



**AMERICAN PECAN COUNCIL  
OCTOBER COUNCIL MEETING  
October 22, 2024**

**Minutes**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Larry Don Womack, Chair, called the meeting of the American Pecan Council (Council or APC) to order at 1:00 p.m. CT on October 22, 2024, after notice was properly given to the Council.

**A. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Trent Mason conducted the roll call. The following individuals were in attendance:

**Council Members Present:**

Larry Don Womack  
Trent Mason  
Justin Jones  
Louie Salopek  
Frank Salopek  
Deborah Walden-Ralls  
Phillip Arnold  
John Heuler  
Shannon Ivey  
Lalo Medina  
Lenny Wells  
Randy Stephens  
Steve Zaffarano  
Jared Miller  
Molly Willis  
Angie Ellis  
Will Easterlin  
Evo Soria  
Alex Willson  
Mark Hamilton

**USDA Attendees:**

Jennie Varela, USDA  
Steven Kaufman, USDA  
Rebecca Geller, USDA  
Jamilah Cassagnol, USDA FAS

**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:**

Kevin Randolph, Eide Bailey  
Mary Bruorton, GPGA  
Catherine Clark, Pecan South  
Mark Hendrixson  
Matthew Bailey  
Brenda Evans  
Maggie Pepper, Armstrong Backus  
Ashlei Lewis, Armstrong Backus  
John White, WPGA  
Dan Zedan  
Chris Wallace  
Brandon Harrell  
Taylor Moses  
Alexander Wright  
Nav Athwal  
Bill Davis

A quorum of the members of APC was confirmed.

**A. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Mr. Womack called for a motion to approve the Minutes of the previous Council meeting held on July 11, 2024. Mr. Louie Salopek moved to approve the Minutes, and Mr. Frank Salopek seconded the motion. The Minutes were approved by the Council.

**B. CHAIR REPORT**

Mr. Womack commended Ms. Warden and the team for the significant progress the organization has made over the past year, noting the strides that have been accomplished. Mr. Womack extended his appreciation for the staff's dedication and hard work before turning the meeting over to Ms. Warden for the CEO update.

**C. CEO UPDATE**

Ms. Warden expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to begin her second year serving the pecan industry and thanked all attendees for their participation. She acknowledged the members who had remained on the Council while awaiting the announcement of new



appointees by the Secretary of Agriculture, thanking them for their time and dedication during this interim period.

Ms. Warden noted that while the new member appointments have not yet been finalized, the meeting would proceed with key updates on APC's marketing efforts and the progress made to date. She emphasized the importance of marketing as the industry approaches the upcoming harvest, recognizing the influx of questions that may arise. To ensure all stakeholders are well-informed, she underscored the significance of APC's ongoing initiatives and the positive impact these efforts are having on the industry.

Ms. Warden then turned the meeting over to Ms. Serena Schaffner, who would provide an overview of APC's export marketing programs. She also noted that the committee chairs would present updates on their respective initiatives, followed by a readout of APC's FY23 financial audit.

Ms. Schaffner provided a comprehensive overview of APC's ongoing and upcoming initiatives across key markets. She acknowledged the committee's hard work in advancing the Unified Pecan Promotion Plan (UPPP), which focuses on enhancing profitability across the value chain through initiatives in nutrition, expanding demand, increasing exports, and strengthening industry readiness.

She outlined APC's strategy for the India market, emphasizing opportunities in the wedding, hotel, and catering sectors, positioning pecans as a premium product in the luxury market. She also highlighted APC's continued marketing efforts through retail, e-commerce, and social media, targeting India's vast social media presence.

In the UK, Ms. Schaffner detailed plans to significantly increase the visibility and distribution of American Pecans, including a 138% increase in in-store promotions, expanding from 1,722 stores to 4,102 by 2024. She mentioned successful campaigns, such as email marketing to Sainsbury's customers and a sponsored search campaign at Tesco, which generated significant sales. She also noted Whitworths' launch of a 75g branded pecan SKU featuring American Pecans.

Ms. Schaffner then reviewed findings from the McKinsey study on China, which projected a significant increase in China's pecan production by 2028, and outlined APC's strategy to position American Pecans as a premium product in China's competitive market, where 90% of consumers are already aware of pecans. She also presented APC's plan to establish in-country representation in China, focusing on partnerships and trade missions to strengthen market relationships.

In terms of industry readiness, Ms. Schaffner highlighted APC's services, such as webinars on international marketing and export funding, and the expansion of the Industry Fact Sheets on



health benefits of pecans. Additionally, she mentioned plans for a website refresh to improve user experience and streamline content.

Finally, Ms. Schaffner outlined key marketing initiatives for the coming year, including retail pushes in the UK, campaigns for Diwali and the luxury market in India, and participation in industry events like MEWA and Gulfood. She also discussed the focus on National Pecan Month in Q3, as well as an industry rally to further engage stakeholders.

#### **D. USDA UPDATE**

Ms. Jennie Varela thanked everyone who submitted damage reports to USDA regarding the impact of Hurricane Helene so they could let the department know what the industry is facing.

Ms. Varela also highlighted the hiring of a new employee at USDA to assist with overseeing APC. She noted that their office is currently reviewing APC vendor contracts for FY 25.

### **II. GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

Ms. Warden reported that the Governance Committee had reviewed the financial requirements for the Penn State research contract, which had been approved by the Council in a previous fiscal year. She explained that although prior staff had granted no-cost extensions to Penn State in subsequent years, the contracted funds were not included in the FY 24 budget, which had been developed prior to her tenure. Ms. Warden noted that the Committee voted to recommend that the Council allocate funds from reserves to cover the contract costs, in order to fulfill the Council's prior commitment to Penn State.

Additionally, Ms. Warden reported that the Committee discussed the process for amending the Order, bylaws, and internal controls, emphasizing the importance of keeping these governance documents up to date. She further noted that staff, in collaboration with Mr. Medina and Mr. Zaffarano—selected by the Committee—will prepare initial draft revisions for the Committee's review, with the intention of presenting them for Council review at the February 2025 Council meeting.

### **III. MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT**

Mr. Zaffarano highlighted the APC Marketing Committee's responsibility for overseeing the domestic marketing efforts for U.S. pecans, with a particular focus on B2B marketing, fostering commercial partnerships, and supporting the industry in effectively promoting pecan products. He noted that during the Committee's most recent meeting, the results of an industry survey were reviewed, which focused on identifying key areas for research investment, determining useful marketing materials for organizations, and gathering input on the industry's export assistance needs and preferred channels for receiving information.

Mr. Zaffarano acknowledged that the Committee had already begun taking action based on the survey results, including updating nutrition resources and improving the accessibility of



marketing materials through communication vehicles such as industry newsletters and webinars. He also noted that, in the coming weeks, the Committee would meet to discuss the planned refresh of the AmericanPecans.com website and appoint an agency to enhance its user-friendliness for industry stakeholders.

Ms. Schaffner further emphasized that APC is in the process of selecting a new agency to lead the website refresh, which she stated will be a significant improvement in terms of both access to materials and supporting export promotion efforts.

Mr. Womack commended the staff for their work, progress, and efficiency in driving these initiatives forward.

#### **IV. INDUSTRY RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Mr. Justin Jones emphasized the importance of highlighting the growers' stories and commended staff for their active presence at various pecan industry meetings across the United States. He then turned the meeting over to Ms. Schaffner to continue with the Industry Relations Committee report.

Ms. Schaffner underscored the importance of gathering feedback from the broader industry to ensure that all pecan associations have input into the Unified Pecan Promotion Plan (UPPP). She highlighted that APC staff continues to raise awareness of both APC and APPB, as well as the significance of the UPPP, by actively participating in industry meetings domestically and internationally.

Ms. Schaffner noted that over the past several months, staff has traveled extensively across the U.S. to engage with industry stakeholders and collect valuable feedback regarding the UPPP. This input has been crucial in shaping the initiatives of the Council. In collaboration with the Marketing Committee, staff has worked to incorporate this feedback into APC's communication strategies and the ongoing development and refinement of marketing materials.

Furthermore, Ms. Schaffner emphasized that APC is committed to exploring opportunities to unify the industry, working collaboratively with organizations across the U.S. to advance marketing objectives in international markets, while simultaneously creating value for domestic farmers.

#### **V. INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE**

Mr. Will Easterlin reported that significant progress has been made in key markets since the committee's last meeting. He highlighted continued momentum in India, where a strong local partner has been engaged, and emphasized efforts to expand distribution in the UK through key retailers. Mr. Easterlin also provided an update on the recently completed McKinsey research on the Chinese market, which analyzed factors such as tariffs and competing countries' projected production levels to inform APC's strategic approach. After thorough deliberation, the



Committee decided to maintain a presence in China, recognizing its historical importance as a major market and identifying potential future opportunities for APC to add value. The McKinsey findings reinforced the strategic decision to position pecans as a premium product, a strategy already being implemented in India and the UK.

Mr. Easterlin further reported that the Committee has initiated a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for selecting a new marketing agency in Germany to support the ongoing efforts in that market.

Ms. Schaffner provided an update on APC's collaboration with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) to explore funding opportunities, including the Market Access Program (MAP) and the Rural Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP). She noted that APC recently submitted an application for RAPP funding to sustain and expand marketing initiatives in key markets such as India, the UK, and Germany. Additionally, Ms. Schaffner highlighted the exploration of new market opportunities, particularly in South Korea.

#### **VI. GRADES & STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Mr. Mason informed the Council that, following a listening session on August 7, 2024, regarding funding for crop forecasting data, various options for data collection were reviewed. These options included additional pecan reports from the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and satellite acreage mapping. He noted that after thorough discussion, the Council reached a consensus to further investigate alternative crop forecasting methods and, as a result, decided to withhold funding for NASS in FY25 and the Council subsequently approved the decision to forgo funding for the two NASS surveys for FY25.

Regarding the impact of Hurricane Helene, Mr. Mason reported that the Committee evaluated options for assessing the storm's effect on Georgia's pecan crop. After careful consideration, he reported that the Committee agreed to allocate crop forecasting funds to support a Land IQ study to assess the damage caused by the hurricane.

Mr. Mason also informed the Council that the new voluntary USDA pecan standards were implemented on July 26th. He noted that after a few months of implementation, industry stakeholders identified several areas where the standards may need adjustment to better align with current industry practices which was brought to the Committees attention. He noted that the National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA) plans to pursue a petition to amend these standards.

Additionally, Mr. Mason mentioned that the Committee discussed the status of the quality assurance program, which is currently on hold. He stated that further discussions regarding the next steps for this program will be scheduled for upcoming meetings.



Mr. Womack commended Mr. Mason for leading the Grades & Standards Committee and extending his appreciation for his time and work.

Mr. Dan Zedan reported that the NPSA working group recently met to address concerns related to color, size uniformity, and moisture content. He noted that only minimal language changes were proposed to streamline the USDA's review and revision process. Mr. Zedan highlighted a key recommendation to shift from monitoring moisture content levels to water activity levels, which would eliminate the need for specific instrument parameters. Additionally, he mentioned that the NPSA suggested working with the USDA to develop a training mechanism for inspectors.

#### **VII. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Brandon Drummond presented the financial statements for the period from May to August 2024 to the Council, noting that the statements had been included in their meeting packets for review. Mr. Mason motioned to approve the financial statements from May to August 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Arnold, and the Council approved.

Mr. Drummond introduced Mr. Kevin Randolph from the financial auditing firm Eide Bailly to present an overview of the final FY23 financial audit report to the Council. Mr. Randolph then provided a detailed review of the audit findings. Mr. Randy Stephens motioned that the Council approves the financial audit report regarding the Council's financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2023. Mr. Arnold seconded the motion, and the Council approved.

#### **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Drummond presented the revised FY 25 budget to the Council, as outlined in their meeting packets. He explained that the revision reflects the previously approved allocation of funds for a health research study to be conducted by Penn State. He noted that the proposed no-cost extension will enable Penn State to complete the study and proceed with its publication. Mr. Frank Salopek motioned that the Council make a no-cost extension for the Penn Study health research study. Mr. Arnold seconded the motion, and the Council approved. Mr. Frank Salopek motioned revised line-item adjustments to the FY25 budget. Mr. Arnold seconded the motion, and the Council approved.

Ms. Warden noted the final appointments from the Secretary of Agriculture are received, APC will hold a virtual meeting in December to formally induct the new members and initiate the process of assigning them to the appropriate committees.

#### **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Mr. Larry Don Womack adjourned the meeting at 2:02 p.m. CT.



Respectfully submitted,

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Trent Mason, Secretary

Approved after review of the Board and USDA:

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Larry Don Womack, Chair