

Minutes of a Katama Farm Stewardship Committee
November 5, 2020

Attending: Steven Steinberg; Ken Michel; Brian Athearn; Jane Varkonda; Jeff Carlson; Bob Avakian;
Geoff Kontje
Others: Rachel Gilker

Jane noted that she had just received the fields condition report from TTOR and would be distributing it to the members and anyone else who would like to see the report.

Jane noted that she had not received input from Counsel's office regarding the questions the committee had about the REOI, but that she would inquire after the meeting.

The Committee reviewed the proposed Expression of Interest (EOI) for Use of Katama Farm submitted by Rachel and the comments submitted by Ken. Several modifications and additions to the form as presented were made. Jane stated that she would get the information from Chilmark for the Tea Lane farm project and the info from the Landbank for Arrowhead farm.

Geoff asked if we should mention a preference for no till farming methods? Andrew Woodruff talked to the committee about his experiences with traditional farming over the years and his recent conversion to regenerative farming. Regenerative farming is based upon minimizing tillage; live roots at all times, animals on the soil and a diversity of cover crops. Rachel echoed his points.

There was discussion regarding multiple uses by multiple farmers at thimble farm run by IGI and how that was not maybe possible at Katama farm. But that IGI has a model in place that the committee could review. Brian Athearn noted that the mere presence of sheep on a pasture can result in rapid and measurable benefits to building the soil.

Andrew Woodruff noted that even raising crops such as hay can deplete the soil if not properly done and how he has modified his hay crop rotations at 7 Gates.

Geoff noted that it may be beneficial to visit thimble farm. Julie Scott stated that the IGI model may not work for Katama farm.

Rachel noted that several things that had been talked about today, such as minimal tilling, require cover crops, what and how the land is to be farmed, and requirements for living roots at all times, will be best covered in the RFP.

The Committee also briefly discussed the eligibility criteria and a ratings system to be employed when reviewing the RFPs.

Eric Glasgow noted that farming equipment is expensive and that kind of financial commitment requires a long term lease. Jane noted that is why the town went to town meeting and the State legislature years ago in order to lease the farm in terms far greater than normally allowed by law.

Brian Athearn noted that farming on the Vineyard is an uphill battle and it may be best to not micro manage requirements for katama.

Geoff asked Eric Glasgow to briefly explain what he does at his farm. Eric noted that he mainly grazes with various cover crops for forage for the cattle and that he used a shallow tillage method. His yearly soil test indicated an increase in organic matter. He also spreads composted manure.

Rachel noted that she will make the edits to the REOI for the Committee. Those changes were reviewed. Rachel asked if the farm were certified organic. Jon noted that the TFI lease and the TTOR lease encourages organic practices and limits the use of inorganic products. Jane stated that she would look up the language and get that information, and the mandate for the Committee to Rachel in order for her to incorporate pertinent information into the REOI.

Jane made a motion to accept the revisions and changes to the REOI, Ken seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Varkonda yes, Steinberg yes, Michel yes, Athearn yes, Carlson yes, Avakian yes, Kontje yes. The vote was unanimous.

Julie asked if prospective bidders would be able to visit the site. Jane noted that a site visit is often mandatory as part of the RPF process.

Rachel asked what crops had not done well there besides sweet corn and potatoes. Andrew woodruff noted that veggie crops need water and would the town be able to provide more water. JV noted that the town had talked with TTOR getting another well in the southern pasture. Julie noted that Slough farm just went through a procedure with the Board of Health and TNC who holds the CR on the fields so an additional irrigation well.

Bob asked Brian about his sheep operation, which is basically 25 sheep on 4 acres with 12 acres for grazing in the summer and that he founds sheep to be the easiest livestock to manage with a huge return on organic matter to the soil.

Jane asked Julie about the difficulties of restoring former corn maze areas. Julie noted that the areas were about 3to 5 acres of a weedy mess that took a few years to come back and that it took a lot of money and equipment that just was not available to them at that time. Jane noted that things like corn mazes may be a great draw to keep people to visit the farm but may not be desirable for farming interests. Julie noted that things like sunflower areas for the public can be done on much smaller scale and still have a big impact for the visitors.

The Committee voted unanimously (roll call: varkonda, yes, Michel yes, Athearn yes, Avakian yes, Kontje yes, Carlson yes) to add the following question to the REOI: how many acres to be used for the planned operation.

The Committee adjourned at 2:25

Approved:

1/28/21 