



**AMERICAN PECAN COUNCIL
DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING
December 19, 2024**

Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Jennie Varela, USDA, called the meeting of the American Pecan Council (Council or APC) to order at 11:03 a.m. CT on December 19, 2024, after notice was properly given to the Council.

Ms. Varela announced that the selection order was officially signed by the Secretary of Agriculture in November and proceeded to read aloud the names of the seated members and their respective alternates. Additionally, she presented a lobbying statement to the Council.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Emma Garner conducted the roll call. The following individuals were in attendance:

Council Members Present:

Justin Jones

Lenny Wells

Lalo Medina

Larry Don Womack

Alexander Wright

Alex Willson

Frank Salopek

Josh Bowman

Evo Soria

Jared Miller

Brandon Harrell

Will Easterlin

Taylor Moses

Brent Brinkley

Molly Willis

Randy Stephens

Vada Lucas

Louie Salopek

Deborah Walden-Ralls

Jeff Worn

Steve Zaffarano

Jake Montz



Due to the vacancy in Eastern Region Grower Seat 1, Ms. Taylor Moses, as the designated alternate, was seated in the Member seat for the duration of the meeting.

As Central Region Grower Seat 2 was vacant, Mr. Randy Stephens, as the designated alternate, was seated in the Member seat for the duration of the meeting.

As Eastern Region Sheller Seat 1 was vacant, Mr. Jeff Worn, as the designated alternate, was seated in the Member seat for the duration of the meeting.

Due to the absence of Mr. Blake Houston, representing Western Region Sheller Seat 2, the designated alternate seat was vacant. Mr. Jake Montz, as the designated alternate for Central Region Sheller Seat 2, was seated in Mr. Houston's place for the duration of the meeting.

USDA Attendees:

Jennie Varela, USDA AMS
Matt Neagley, USDA NAS

APC Staff Present:

Anne Warden, APC staff
Serena Schaffner, APC staff
Brandon Drummond, APC staff
Emma Garner, APC staff
Kristi Mosquera, APC staff
Gabrielle Teixeira, APPB staff
Carl Sanders, APPB staff
Joy Glass, APPB staff

Additional Attendees:

Don Lucas, Delta Pecan Company
Nicole Gray, Gray Matter Consulting
Mike Spradling
Ana Sanchez
Blair Krebs
Dan Zedan
Eric Miller
Kelly Birch
Kyle Barker
Margie Whitcotton
Noe Ramos
Sally Arn

A quorum of the members of APC was confirmed.



III. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Varela opened the floor for nominations for the position of Chairperson. Mr. Frank Salopek made the following slate nomination: Mr. Larry Don Womack for Chair, Ms. Deborah Walden-Ralls for Vice-Chair, Mr. Lalo Medina for Treasurer, and Mr. Justin Jones for Secretary.

Ms. Varela asked if there were any further nominations or objections to the slate of nominees. She then called for a vote by all seated members, and the motion passed. Ms. Varela congratulated the elected officers and officially handed the meeting over to the newly elected Chair, Mr. Womack.

Mr. Womack opened the floor for nominations for the At-Large Accumulator Member and Alternate Seat. Mr. Jeff Worn nominated Mr. Will Easterlin, and Ms. Walden-Ralls nominated Mr. Mark Hamilton. Ms. Anne Warden read aloud the names received by the office for consideration.

Mr. Frank Salopek motioned to close the nominations for the Accumulator Member and Alternate Seat. The motion was seconded by Mr. Medina, and the motion passed.

Mr. Hamilton then motioned to recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that Mr. Easterlin be seated as the Accumulator Member and Mr. Hamilton be seated as the Accumulator Alternate. The motion was seconded by Mr. Soria, and the motion passed.

Mr. Womack opened the floor for nominations for the Public Member Seat and Alternate. Ms. Warden reminded the Council that nominees must not have any financial interest in the Pecan industry. Mr. Louie Salopek presented the name of Ms. Donna Volz for consideration, and Mr. Montz nominated Dr. Luis Ribera. Ms. Warden outlined the outreach efforts conducted for the At-Large Member Seats, including newsletters, personal calls, and member outreach. She also informed the Council that the office had received the name of Ms. Erika Hinsberger for consideration.

Mr. Zaffarano motioned to recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that Ms. Hinsberger be seated as the Public Member. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wright.

Mr. Frank Salopek motioned to close nominations for the Public Member Seat. The motion was seconded by Mr. Soria, and the motion passed.

Mr. Medina then motioned to recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture that Ms. Erika Hinsberger be seated as the Public Member and Dr. Luis Ribera be seated as the Public Member Alternate. The motion was seconded by Mr. Jones, and the motion passed.



Ms. Warden reviewed the current vacant seats on the Council and recommended that the Council bring any nominees for these vacancies to the Council during the February 27, 2025, meeting to ensure widespread promotion and provide opportunities for eligible candidates. Mr. Womack encouraged Council members to engage with industry members and associations to identify eligible nominees for each vacant seat.

IV. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Mr. Womack called for a motion to approve the Minutes of the previous Council meeting held on October 22, 2024. Mr. Frank Salopek moved to approve the Minutes, and Mr. Jones seconded the motion. The Minutes were approved by the Council.

V. CHAIR REPORT

Mr. Womack expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the confidence the Council has placed in him as Chair. He also informed the Council that he would be traveling to meet with Indian buyers during the Georgia Pecan Growers Association's India Reverse Trade Mission.

VI. CEO UPDATE

Ms. Warden expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to begin her second year serving the pecan industry and extended her thanks to all attendees for their participation.

She presented a timeline to prepare for the upcoming in-person Council meeting in February, reminding the Council that the Unified Pecan Promotion Plan (UPPP) was distributed to all members in December. She requested that all members take the next two months to review the document in detail. Ms. Warden also noted that the Chair would be providing Committee assignments in the coming weeks.

Ms. Warden informed the Council that the Committees will convene in January and February to align on the initiatives outlined in the Unified Pecan Promotion Plan (UPPP). She explained that both the Council and the American Pecan Promotion Board (APPB) will review the results of the marketing efforts detailed in the UPPP and vote on the future direction of the plan. Additionally, Ms. Warden highlighted that the Committees will meet in May and June to assess the progress of the initiatives and determine the committee budgets, which will be recommended to the full Council during the July 2025 meeting.

Ms. Warden then provided an overview of the UPPP, an industry-wide global marketing plan organized by the APC and APPB. She noted that this plan is designed to align all industry partners toward shared goals and investments. She explained that the plan focuses on four key strategies to support profitability across the value chain: increasing value through nutrition, expanding demand through new occasions, driving incremental volume through exports, and enhancing industry readiness. Each strategy is underpinned by key insights and takeaways from research, specific goals and supporting initiatives, and detailed tactics and measures.



Ms. Warden also notified the Council that, as a refresher and for the benefit of any new and current members, APC staff will conduct a member orientation to review all policies and procedures.

She provided an update on the staff at the American Pecan Council, noting that, as a cooperator with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, APC has been awarded \$3 million in RAPP funding over the next few years. This funding will enhance marketing programs in key markets such as India, Europe, and South Korea. Ms. Warden explained that staff will develop a plan to present to the International Committee, which will then be brought to the full Council during the February meeting.

Ms. Warden concluded by reiterating how proud the APC staff is to serve the pecan industry.

VII. USDA UPDATE

Ms. Jennie Varela stated that any new updates will be presented at the next in-person meeting.

VIII. GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Ms. Warden reported that APC recently completed its FY 23 financial audit, which is an annual requirement conducted by a third-party auditor. The audit returned clean results. She also mentioned that the FY 24 financial audit is currently underway.

Ms. Warden noted that the Governance Committee has been working on proposed changes to the Order and Internal Controls. Legal counsel is currently reviewing the changes, and the final proposals will be presented to the Council in February for discussion to ensure the documents are up to date and continue to meet the needs of the industry.

Ms. Warden provided an overview of the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) audit, which reviewed programs prior to the current staff's tenure. She highlighted that many findings were identified when staff received the initial report due to missing documents. Although evidence showed the work had been completed, USDA requires the retention of every receipt for every expense, and some were not available. She explained that APC made efforts to gather additional information with the assistance of Nicole Gray from Gray Matter Consulting. Ms. Warden informed the Council that FAS issued its final audit report, confirming that APC received a clean audit with no financial penalties. She concluded by stating that APC now has a clean slate and will move forward with a renewed focus on future programs.

IX. MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT

Ms. Schaffner provided an update to the Council on the Committee's efforts to refresh the American Pecan website. She explained that the Marketing Committee had reviewed three proposals from different agencies for this project. Ms. Schaffner informed the Council that the Committee had selected the vendor Rise, citing their extensive experience with other



commodity boards and their ability to create a more user-friendly and easily navigable website experience.

X. INDUSTRY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Ms. Schaffner noted that with the new committee assignments in place, the next Industry Relations Committee meeting is scheduled for January. During this meeting, the Committee will review and discuss several key initiatives, including upcoming association meetings, booth participation at industry events, webinars, and the development of marketing materials for the industry.

XI. INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Ms. Schaffner updated the Council on the progress with the new Rural Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP) funding, emphasizing that APC is maintaining a strong focus on the Germany and China markets. She noted that the Committee has conducted extensive work to understand the opportunities in China, determine the most effective market entry strategies, and explore ways to increase distribution in Germany. Ms. Schaffner highlighted the importance of having representatives on the ground in these countries to build relationships with key distributors and retailers. As a result, she reported that there is currently an open Request for Proposals (RFP) for in-country representatives in both China and Germany. At the next International Committee meeting, the Committee will review the proposals and decide on the candidates to move forward with. Ms. Schaffner also pointed out that APC already has in-country representatives in the UK and India.

Additionally, Ms. Schaffner mentioned that, beyond the RAPP funding, APC is now also receiving funding from the Quality Samples Program (QSP).

She further updated the Council on her attendance at the Georgia India Reverse Trade Mission, where 13 importers from India were present. She noted the excitement and interest expressed by the Indian buyers during the event.

XII. GRADES & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Ms. Warden informed the Council that the USDA had published the first major updates to the pecan grades and standards in decades. She noted that these updates were disseminated, and feedback was received from the shelling community, indicating the need for a few adjustments. USDA acknowledged that such tweaks are typical following the dissemination process. Ms. Warden stated that APC had communicated with the National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA), who submitted a petition with the minor revisions. The Grades & Standards Committee will meet in the coming month to review the proposed changes, which will be presented to the full Council in February.



Additionally, Ms. Warden formally introduced Bailey Rayfield, Senior Manager of Industry Relations, who will be leading the industry grades and standards efforts. Ms. Rayfield will also oversee various data collection methods and will serve as the primary point of contact for working closely with the industry on these initiatives.

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Brandon Drummond presented the financial statements for the period for September and October 2024 to the Council, noting that the statements had been included in their meeting packets for review. Mr. Frank Salopek motioned to approve the financial statements from September and October 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alexander Wright, and the Council approved.

XIV. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Garner reminded the Council that the next in-person meeting is scheduled for February 27th at the Grand Hyatt DFW Hotel. She expressed that the staff looks forward to seeing everyone at the meeting.

XV. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Womack called for a moment of silence to honor the passing of Mr. Chop Evans.

There being no further business, Mr. Jones motioned to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Salopek, and the Council approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Lalo Medina, Secretary

Approved after review of the Council and USDA:

Larry Don Womack, Chair