PENNSYLVANIA APPLE PROGRAM BOARD MEETING
Minutes of the November 3, 2026 Virtual Meeting

Public notice of the November 3, 2026, Pennsylvania Apple Program Board Meeting was given as stipulated by the Sunshine Law.

CALL TO ORDER

David Peters, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Board members in attendance, in addition to Chairman Peters, included Benjamin Keim, Vice Chair; Kyle Benner; Maggie Travis; and Ellie Vranich, Treasurer.

Also present: Michael Keefe, Program Commodities Manager; Mark O'Neill, Division Chief of Food Systems, Bureau of Market Development; Frenchie Cline, Administrative Assistant 1, Bureau of Market Development; Michelle Earley, Senior Accountant, McKonly and Asbury; Sarah Zost, President, State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania (SHAP); Adam Morris, Esquire; and Rachel Wilbur-Adams, Sargent's Court Reporting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLUTION 2026.16 - MINUTES

Presented by: Ellie Vranich

Seconded by: Kyle Benner

Passed: Unanimously

To approve the July 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Michelle Earley, Senior Accountant, McKonly and Asbury, presented the financial statements as of September 30, 2026. She reviewed the balance sheet that reflected an overall total equity of $295,301. She next touched on the accounts payable sheet and the profit and loss statement. She questioned postage expenses, and it was noted the postage expenses were sent in on October 26, 2026 so they would show up on the next meeting's report. Also under expenses, she noted the audits for FY24/25 and FY25/26 were underway, and the audit fees would be added after the audits were complete in a few months. It was also noted the annual state crop assessment invoice had not been received. Regarding net income, she noted the current year was at $30,954, an increase of $80,000 over the prior year due to not all of the expenses being recorded yet.

Ms. Earley stated the three-year profit and loss statement was included in the packet per a request several months ago. She reviewed the actual versus budget for the current year, noting as of September there was $33,000 in income versus a budget of $100,000.

Mr. Keim asked how the Board would deal with a potential $73,000 loss this year due to the smaller crop and how expenses would be covered in the spring going into next year. Ms. Vranich noted the loaded question and stated discussions would be needed on how to handle expenses. She expressed concern that the 2025 crop number might be lower than it should be at the current time. She noted unless something drastic happens, the Board will likely need to dip into reserve funds to cover expenses.

Ms. Travis also expressed concerns, noting while some expenses are fixed, potential discussions might center around the Consumer Education Farm Show and SHAP Apple Research lines.

Chair Peters acknowledged the concerns presented. He suggested holding off on payments of larger line items until Hershey, at which time the Board could reevaluate how close they were to the budget and if 2025 crop assessment was still trickling in. Mr. Keim agreed with Chair Peters suggestion and noted the Board could also consider a split payment for the annual state crop assessment to the U.S. Apple Board.

RESOLUTION 2026.17 - APPROVAL OF DEFERRED PAYMENTS

Presented by: Benjamin Keim

Seconded by: Maggie Travis

Passed: Unanimously

To approve deferring payments for the annual state crop assessment, SHAP Apple Research, and Consumer Education Farm Show expenses until the Hershey meeting in early February 2027.

RESOLUTION 2026.18 - APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORT

Presented by: Ellie Vranich

Seconded by: Benjamin Keim

Passed: Unanimously

To approve the Financial Report as presented.

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Michael Keefe, Program Commodities Manager, provided a brief update on assessment collections, reported production figures, and current financial position. Regarding assessment collections, he stated for 2023 approximately $238,424 had been collected. For 2024

approximately $146,144 had been collected. He noted for 2025, $135,314 had been collected, an increase of $33,224 since the July meeting.

Regarding fresh and processing bushel figures, he noted a substantial change in the 2023 numbers. He explained the department made an effort to reconcile historical production records with assessment payments reported from growers. During the process, a discrepancy was found between the amount of assessment revenue and the amount of production accounted for. Adjustments were made to the figures accordingly.

He echoed figures from the financial report presented by Ms. Earley. He noted the department was conducting an audit of the 2024 and 2025 production years, which would be prioritized over the next few months. He returned to the 2023-bushel numbers, explaining there had been information entry errors and apologized for the prior misrepresentation of bushel numbers.

Mr. Keefe stated, in looking at the 2023 numbers, it appeared there was room for growth in the 2024 and 2025 numbers. Once numbers were corrected, he would reach out via various communication methods to growers to effectuate reconciliation.

Ms. Vranich thanked Mr. Keefe for his efforts in making sure the numbers were correct and as up to date as possible. Mr. Keefe provided additional details as to how the errors occurred. Chair Peters echoed the appreciation expressed by Ms. Vranich.

Mr. Keim asked, if during the reconciliation, Mr. Keefe had noticed growers who were consistently paying above what they owed as well as if there were growers avoiding payments or paying below what they owed. Mr. Keefe replied the question could be answered after the 2024 and 2025 audits were completed. He added, for 2023, there was information that some growers paid more or less then assessed but not by a meaningful amount. He provided additional explanations how the confusion and errors could occur.

Ms. Vranich asked two questions, the first of which was if Mr. Keefe had discovered any growers who had fallen off or new ones that were not there in previous years. Her second question was if there was a way for the Board to compare the list of growers who had applied for the state freeze money and compare them to the list of growers who submitted losses for payments to the Board, ensuring everyone is on the mailing list. Mr. Keefe replied he had seen more of a drop-off of growers then new growers entering the market. He suggested additional forms of communication beyond the mailings might help capture some of the people who were missing. He noted, with the upcoming referendum, it was important to convey to growers the value provided by the PA Apple Program. Regarding her second question, he would check into her question and provide an answer in the future.

Ms. Travis commented, from the pack house perspective, she just sent out the final packets for 2025, so she was interested to see if the fresh bushel numbers for 2025 change for the February meeting.

Mr. Keefe thanked the Board for their patience and understanding.

RESOLUTION 2026.19 - APPROVAL OF ASSESSMENT REPORT

Presented by: Kyle Benner

Seconded by: Maggie Travis

Passed: Unanimously

To approve the Assessment Report

NEW BUSINESS - Industry Discussion Updates

Mr. Keefe introduced the topic of industry updates, noting it was an opportunity for general discussion of the industry. Ms. Travis shared her company, while not fully delivered, came in a 42 percent compared to prior year, however the number was 18 percent over estimate. She added there were moments which were better than expected.

Mr. Keim asked if, given the reduced crop, if there could be an expectation that growers will be through the apple crop sooner, therefore reconciling assessment amounts sooner. Ms. Travis explained the constricted total program Rice Fruit Company took, noting Mr. Keim's question was complicated. Mr. Benner shared the expectation at El Vista Orchards is that they will probably be through their crop earlier than normal, given they are at an 80 percent harvest compared to last year.

The Board discussed the optimistic feelings throughout the industry in light of the spring freeze. It was noted some apple varieties performed better than expected with other varieties being hit hard. Mr. Benner also noted crop quality varied by block and by location.

Ms. Travis stated, with every challenge faced that is out of the control of growers, there were also enough favorable things happening with federal and state support. The support led to a lift in mentality.

Sarah Zost, President, State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania (SHAP), commented on the impact of the financial help from the state and federal governments. As SHAP President, she has first-hand knowledge of farms around the stated that would not be solvent at all without the state money coming in. She added, at Bonnie Brae, they came in at about 40 percent of a crop when they thought they would be closer to 30 percent. Comparatively she noted the slightly better crop helped lead to a better mood, despite the overall crop being horrendous and the smallest ever picked.

NEW BUSINESS - 2027 Referendum Updates

Mr. Keim asked how long the referendum period would be open for, adding perhaps the program could capitalize while growers are in a slightly more optimistic mood before they get

busy again. Mr. O'Neill explained the full referendum process takes about three months. Mr. Keim asked if early March could be a possibility. Mr. O'Neill noted early March would be a challenge with mid-to-late March being a better option. Mr. Morris noted the minutes from the prior meeting indicated the Board had discussed using the first or second week of March to distribute ballots to be returned within one month. From a legal perspective, he noted the continuation referendum was fairly straightforward.

The Board discussed the timeframe for the referendum with Ms. Vranich sharing concerns about the late March to April timeline. Ms. Travis suggested March 15, 2027 as a start date. The winter fruit schools were discussed as being a good period to remind people of the upcoming referendum. Mr. Keefe asked for additional detail about the fruit schools, which were provided. He offered support from the department regarding the referendum and the program at the schools.

Mr. O'Neill noted there would be a mailing going out prior to the referendum and asked if the Board wanted to add a one-page describing the benefits of the program to the mailing. Ms. Vranich replied she could use a letter from 2020 as a starting point for a one-page. Mr. O'Neill noted explaining where their money is going would be a helpful reminder for people leading into the referendum. It was noted highlighting the support given to growers over the past year would be good as it would show having a collective presence at the state level allowed for a quick reaction.

Chair Peters asked if the vacant Board position had been filled. Mr. Keefe stated outreach had been done and the department was going to coordinate with the Secretary of Agriculture to get an appointee in place.

RESOLUTION 2026.20 - MOTION FOR REFERENDUM START DATE

Presented by: Maggie Travis

Seconded by: Benjamin Keim

Passed: Unanimously

To recommend a start date of March 15, 2027 for the next referendum.

It was noted the next mailing was due to go out at the beginning of December so anything the Board wanted to include needed to be sent in to the department as soon as possible.

NEW BUSINESS - 2027 MEETING DATES

Mr. O'Neill noted the meeting at Mid-Atlantic on February 2, 2027 was set. Ms. Kline shared other meeting dates of July 6, 2027 and November 2, 2027. There were no issues with the suggested dates.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Keefe returned to the discussion regarding the open Board seat. There were six names up for consideration. Chair Peters asked if the people were well distributed through the state. Mr. Keefe shared two were from Western Pennsylvania and three were from Central Pennsylvania.

ADJOURNMENT

RESOLUTION 2026.21 -ADJOURNMENT

Presented by: Kyle Benner

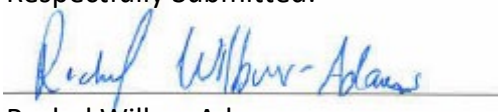
Seconded by: Ellie Vranich

Passed: Unanimously

To adjourn the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:33 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:



Rachel Wilbur-Adams

November 3, 2026