

**LOUISIANA AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AUTHORITY (LAFA)**  
**MINUTES**  
**JUNE 21, 2022**  
**10:00 a.m.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) Commissioner Mike Strain at 10:02 AM.

**II. ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Angela Browning.

**Present:** Commissioner Mike Strain, Kent Brown, Devin Davis, Jennifer Hill, Ronald Petree, and Rep. Christopher Turner.

Ms. Browning stated there was a quorum with six members present.

Bill Waguespack entered the meeting at 10:11 a.m.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Commissioner Strain thanked everyone for attending and thanked Representative Turner for his service in the legislature. Commissioner's comments were brief due to the length of the agenda. Issues facing the farming community include inflation, profitability, fuel, fertilizer, availability of food products worldwide.

There were no other public comments.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Commissioner Strain asked the board members to review the minutes from the February 4, 2022, meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to approve the minutes from the February 4, 2022, meeting. It was seconded by Mr. Brown and passed unanimously.

**V. REVIEW OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

Mrs. Catrina Irvin presented LAFA's Financial Statements to the board and answered the members' questions. Catrina stated that the annual audit executed by the Legislative Auditor's Office was completed and there were no findings.

A motion was made by Mr. Turner to accept the Financial Statements. It was seconded by Mrs. Hill and passed unanimously.

## **VI. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Due to an extensive agenda, Commissioner Strain explained that he would not have a Commissioner's Report. He thanked everyone for attending during Public Comments.

## **VII. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Indian Creek**

Commissioner stated that Indian Creek has been staying busy, new sites in place and new bulkheads. There have been \$893,000 in receipts with a net profit of \$129,000. Continues to be a real jewel. Federal grants have allowed for a 2 ½ mile trail.

Melissa Hildago, Director of Indian Creek addressed the board. She reported that Indian Creek received the Best Outdoor Attraction in May 2022. Indian Creek had a successful Easter event with around 3500 people in attendance. They are looking forward to the annual fireworks celebrating July 4 sponsored by Walker Automotive in Alexandria and Calvary Baptist Church in Woodworth. The fishermen in the area have been having record catches.

### **B. South Louisiana Rail Facility Loan**

Michelle Ribera updated the board on the status of the South Louisiana Rail Facility (SLRF). Construction is currently 65% completed.

### **C. Equipment Shed at LDAF – BRHQ**

The LAFB board had previously given the Commissioner a budget is \$200,000. The lowest bid was \$250,000. This project is on hold because of the cost of construction at this time.

Mr. Petree made a motion to raise the budget to \$225,000. It was seconded by Mrs. Hill and passed unanimously.

### **D. Emergency Fuel Transport Trailers/Depot Proposal**

Commissioner Strain stated that we have received 3 new diesel fuel trailers for emergency response.

### **E. Disaster Recovery Program -**

#### **1. Louisiana Seafood Processors Pandemic and Safety Response Program**

Michelle Ribera gave an overview of the program and the remaining outreach meetings in Violet and Houma. She introduced the team: Jeffrey Nelson, Stephanie Harts-Bureau, Dale Hunt, Pam Suggs and Shawna Robertson.

2. Louisiana Farm and Timber Recovery Grant Program - - Michelle Ribera stated that LAFA is not currently administering this program because the funds given to the Louisiana Office of Community Development did not cover the housing expenses during Hurricanes Laura and Delta. Office of Community Development did not have excess funds to go toward agriculture and forestry damages.

**F. Louisiana Agricultural Workforce Development Program**

Michelle Ribera stated that LAFA administers this program as a result of a legislative initiative authored by Representatives Jack McFarland and Chris Turner. Video produced by LDAF staff was shown.

**G. Bee Grant**

Commissioner Strain notified the board that there are currently 28 students participating in the program. He has received \$50,000 federal dollars to expand the program. Video produced by LDAF staff was shown.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. 2022 Regular Session Legislation**

1. The Legislature allocated \$200,000 to the Equine Promotion and Research Advisory Board housed within LDAF. LAFA will administer the funds.
2. Commissioner Strain spoke of the LAFA Fuel Legislation authored by Rep Chris Turner. Commissioner explained the LDAF/LAFA response during an emergency with regards to emergency fuel.
3. The Legislature placed language in the supplemental appropriations bill to offset the impending \$2.4 million dollar debt with regards to Jefferson Davis Parish/South LA Rail Facility.

Commissioner Strain acknowledged Mr. Ronnie Petree as he recused himself from voting on this matter.

A motion was made by Commissioner Strain for the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA is hereby authorized to pay the impending loan to Jeff Davis Parish/South LA Rail Facility as may be appropriate. It was seconded by Mr. Davis. There was no discussion. The motion passed with one abstention.

**B. South Louisiana Rail Facility Request**

Commissioner Strain acknowledged Mr. Ronnie Petree to recuse himself from voting on this matter.

Presentation from Mr. Mark Pousson on current, as well as future plans for their footprint at Lacassine Industrial Park. Mr. Pousson, on behalf of the South Louisiana Rail Facility (SLRF) requested of LAFA a loan of \$3.5 million to build a grain/rice storage facility.

A motion was made by Rep. Turner for the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA, to be authorized to negotiate terms of this endeavor. It was seconded by Mrs. Hill. There was no discussion. The motion passed with one abstention.

**C. Lacassine Industrial Park Scales**

Michelle Ribera gave an update on the trucker-assist Fairbank scales system at Lacassine Industrial Park. A motion was made by Mr. Brown to allow the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA, to establish policy related to charging per reading for the use of the scales by tenants, other individuals, or entities. This charge shall be effective July 1, 2022. It was seconded by Mr. Waguespack. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**D. FY2023 Budget ( LAFA, Lacassine and Indian Creek)**

Catrina Irvin presented the FY2023 budget for LAFA. A motion was made by Mr. Petree to accept FY2023 Budget for LAFA. It was seconded by Rep. Chris Turner and passed unanimously.

Catrina Irvin presented the FY2023 budget for Lacassine Industrial Park. A motion was made by Mr. Waguespack to accept FY2023 Budget for Lacassine Industrial Park. It was seconded by Mrs. Hill and passed unanimously.

Catrina Irvin presented the FY2023 budget for Indian Creek. A motion was made by Mr. Davis to accept FY2023 Budget for Indian Creek. It was seconded by Mr. Petree and passed unanimously.

**E. Certified Louisiana Program**

Deana Erdey updated the board on the continued growth of the Certified Louisiana Program. There has been a 52% increase in Certified members with 512 members. Certified Louisiana's Facebook followers have increased by 57.5% with a total of 22,777 followers. Instagram has shown a 53.5% increase with a total of 1,552 followers. Deana Erdey also gave an update on the Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) activities. The SUSTA membership has increased 42.6% with 117 members. Deana and Commissioner Strain spoke of and played an example of Certified Louisiana's video series "Crawfish Tales" where Commissioner spotlights a Certified Louisiana member once a month. Deana discussed the USDA Specialty Crop Grant for pecans that she administered during 2020-2021. Approximately \$70,000 in USDA Specialty Crop Grant funds was used for marketing and promotion of pecans. During the two years measured, Louisiana pecan sales went up 52%.

**F. Security Upgrades at Baton Rouge Headquarters**

Michelle Ribera presented security concerns for the Baton Rouge Headquarters of LDAF, which is owned by LAFA. Possible security upgrades and additions were discussed. Mr. Waguespack made a motion to research and execute the needed upgrades to the security system at Baton

Rouge Headquarters owned by LAFA. It was seconded by Rep. Chris Turner. The motion passed unanimously.

**G. Emergency Shelter Facility at Baton Rouge Headquarters**

Commissioner Strain gave an update on LDAF/LAFA emergency shelter to be located at the Baton Rouge Headquarters of LDAF. The purpose of this shelter is to house LDAF employees who are responding to a disaster. The plan is to have room for 22 beds; washer/dryers; bathrooms and showers to be utilized during LDAF's emergency response.

**H. Discussion of land adjacent to Baton Rouge Headquarters**

Commissioner Strain presented information regarding the sale of the land adjacent to the Baton Rouge Headquarters of LDAF. Dane Morgan informed the board that there are three acres of grass adjacent to the office that LAFA would like to acquire. An appraisal was included in the members' packet for \$350,000. The sellers communicated that they were not in agreement with the \$350,000. At the time of communications, the sellers were sticking to the \$ 500,000. A motion was made by Mr. Petree that the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA be hereby authorized to negotiate and conclude the terms and conditions necessary to purchase the immovable property located adjacent to the Baton Rouge Headquarters and to execute all documents need to transfer title to the property to LAFA. It was seconded by Mr. Waguespack. The motion passed unanimously.

**I. Lease for State Police Commission**

Michelle Ribera stated that the Louisiana State Police Commission is increasing their footprint at the Baton Rouge Headquarters to include two more offices.

Representative Turner made a motion to authorize the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA to be authorized to execute the necessary changes to the lease. It was seconded by Mr. Davis. The motion passed unanimously.

**J. Lease of New Orleans Office Space**

Ashley Dupree presented information regarding the New Orleans LDAF office located in the USDA building. A motion from Commissioner Strain was made to give him permission to authorize and sign all leases or agreements necessary to maintain space in the USDA building. It was seconded by Mrs. Hill. The motion passed unanimously.

**K. Transfer of ownership of Roseland, LA property from LAFA to Office of State Military**

Ashley Dupree presented information regarding the transfer of ownership of Roseland, LA property to the Office of State Military. A motion was made by Mr. Petree to give Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA, permission to authorize the transfer of property to LMD and that the Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry is authorized to sign all acts or documents necessary to transfer title. It was seconded by Mr. Brown. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**L. Purchase of Bienville Parish Property (2.55 acres)**

Ashley Dupree presented information regarding the purchase of 2.55 acres of land in Bienville Parish. A motion was made by Mr. Brown to give Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, as chairman of LAFA, authority to negotiate and conclude the terms and conditions necessary to purchase the immovable property and to execute all documents needed to transfer title to the property from Carthage to the LAFA. It was seconded by Mr. Waguespack. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**IX. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Petree stated that he would like to visit other properties such as Indian Creek and Lacassine for future Board meetings.

**X. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Petree and seconded by Mr. Waguespack. The meeting was adjourned 12:05 PM.