

## Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Time:** 11:00am – 2:30pm

**Location:** In-Person: Otesaga Resort Hotel, Cooperstown, NY

Virtual: Microsoft Teams

**Chair:** Bill Zittel

**Co-Chair:** Rich Stup

**Facilitator:** Dahlia Sheehan-Yassin

**Virtual Attendees:** Richard Stup, Allison Appleton, Kitty Gelberg, Bruce Gibson, Victor Jones, Michael Sellitti

**In-Person Attendees:** Bill Zittel, Jim Bittner, Liz Callahan, Ben Pallack (attending in place of Renee St. Jacques), Katherine Brieger, Keith Clark, Alicia Fletcher, Lisa Ford, Elizabeth Wolters, Dan Zeh, Pauline Boyer, Gillian Bradley, Alvaro (Tito) Chavez Gonzalez, Conor Hammersley, Christine Lalonde-Meade, Erik Merrell, Pamela Milkovich, Erika Scott, Dahlia Sheehan-Yassin, Julie Sorensen, Katrina Schwab-Tully (note-taker)

**Absent:** Renee St. Jacques, Jessica Garcia, Becky Wiseman, Steve Clark, Liane Hirabayashi, Andrew Johnson, Amanda (Mandy) Roome, Brian Quinn

### Welcome & Opening Remarks

- Erika welcomed attendees and acknowledged virtual participants
- Bill Zittel thanked everyone for attending either in-person or virtually and confirmed quorum

### Director's Report: Julie Sorensen & Erika Scott:

- Overview given of the Director's Report:
  - During the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2025, NYCAMH and NEC delivered extensive occupational health, safety, and outreach services, including over 1,000 clinical services through HealthWorks, 757 flu vaccinations, and significant respiratory, fit-testing, and DOT exam activity. Social Work Services continued to see increased demand, providing case management to 18 farmers and financial assistance through multiple farmer-support funds. Outreach and training efforts reached 1,909 individuals across 141 events, while the PPE Program continued statewide engagement. The ROPS Rebate Program installed 35 tractor rollover protection kits and maintained a 99% satisfaction rating. The John May Farm Safety Fund processed 28 applications, completing 33 projects and reimbursing over \$148,000 in safety-related farm improvements. Several presentations and research publications were completed or accepted, highlighting ongoing contributions to agricultural health and safety scholarship.

- **NYCAMH staff completed training on safe practices during outreach events involving immigrant workers and are developing a protocol to ensure consistency across teams**
- **Amanda (Mandy) Roome is leading the development of a new Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) survey aimed at identifying social and environmental factors affecting farmworker health. The survey tool is nearing finalization after significant internal review and refinement. Multiple staff have contributed under Mandy's leadership. Several collaborating agricultural centers nationwide have expressed interest in using the tool once completed**
- **Board Business: Bill Zittel**
  - **Chair & Co-chair**
    - **Chair election scheduled to take place at the June meeting**
    - **Discussion included whether voting should be in-person or hybrid**
    - **All members are encouraged to express interest in either Chair or Co-Chair roles to Julie**
  - **Board Retreat & Fundraising**
    - **Discussion included interest in a fall board retreat and the possibility of a fundraiser dinner to support the John May Farm Safety Fund**
- **John May Farm Safety Fund: Cost Match & Work Hours: Dahlia Sheehan-Yassin**
  - **PP Presentation overview:**
    - **JMFSF currently reimburses farmers for self-reported in-kind labor at \$25/hour as part of safety upgrade awards that typically average \$4,200, but this practice has led to challenges because labor hours are difficult to verify and often differ significantly from initial estimates, affecting funding allocations and accounting accuracy. While reimbursement acknowledges farmers' "sweat equity", discrepancies between estimated and actual hours – such as projects increasing from 10 to 50 reported hours – create inconsistencies not reflected in the programs marketing or scope of work**
    - **The board is leaning toward allowing in-kind hours and capping them at what the farmer initially submitted in the application**
- **Industry Highlight: Viticulture: Alvaro Chavez Gonzalez (Tito):**
  - **PP Presentation Overview:**
    - **The NYS wine and grape industry is a \$16.81 billion sector supporting more than 83,000 jobs across 7 major growing regions, with significant contributions to wages, tax revenue, and tourism. The industry encompasses roughly 30,000 vineyard acres across native, hybrid, and varieties and remains strong, though both vineyards and wineries face notable safety risks – including tractor**

- rollovers, PTO incidents, chemical exposure, post pounding, CO<sub>2</sub> hazards during punch-downs, and equipment-related injuries

  - Presentation emphasized protecting workers is essential to sustaining the industry's economic impact and outlined potential improvements such as better ventilation, gas detection, electrical upgrades, safer ladders and catwalks in wineries, and enhanced pruning tools, lighting, pesticide storage, and ROPS retrofits in vineyards
- **Research Focus: AgFF Empower Grant - Updating a resource for health:**  
Madeleine Zenir
  - PP Presentation Overview:
    - AgFF EMPOWER (Engaging Medical Staff & Patients in Occupational Health & Wellness with Electronic Resources) initiative aims to strengthen clinician's ability to recognize and treat agricultural, forestry and fishing (AgFF) - related injuries and illnesses, while also improving workers' health literacy so they can make informed medical decisions. The project includes reviewing existing farmworker clinical resources, developing new multimedia materials, partnering with a web developer, and ultimately launching and disseminating an accessible online platform. Ongoing informant interviews with clinicians, workers, community stakeholders, and farmers have revealed gaps such as limited clinician resources, reliance on on-the-job training, and barriers like lack of time and money
    - Next step includes completing additional interviews - especially among workers, farmers, and logging professionals - analyzing findings, and using the insights to guide the website's development and direction
- **Outreach Focus: Gas Meters for Farm Emergency Response:** Pauline Boyer & Erik Merrell
  - PP Presentation Overview:
    - The Gas Meter Program presentation outlined the significant risks posed by confined spaces on farms and discussed opportunities to support rural fire departments with gas-detection tools and training. Pauline & Erik reviewed differences between single-gas and four-gas meters, noting that single-gas H<sub>2</sub>S meters cost about \$200-300 and are used by NYCAMH to protect educators, while four-gas meters cost about \$1,000-2000 and detect multiple gases linked to manure-related fatalities. A successful model from the National Farm Medicine Center demonstrated improved emergency preparedness by providing free four-gas monitors to departments completing Ag Rescue Training

- **The board considered future possibilities for JMFSF, such as allowing fire departments to apply for gas meters, aligning with RF-DASH trainings, and developing a New York-based dataset to strengthen farm emergency response**
- **Wrap Up & Adjourn: Bill Zittel**
  - **Adjourned meeting at 2:30pm**

### **Action Items:**

- **Chair Elections (June): confirm voting method (in-person hand vote vs. online/survey) consistent with bylaws for hybrid meetings; solicit Vice Chair interest (members to contact Julie); finalize at the June meeting**
- **Board Composition: identify under-represented occupations and specific candidates – particularly near-shore/aquaculture and related processing – for recruitment outreach**
- **Board Retreat: bring options for an overnight retreat (target September 2026 or 2027) with proposed agenda, venue and budget**
- **EMPOWER Project recruitment & analysis: continue recruiting for interviews, prioritizing workers (including Spanish-speaking) and logging perspectives; board/staff to refer candidates; proceed with NVivo coding and start shaping website direction from early findings**
- **SDOH Survey Tool: finalize instrument and share with collaborating centers; plan internal rollout for data collection**
- **Immigration Protocol: Finalize and disseminate a standard protocol for staff at outreach/clinic events; train field teams**
- **JMFSF:**
  - **Cost-share policy: draft a proposal to revise treatment of in-kind/self-reported labor hours to improve estimate accuracy and budget predictability; present recommendation to board**
  - **Support for gas meters (Ag Rescue): decide whether support up to 50% cost-share or fully fund four-gas meters for fire departments completing Ag Rescue/RF-DASH training; bring contract/budget language enabling fire-department eligibility and an RF-DASH participation condition**
  - **Fire-department readiness scan: Conduct a short survey to assess departments access to single/four-gas meters, calibration capability, and training needs; leverage regional EMS/Fire networks for distribution**
  - **Ag-Rescue Training expansion: Coordinate with state/regional partners to expand RF-DASH/Ag-Rescue offerings and promote proactive “box alarm” mutual-aid planning for farm incidents**
  - **Engineering controls pilots: Evaluate physical controls (e.g., grates/guards, ventilation improvements) for grain bins/manure pits; consider piloting via JMFSF grants while balancing usability and safety**
- **Outreach, Development & Partnerships:**
  - **Fundraiser Concept: Explore a fundraising dinner for JMFSF**

- **Custom applicators engagement: Compile a list of custom crop/manure applicator organizations (including those offering safety training) and plan targeted outreach; consider publicity partners to reach small operators**
- **Fire-service contact & awareness: Publicize the hotline/point of contact for departments seeking gas-monitor and training assistance; include in survey follow-ups and RF-DASH communications**
- **June meeting agenda planning: Include JMFSF contract language options (gas-meter support & cost-share policy), fire department survey status, EMPOWER update and officer elections**
- **Board to evaluate adding gas meters in the Ag & Markets contract with the state**

**Next Meeting:**

**Thursday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026 11:00am – 2:30pm**

**Otesaga Resort Hotel, Cooperstown, NY**