*Bedford Farmers Club DRAFT*

*Minutes from the Meeting of May 5, 2021*

*St. Matthew’s Parish House, Bedford, NY*

Jim Wood, President Emeritus, presided over the meeting in the absence of President Mary Farley. Mr. Wood greeted attendees to the first meeting of 2021 and thanked everyone for abiding by mask-wearing and social-distance guidelines necessitated by the Coronavirus. Guests were acknowledged: Ann Todd, a former BFC member; Jack Garter, a recent college graduate with a degree in plant biotechnology; and Kimba Wood, of the State of Washington Woods.

Roger Vincent presented the Nominating Committee Report for the Slate of Officers for 2021. The slate was approved by unanimous acclimation.

* President Mary Farley
* Vice President Robin Ashley
* Treasurer Roger Vincent
* Secretary Open
* Historian John Stockbridge
* Timely Tips Ellen Best
* Hospitality Julie Henken
* Signs Gene and Sylvia Finger
* President Emeritus Jim Wood

Mr. Vincent noted that the position of Secretary was open, and made a pitch for volunteers to take on the duties either individually or shared between two people. Anyone who was interested should speak with him or Mary Farley.

In his role as Treasurer, Mr. Vincent declared that the Club was solvent, and circulated a clipboard to collect the $10 annual membership dues.

Ellen Best presented Timely Tips. Ellen runs a local chapter of the Bionutrient Food Association, whose mission is to improve the nutrient density of the food supply. Ellen displayed two bags of carrots, one organic and one conventional, and asked the group which was the more nutritious. It turns out it could be either, because the method of growing doesn’t impact the nutritional value of the food – the health of the soil does. She then displayed two containers of soil. The unhealthy soil was dry and sandy. The healthy soil was darker and clumped together, with air pockets that microbes need to survive. The best way to improve the health of the soil is to cover it to prevent run-off and encourage rain filtration. Hay, compost, mulch and leaves are all good materials for coverage. Invasive plants – as long as they haven’t gone to seed – can also make good mulch because they’re healthy from drawing so many minerals from the soil. You can also improve your soil’s health by introducing perennials to create a year-round root system, and by using cover crops for soil fertility and biodiversity.

Historian John Stockbridge spoke next, taking his inspiration from the guest speaker’s theme of integrated pest management to find a similar topic in the Club’s historical record – bugs.

At the January 1876 meeting held at the Katonah Fire Department, members engaged in a lively debate on potato bugs. Club President Mr. Clark didn’t think the crop was damaged by the potato bug after a certain stage, while Mr. J.S. Holmes thought potato bugs should be fought desperately. Mr. Clark related an incident told by Mr. Wood when a potato bug was caught coming from New Jersey. The bug was held underwater for a considerable period of time, but when taken out it was still alive as if nothing had happened. Club members determined that the potato bug had waterproof qualities.

In July 1878, Club President Mr. Henry Pellou opined that potato bugs were less prevalent than in the previous year and were decreasing in number. Other members disagreed and noted that the bugs were also partial to tomatoes and eggplant. Mr. James Wood observed that when any destroyer of vegetation came, Providence soon sent an enemy to wipe out its existence.

In 1946 the guest speaker said that Bedford was the best hunting ground for insect life, and he knew this because he had hunted for bugs in England, Africa and Australia. In Bedford he found a rare butterfly on the Guard Hill road.

In 1931 President Dan Hollingsworth opened the meeting by reading letters from some of the Club’s wandering members. Guest speaker Dr. Hartzel discussed how insects injure plants.

Dr. Hartzel said there was a constant struggle to keep insect life down so that we may grow our food. There was always the fear in mankind that he may be the loser; however, insects in their natural haunts have enemies that keep them in bounds.

At a 1957 meeting held in the Katonah Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Henry Miller invited guests to take refreshments as she recited a rhyme:

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary how does your garden grow?*

*With bugs and slugs and blight to fight, I hardly know!*

Mr. Wood then introduced the day’s guest speaker, his son, Steve Wood. Mr. Wood related that his son decided at 12 or 13 years old that he wanted to farm and, after managing the family farm, going to agricultural college and spending two years working on a farm in Tanzania, he moved to Montana. Today Steve Wood has 1,500 head of mainly Angus cattle, and had just calved 450 cows.

Using a PowerPoint Presentation, Steve Wood discussed Integrated Pest Management in Montana. Pests are a big problem, whether they’re vertebrates, insects or weeds. The tremendous range of regions in Montana – plains, mountains, arid areas and areas of greater rainfall – pose additional challenges. That and the variety of pests call for different systems and approaches, which have to be monitored for their effectiveness and changed if necessary. Noxious weeds are a particular problem, and there are laws in Montana to mandate their control. One weed, the leafy spurge, has a tap root that can extend down 120 feet.

Manual cutting, pulling or tilling can be used to reduce weed growth. Chemicals have been the norm for 40 or 50 years, and Mr. Wood noted that their use is in flux, as they become more species-specific and more precise in their application.

Biological pest management with the use of bugs is another way to control the spread of weeds. For this method to be effective, the area must have a very heavy infestation of weeds. Bugs won’t provide effective control if the weeds are scattered sporadically in the fields. A bug might attack the root, stem or crown of the weed. Bugs that eat the seed heads can help prevent weeds from propagating.

Flea beetles have been introduced to attack the leafy spurge. Sweep nets are used to capture the beetles and move them from field to field as necessary. Suppliers grow and harvest beetles for weed control and can deliver orders by the thousand or the ten thousand, depending on need. Monitoring is the key to success, and results can vary from year to year. A farmer / rancher may have to add more bugs, especially as the harsh Montana winters can cause a high mortality rate in the bug population; or there may be a need to try a different approach if the bugs are not effective.

Animals such as sheep, goats and cows can be deployed as another method of biological weed control. First, animals have to be taught to eat a plant that is foreign to their palates. A farmer / rancher can do this by introducing different textures and tastes, and then eventually introducing the target weed itself – keeping in mind that some weeds are toxic to different animals. It’s best to begin the process in a small area, such as a couple of acres, with a high weed infestation.

An animal will generally taste something and then go away to ruminate to see if it has any adverse reaction, such as acid reflux, gas or aversion to the taste. If the experience is positive, the animal will return for more. With some plants, for example, those with thistles and thorns, the animal will have to learn how to eat them by stripping away the edible portions from the inedible parts. Animals can also be mentors to their peers and teach them how and what to eat. Weeds can be a good source of protein and nutritious for the animals.

Animal herds are sometimes rented out to provide weed control on other properties.

Hospitality Chairperson Julie Henken and her committee produced a COVID-safe refreshment table to the enjoyment of all.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Sheila Crespi*