

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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STATE OF MAINE

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

March 12, 2012

The Honorable Kevin L. Raye
President of the Senate
The Honorable Robert W. Nutting
Speaker of the House of Representatives
125th Legislature
State House
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Mr. President and Mr. Speaker:

Pursuant to Title 3 Maine Revised Statutes, chapter 35, we are pleased to submit the findings of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry from the review and evaluation of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee under the State Government Evaluation Act. In its review, the Committee found that the Commission is operating within its statutory authority.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Roger L. Sherman in black ink.

Senator Roger L. Sherman
Senate Chair

Handwritten signature of Peter E. Edgecomb in black ink.

Representative Peter E. Edgecomb
House Chair

cc: David Bell, Executive Director, Wild Blueberry Commission
Marion Hylan Barr, Director, Office of Policy and Legal Analysis

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Review of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee under the Government Evaluation Act March 2012

The Government Evaluation Act

The Government Evaluation Act provides for a system of periodic review of the efficacy and performance of state government agencies (3 MRSA §951 et seq). The keystone of the Act is the agency's program evaluation report that consists of a number of components required by the statute. Essentially, the report is an agency self-assessment, which the committee of jurisdiction uses as a starting point for its evaluation of the agency's effectiveness, efficiency and performance.

Review Process

In May of 2011, the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry notified the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee of its intent to review these entities pursuant to the schedule established in 3 MRSA, §959. The commission and advisory committee submitted a program evaluation report as requested in October of 2011.

On January 19, 2012, two commission members, Todd Merrill of Merrill Blueberry Farms and Ragner Camp of Cherryfield Foods and David Bell, Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine presented the report to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry at a public meeting. The commission made 2 suggestions for statutory changes at this meeting.

Findings and Recommendation

The Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has reviewed the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and finds the commission is operating within its statutory authority. The commission is doing a commendable job of promoting the wild blueberry industry and assisting blueberry growers and processors. The Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee is meeting its responsibilities for guiding research and obtaining grants for blueberry research.

The Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is submitting legislation to implement changes requested by the commission. First, the committee endorses the suggestion that the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine include information on the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee in its subsequent GEA reports. The Wild Blueberry

Commission of Maine appoints members to the advisory committee. The activities of the committee can be appropriately reviewed within the context of the commission's report. A separate report is not necessary.

Second, the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry recommends language to ensure continuing staggered terms for commission members. All 8 members are appointed to 4 year terms by the Commissioner of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. Current law does not specify a date for terms to expire and over the years appointments have become unsynchronized. The committee sees value in having appointments every 2 years to provide orderly transition and maintain continuity. Legislation is being reported out of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to implement these changes and to establish future report dates. The Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is recommending that the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine be reviewed again in 2019.