionnaire (see Exhibit #1) has gone through initial reviews by the Committee and will be ready to send to the industry following this meeting, once final adjustments have been made. The committee noted that specific mention of the confidentiality of this report should be noted on the questionnaire along with some indication of the size of the respondents operation and whether they are currently required to complete their own food safety audits. Addresses for websites where respondents could download food safety materials will be noted on the questionnaire as well.

The committee will review a final draft of the questionnaire following this meeting with the goal of sending the survey out to the industry by the end of March. The British Columbia Blueberry Council will also be approached to see if they would be willing to send this survey to their members as well. Respondents will be asked for immediate response to the survey and will be provided with a self-addressed envelope to encourage return mailing. A cover letter will accompany the survey noting the need for this information, its confidentiality and sources for additional food safety information.

Villata also reported that various food safety materials had been collected and reviewed to date. Examples of these materials and their costs had been sent to the committee for review and consideration. At this point, it appears that the most effective and affordable materials could be sourced from the Good Agricultural Practices Program at Cornell University. The committee discussed the various food safety DVD, CD, leaflets and flyers and decided that the committee would purchase two flyers to distribute to the industry titled "Good Hygiene Protects Everyone!" and "Food Safety Begins on the Farm- A Grower's Guide". Villata will contact Cornell and make arrangements for purchase.

Next steps will be to send the final questionnaire to the industry and compile survey results. The plan will be to hold a conference call of the USHBC Food Safety Committee to review study results this April or May and make final decisions on our risk analysis and media training. Staff will then follow-up with a second mailing which will include the two food safety flyers plus information on where to go to receive additional copies of these flyers and additional educational material. The ultimate committee goal will be to develop USHBC blueberry specific PowerPoint presentations and information flyers for future distribution.

The final action taken to date was the distribution of the updated USHBC Crisis Management Plan. Villata reported that a PowerPoint version of the plan had been emailed to the USHBC Members and Alternates in November 2007 for their use in future blueberry grower meetings they may be attending. A final copy of the plan was also emailed to USHBC Members, Alternates and committee members last month.

Agenda item three was the continued discussion of an industry audit to determine food safety vulnerabilities and potential individuals to conduct the audit. Villata reported that in September 2007 letters had been sent to individuals and firms requesting background information and suggested steps for a blueberry industry risk analysis, as well as an initial cost estimate. This letter

was followed up with a second letter in October 2007 that further defined the scope of the industry audit and the regions where it would be conducted. In January 2008 an additional letter was sent to the following four potential contractors asking for a suggested action plan and costs. Responses were requested by mid February from:

Donald Schaffner- Rutgers University
Arthur Miller- Exponent Inc.
Tom Vogel- American Council for Food Safety & Quality
Robert Gravani- Cornell University

To date, the USHBC has received response from Arthur Miller at Exponent. The committee reviewed the proposal and will keep it in consideration while we await additional responses from the other firms. The goal will be to select a contractor for this risk analysis within the next two months.

Agenda item four was a discussion of industry standards for frozen blueberries. Villata reported that actions have been taken to date to narrow the definition of "blueberries" in the current U.S. Frozen Blueberry Standards so that only North American and South American highbush and lowbush blueberries (or other foreign produced blueberries with North American roots) are identified as a blueberry. This action was deemed necessary to address past sales of Chinese "wild blueberries" marketed as blueberries when they most likely were more closely related to a huckleberry than a blueberry. With the assistance of Bernadine Strik at Oregon State, we have now finalized language that should address this issue as noted below.

PROPOSED UPDATED STANDARD DEFINITIONS DEC '07

Section 52.611 Product Description

Frozen blueberries are prepared from sound, properly ripened fresh fruit of the species *Vaccinium corymbosum*, *V. virgatum* (syn. *V. ashei*), *V. angustifolium*, and *V. myrtilloides* (some common names: highbush, cultivated, wild, lowbush, southern highbush, rabbiteye), including species and cultivars often called huckleberries, but not of the genus *Gaylussacia*, are cleaned and stemmed; are properly washed; are packed with or without packing media; and are frozen and maintained at temperatures necessary for the preservation of the product.

Section 52.612 Types of Frozen Blueberries

- (a) Native or Wild Type
- (b) Cultivated Type

We were planning to ask USDA to consider this change but have now learned of another potential issue that could be considered as an additional modification to current frozen standards. Current frozen standards may be outdated with respect to how "defects" are scored. It is suggested that the USHBC consider this additional update to the standards and that an overall review and potential update of the 1957 USDA Frozen Standards and USDA Fresh Standards be considered as well.

It was the consensus of the committee that this activity is beyond the scope of the USHBC Food Safety Committee and that it would be best for this issue to be taken on by an ad hoc committee of

industry experts. The Food Safety Committee will make this recommendation to the Council at its upcoming meeting on Saturday

The fifth agenda item was an update on media training. The goal of this activity is to provide members of the USHBC Crisis Management Team with specific background on how to handle media inquiries and with media training. A secondary goal will be to provide broad based media information and training to the general USHBC membership. Villata reported that four media firms had been contacted and provided committee members with copies of proposals received to date from *Cameron Communications* and from *Winning News Media*. The committee will review these proposals and will plan to make a decision on media training, and who from the Crisis Management Team would receive the in-depth training, prior to the next USHBC meeting this Fall.

There being no further business Frank Bragg moved, with a second from Denny Doyle, to adjourn the meeting of the USHBC Food Safety Committee. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 9:10am.

EXHIBIT #1



USHBC FOOD SAFETY QUESTIONNAIRE

January 7, 2008—THIRD DRAFT

The USHBC Food Safety Committee has been established to help maintain consumer confidence and ensure that consumers receive a safe, wholesome product. It's mission is to assist the highbush blueberry industry, through information and education, in achieving this objective. The USHBC Food Safety Committee educates growers and handlers about best practices and regulations governing safe food production. The committee provides a framework for the industry's individual quality control programs while investigating methods to ensure that highbush blueberries remain a safe, high quality product

In order to better assess how the USHBC Food Safety Committee can assist the blueberry industry, we are requesting that blueberry growers and handlers complete this questionnaire and forward it to the USHBC office. Your response will be greatly appreciated as we work together to continue to make food safety an industry priority. Please contact the USHBC office at (916) 983-0111 with any questions you may have concerning this survey.

Please indicate whether you are a blueberry grower, blueberry handler or both a grower and handler:

- ☐ Blueberry Grower
- ☐ Blueberry Handler
- ☐ Both a Grower and a Handler

Please indicate the type of blueberries you grow and/or handle:

- ☐ Conventional
- ☐ Organic
- ☐ Both

Please indicate the state where your operation is located:

Please answer Yes or No to the Following Questions:

- Have you attended and had one-on-one training in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and/or Good Management Practices (GMP)? ☐ YES ☐ NO
- Do you currently have background information on hand concerning Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or Good Management Practices (GMP)? (Leaflets, DVD's, Brochures, etc) ☐ YES ☐ NO

- Have you had an independent agency conduct a food safety review and certification of your operation? ____YES ____ NO
- Have you conducted your own "individual risk analysis" of your farm and/or facilities (animal exclusion, sources of contamination from adjacent fields, etc)?
____ YES ____NO
- Are you aware of proper use and handling requirements for compost or manure?
____ YES ____ NO
- Do you have a documented "trace back" program in place to identify where and when a specific lot of blueberries were harvested, packed and shipped? ____YES ____ NO
- Have you had training in IPM and do you currently have an IPM program in place?
____ YES ____ NO
- Do you currently conduct water quality tests for irrigation, wash water, drinking water, spray water, water used in cooling, water used in processing, etc.? ____ YES ____ NO
- Do you have written food safety procedures for cleanliness as part of your food safety program? ____ YES ____ NO
- Do you have an employee-training program in place that includes information on areas such as worker safety, pesticides, and hygiene both in the field and in the plant?
____ YES ____ NO

Please Indicate What Type(s) of Educational Material You Would Find Most Useful:

____ Food Safety Training DVDs

____ Food Safety Educational Presentations in CD Format

____ Food Safety Booklets and Leaflets

____ Grower's Guide for Developing Food Safety Procedures

____ Leaflets explaining Good Agricultural Practices or Good Management Practices

____ Food Safety Posters

____ Other Types of Materials (Please List)

Please note any challenges you currently face or have faced in the past in implementing a food safety program for your operation

Thank you for participating in this survey. **Please send your completed questionnaire to the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council at the address listed below**, or fax your questionnaire to the USHBC office at (916) 983-9022. We would appreciate receiving completed questionnaires **by** MONTH, DAY, 2008.

**U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council
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