



**Assessment Steering Committee  
Friday, March 14, 2025  
9-10:30 a.m. PT  
Videoconference**

**Tom Bodtke, Chair, presiding**

**MINUTES**

**Call to order**

The meeting was called to order by Tom Bodtke at 9:01 a.m. PT on Friday, March 14, 2025.

**Committee Members Present:** Tom Bodtke, Denny Vander Kooi, Andres Armstrong, Shelly Hartmann, Brittany Lee, Jody McPherson, Brad Moorer, Luis Miguel Vegas, Brandon Wade, and Bryan Sakuma, USHBC Chair

**Committee Members Absent:** Rodrigo Aceves, Gunnar Avinelis, Ellie Norris, Paul Sangha

**USDA/AMS Representative:** Sarah Richardson

**Council Member Guests:** Andrew Maiman, Anne Krahmer-Steinkamp, Doug Krahmer, Bonnie Lundblad, Chelsea Consalo, Daniel Bustamante, Doug LaCroix, Katelyn Craig, Kristen Brinkley, Mark Adams, Markus Duram, Mike Mendez, Particio Munoz, Paul Macrie, Guy Cotton, Tammy Brannen, Bill Cline, Mike Mendez, Raul Gonzalez, Patricio Munoz, Juan Pablo Vogt, Joe Barsi, Bo Slack

**Additional Guests:** Harry Kaiser Ph.D., Cornell University, Dan Barber with Fleishman-Hillard

**Staff Members Present:** Kasey Cronquist, Kevin Hamilton, Joe Vargas, Jared Ruggles and Melinda Kern

QUORUM PRESENT

## **Approval of Agenda**

ACTION 1: Motion made to approve the agenda for Friday, March 14, 2025.

Motion seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

## **Approval of Minutes**

ACTION 2: Motion made to approve the minutes from February 24, 2025.

Motion seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

## **President's Report**

Kasey Cronquist noted an administrative change to the January meeting minutes with the addition of Shelly Hartmann's name noted in attendance.

Cronquist shared that the committee's request for an information webpage for the 2027 Assessment Discussion had been launched and recently shared with the industry through an email announcement from Bryan Sakuma.

## **Chairs Comments**

Tom Bodtke welcomed USHBC council members and alternates as guests to the meeting.

Bodtke reviewed the history of the USHBC Assessment Steering Committee which was established by USHBC chair Shelly Hartmann in 2024 and originally chaired by Bryan Sakuma. Bodtke reviewed the purpose of the committee to oversee and help guide USHBC staff to engage with the industry on the "what, why, and how much," of any possible assessment increase the council may want to put forth to the USDA for review and approval. Bodtke noted that the staff has been gathering and sharing information at regional engagement meetings at the request of the Council.

Bodtke highlighted regional meetings held and acknowledged the committee's effort to gather feedback and be reporting back from their regions. Based on the feedback at that time, in January, this steering committee unanimously voted to recommend an assessment rate split between fresh and frozen. The recommendation was that frozen would be assessed at \$.015/lbs and fresh at \$.025/lbs.

Committee members and staff were asked to begin sharing and socializing this recommendation during regional engagement meetings and in conversations prior to the council's meeting in March to continue to collect grower feedback.

## **USHBC Chair Remarks**

Bryan Sakuma thanked the committee for their work and how important this conversation is for the future success of our growers. He reported that he had received letters from Florida, Oregon, Georgia and North Carolina. Sakuma shared concern about support for the rate that the steering committee is currently recommending. Sakuma shared that more time building consensus is needed and requested that the committee reconsider their recommendation to the council, based on the additional feedback being received. Sakuma also requested that more grower to grower communication on the facts involved need to be shared and encouraged the committee and the council members present to be actively engaging in any and all opportunities to convey the need assessment that's been studied and the opportunity for marketing to help solve. To help coordinate outreach efforts,

Sakuma acknowledged that while the steering committee's recommendation has not yet been formally presented to the full council, no action will be taken by the council at their next meeting in March. However, he requested that the committee's review and next recommendation be completed as soon as possible.

### **Steering Committee Comments**

Bodtke opened the floor for comments from each attending committee member.

Committee members Brittany Lee, Jody McPherson, Brandon Wade, Luis Vegas, Denny Vander Kooi, Andres Armstrong, Shelly Hartmann provide their regional feedback.

Committee member Brad Moorer, shared industry feedback on a consensus of support for \$36/ton.

Bodtke encouraged attending Council Members to comment.

Council members Macrie, Cline and LaCroix spoke.

President of USHBC Kasey Cronquist followed up to introduce Dr. Kaiser to the rest of the committee and meeting attendees. Cronquist provided a brief background on Kaiser's 25 year relationship in providing the economic analysis and report to the council, USDA and Congress that is required every five years to help ensure that the program is being measured and having an impact with the assessment dollars being used for marketing. Cronquist explained that Kaiser's decades of work and reports have been done as a "look back" over a five year period for measurement and evaluation on what had happened during that timeframe. For the assessment steering committee and the council's effort on trying to establish a future need assessment on what a new assessment rate would need to be to keep up with anticipated supply, Dr. Kaiser was asked to take his knowledge, model and assumptions to "look forward," to help determine what a marketing budget would need to look like going forward to maintain grower profitability against increasing supply.

### **Ambassador Training for Council and Committees**

Sakuma thanked Shelly Hartmann for volunteering to assist with training, encouraging an ambassador approach with an emphasis on grower to grower communication. This training would equip steering committee and council members on how to encourage feedback and answer questions.

### **Other Items**

Bodtke encouraged each committee member to share their final thoughts on a possible assessment increase amount and timeline for vote. Each attending member shared.

No action was taken.

### **Items and Scheduling of Next Meeting**

The next committee meeting will be held after the DC meetings.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:58 a.m. PT on Friday, March 14, 2025.