Government & Industry Relations Committee (GIRCom) MINUTES April 12, 2021

Committee Members: Bonnie Potter, Chair
Joan Clappier
Dr. Pat Long
Tom Petersen
Brion Smoker

Board Liaison: Wendy Dittbrenner

Staff Representative: Dan Huntley

Executive Director: Robin Gifford

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm ET.

1.0 Meeting Opening

1.1 AOA News of Importance — Dittbrenner/Huntley

- Elections: The nominating committee has a slate of nominees and they are working on the disclosures.
- National Show:
  - Wendy offered a high-five to Robin for doing an amazing job.
  - It was a top-notch show despite the challenges of Covid requirements. Volunteer involvement was good.
- AOA is now switching focus to elections and the fiber extravaganza in Nashville.
- The Membership committee has put a major effort into the new structure of levels and benefits. Further discussion is below in Section 4.1.
- Question: How are we doing with membership compared to last year? Answer: Probably about like last year, but we are getting a lot of first-time members and may not be retaining enough established members.

2.0 Health/Government Related

2.1 USAHA Alerts — Long / Potter

- Nothing directly affecting alpacas
- There have been a lot of EHV-1 reports in horses. Pat keeps an eye on that because years ago there were reports of EHV-1 in alpacas, but he hasn't seen anything recently. There might be cause for concern if an alpaca show is scheduled in a venue immediately after a horse show.
- Some of new Covid variants have been found in pet cats and dogs in households with positive-testing people. The assumption is that the pets got it from the people.
- One case of rabies in a horse was seen in NC.
- A NC veterinarian recommended vaccination of horses against EHV-1 and WNV, especially in NC, SC, FL area.
- Bonnie reminded us that in the past we have sent an eblast reminding our members to talk with their veterinarians about recommended vaccinations in their area. Last year we sent that out in May. In CA, some veterinarians recommend rabies vaccination for alpacas. The committee decided we should do that again. Bonnie will review the previous eblast and send something to us for review.

3.0 Unfinished Business

3.2 IRS and State Tax Audits - defer — Smoker

3.3 International Transport of Alpacas/Info for website - defer Potter

4.0 New Business

4.1 Proposed New Membership Structure Dittbrenner/All

- Initial considerations:
  - The office team worked on financial data, i.e. what it is costing to provide benefits to the members. Membership dues have not been raised since the merger, but costs keep going up.
  - The Membership team put a lot of effort into restructuring the membership levels and benefits to better reflect the different interests of different groups of owners, i.e. different business models. Associate Member and Youth Member were added. There was recognition of different interests between people breeding and showing for higher end alpacas vs. people focused on the fiber end of the industry.
  - Information flowed back and forth between office team and Membership committee in a good working relationship
  - One important goal was trying to retain existing members.
- Bottom line goal: (a) define the different business models/levels and what benefits each group would be most interested in; (b) look at costs to provide the different levels of benefits.
- A couple of expensive areas are: 1. Events, and 2. Technology, such as search capabilities, EPD options, etc.
- They studied at other organizations that had both registries and shows, including equestrian and dogs.
- Current membership is:1,644 members.
- General discussion among the committee:
  - Bonnie was president of the organization when merger occurred, so she reminded us how we came up with a $15 "registry" membership. They had proposed the lowest membership including voting rights would be $30, but there were complaints about that cost for voting rights, so it was dropped to $15.
  - Comments by several about how basic membership including voting rights is going up from $15 to $100 (or from $30 to $100), which is a steep rise considering this is primarily the fiber producers who don't make much money; but the cost increase from $110 to $200 for the owners who show, breed and sell both animals and breeding is a much smaller percentage but they generally make a lot more money.
  - The low-end cost was too low for too long, but that doesn't make a huge percentage increase more palatable to people. We may lose a lot of the lower-end members with this price increase.
  - We need to do a better job of *selling* how valuable all of the benefits are.
  - One suggestion: Perhaps don't include free show membership with the top end membership because that is the group that generally has more money and is making more money in the alpaca industry, and they are accustomed to pay separately for showing.
  - Another suggestion: Since EPD is expensive and used by a minority of members, make it a fee-for-service.
  - Dan commented that prior to the 2009 recession, the number of registrations was much higher and AOA could afford lower costs for registrations.

4.2 New USDA Aid Program Smoker

- Pat observed that the deadline for some of these programs is so soon that sending this specific information out is not timely. FSA has programs coming up regularly. Our members should keep in touch with FSA. Since there are lots of programs, each different, the FSA agent can help you find those that are applicable to your situation.
- Bonnie: Our last eblast about forming a relationship with your local FSA representative was sent in October. We agreed to send the information out again, so that more people may follow through and do it. If possible, include a link to the USDA website where a person can find contact information for their nearest USDA office.

5.0 Approval of Minutes (Minutes for approval: (2/8/21) Clappier

- Motion to approve the minutes of 2/8/21 was made by Pat seconded by Brion. Motion was passed.

6.0 Meeting Wrap

6.1 Review Action Items — Potter

- Bonnie: Review/edit previous eblast on vaccinations and send to committee for review.
- Bonnie: Review/edit previous eblast on building relationship with FSA rep. and send to committee for review.
- All: Provide Feedback on the questionnaire in the Membership email.

6.2 Next Meeting Date: 5/10/2021 — Potter

6.3 Adjournment — Potter

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 pm ET.