

# INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **Innovation & Technology Committee** meeting held virtually via MS Teams on April 15, 2025.

## **Members Present:**

Felix Egerer	Unsworth Winery
Gail Nelson	BC Fruit Growers' Association
Hank Markgraf	Syngenta Canada Inc.
Jesse Macdonald	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Karen Yeung (CO-CHAIR)	BC Wine Grape Council
Kate Durisek	BC Wine Grape Council
Kathy Malone	Hillside Winery
Kellie Garcia (CO-CHAIR)	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Lindsay King	BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Lisa Wambold	Terralink Horticulture
Sarah O'Brien	Okanagan-Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Program
Shelby Austen	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Steve Brown	Independent
Sukhpaul Bal	BC Cherry Association

## **Regrets:**

Barbara Hall	UBC Okanagan
Galen Barnhardt	Barn to Bottle Consulting
Molly Thurston	Pearl Agricultural Consulting
Nick Ibuki	Summerland Varieties Corporation

## **1. WELCOMING REMARKS**

## **2. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS**

ACTION ITEMS		
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED	STATUS
Kellie/Karen/Gail	Connect RE: BCFGA CropTracker Pilot	?

## **3. MEMBER ROUND TABLE UPDATES**

- Kathy noted that BCWGC is co-hosting the Grape and Wine Research Users Meeting at the Summerland Research and Development Centre on April 17.
  - Kellie inquired about attendance, and Jesse reported 44 in-person and 75 virtual registrations to date.
- Sarah reported that SIR is entering the field season and has removed several traps in areas with low pest pressure. Growers exporting to Taiwan who require specific trap densities are encouraged to contact SIR.

- Felix reported that BCGA has been focused on Enhanced Replant Program related issues, including challenges with French vines not meeting certification requirements and the resulting impacts. BCGA is collecting feedback on the program to help inform potential changes. He also noted ongoing work with the task force in preparation for Phase 2, highlighting strong collaboration among grape organizations.
- Jesse shared an update on a new apple rootstock trial. The project involves testing promising rootstocks in grower-managed orchards to assess performance under real conditions. He also mentioned AAFC's new collaborative research project focused on cold hardiness in cherries, with potential for cross-commodity applications over time, that includes sprayable products and enclosed agriculture systems.
- Gail reported that the recent Tree Fruit Production Guide meeting had over 80 participants, primarily growers. The session included technical updates, product and regulation changes, and reports from SIR, BC DAS, and the nursery stock access project. She also noted that BCFGA will be offering pesticide training and exam preparation, and sprayer calibration courses for apples and cherries in May.
- Hank reported that the season is tracking closely with last year, with apricots currently in bloom in East Kelowna and cherries expected to bloom by the end of the month. He noted that many growers appear to be behind on pruning this year.
- Kate reported that the task force is exploring the development of innovation clusters, with potential themes such as drought or heat stress. The goal is to identify both short- and long-term projects these clusters could support, while also building an overarching knowledge translation and transfer model.
- Lindsay noted that the BC On-Farm Technology Adoption Program is currently accepting applications, with a focus on labour-saving technologies.

#### **4. OLD BUSINESS**

##### **4.1 CURRENT PROJECT UPDATES**

###### **a) BC DAS Operations**

Kellie informed the committee that BC DAS operations are fully underway. The contractor is planning a series of extension events, which will be added to the common calendar shortly. Each event will aim to cover multiple topics to maximize value for participants.

###### **b) BC DAS Expansion to Winegrapes**

Kellie informed the committee that Phase 1 has successfully concluded, with recommendations to proceed with Phase 2. She also noted ongoing discussions within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food regarding potential expansion of the platform to include blueberries and potatoes. Increasing commodity involvement was identified as a factor that could enhance the likelihood of securing long-term funding.

#### **5. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **5.1 PROPOSED PROJECTS**

### a) LiteFarm – Farm Management Tool

Kellie introduced the committee to LiteFarm, a farm management software developed by farmers in collaboration with UBC Farm, which has not yet been used in the Okanagan. The platform is user-friendly and highly customizable, allowing users to manage tasks, map farms, organize crops, and export records. She asked the committee for feedback on whether pursuing a project involving LiteFarm would be worthwhile.

- Kate expressed interest in the project and noted potential synergies with metric tracking for Sustainable Winegrowing BC.
- Felix highlighted the need for compatibility with other required software, such as cellar management systems, and noted BCGA's interest in collaborating on the project. Hank emphasized the importance of compatibility with CanadaGAP certification to prevent duplication of compliance efforts for producers.
- Gail emphasized the importance of data literacy and the role of smartphones in bridging that gap. She also highlighted the benefit of the data being stored locally in Canada.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED
Kellie/Shelby	Connect with UBC Researchers RE: LiteFarm features & compatibility

### b) Herbicide Technology & Extension

Kellie informed the committee that the project was approved by the Advisory Council and the application has been submitted to IAF. Although limited work has been done to date on herbicides, the project will involve demonstration trials and development of a prototype sprayer to improve herbicide application in orchards and vineyards and reduce reliance on glyphosate.

### c) Data Strategy

Gail informed the committee that she and Kellie are developing a proposal for an industry data strategy, as recommended in the Stabilization Plan. The industry currently lacks an integrated, collaborative data management structure. Gail is researching existing functionalities in information management systems, assessing user-level needs (grower, researcher, policy), and exploring what a cohesive framework could look like.

### d) ABAzyne Abiotic Stress Demonstration Trials

Kellie reported that she has been working with the BC Cherry Association on a project application for ABAzyne abiotic stress demonstration trials. She will follow up with AAFC and the Ministry to review the workplan and ensure it complements and builds on their new cold hardiness project.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED
Kellie/Jesse/Lindsay	Follow up RE: Cold hardiness project & ABAzyne trials

#### **e)BCGA Lasers & Bird Deterrents**

Felix informed the group that bird deterrents have long been a challenge, with producers seeking alternatives to auditory methods and netting. Recent regulatory changes have eased restrictions on laser use, and an Osoyoos-based supplier is interested in supporting a project focused on innovation and labour savings. The laser deterrents displace birds from crop areas without impacting predatory species. Felix invited feedback from the group on the proposed initiative.

- Karen and Hank noted the importance of flicker controls.
- Sukhpaul suggested connecting with Gayle Krahn as Jealous Fruits may already be using this technology.
- The group noted the cross-commodity benefit of the project and would like to see it move forward.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED
Kellie/Felix	Connect: RE Lasers & bird deterrent project application

#### **6. ADJOURNMENT**

The next Innovation and Technology Committee meeting will be held virtually via MS Teams on June 10, 2025, from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm.