Meeting Synthesis for the Ad Hoc Committee on Expanding Pathways to Compensate Producers for Climate-Smart Agriculture Production

Meeting date: September 30, 2026

Discussion Summary

Emerging and Idealized Pathways

- Discussed the potential for new or emerging pathways, including how advances in artificial intelligence (AI), large language models, and predictive modeling could affect program design, monitoring, and implementation. Although no new pathway submissions had been solicited, the Committee was encouraged to propose ambitious or idealized approaches that may not fit neatly within the existing taxonomy. These ideas would be compiled for inclusion in the report appendix.
- Members also discussed the possibility of evaluating recommendations based on factors such as cost, political feasibility, and transformative potential.

Recommendation 1: Upfront Funding and Financial Barriers

- Discussion focused on clarifying the distinction between addressing producers' cash-flow constraints and reducing program administrative burdens. Members emphasized the importance of reducing upfront costs and financial barriers to participation, particularly for small, new, and underserved producers.
- Suggestions included retaining bridge financing as a concept while clarifying its purpose, addressing registry fees, and considering payment structures that provide funding earlier in the process. Examples of programs that cover a large share of costs upfront were discussed as ways to reduce financial risk for producers. Members also highlighted the potential value of regional technical support and administrative approaches that could make programs more accessible.

Recommendation 3: Recognizing Existing Practices and Supporting Continued Adoption

- Members recommended refining terminology related to additionality and early adoption, noting that these concepts may be more applicable to carbon markets than to other program types. Discussion highlighted the need to recognize producers who have already adopted relevant practices, as well as those who continue to maintain or improve them.
- Members suggested distinguishing between incentives for adopting new practices and payments that support ongoing implementation or maintenance. The Committee also discussed how program requirements and policies may affect eligibility for producers who have already implemented practices.

Recommendation 4: Data Harmonization, Reporting, and Data Management

- The Committee discussed opportunities to improve alignment across program reporting requirements and data systems. Key considerations included establishing common data

standards and metadata requirements, clarifying data ownership and access, and developing appropriate data-sharing agreements.

- Members emphasized that recommendations should specify their intended users and purposes, including regulatory reporting, program administration, and scientific analysis. Privacy and confidentiality were also identified as important considerations for maintaining producer trust while enabling useful data sharing.
- The Committee noted that harmonizing data requirements and developing shared data infrastructure would be a substantial undertaking. Members suggested clarifying the sequence of activities and considering whether data standards, tools, and repositories should be addressed as separate or staged recommendations.

Recommendations 5 and 6: Program Coordination, Tools, and Quantification

- Members discussed opportunities to improve coordination across state agencies and programs, including clarifying program eligibility and considering how resources could be shared. The discussion also emphasized that programs may deliver a range of climate and environmental benefits beyond carbon outcomes.
- Regarding quantification tools and methods, members raised questions about the suitability of existing tools and the need to distinguish data requirements from the tools used to analyze data. Discussion highlighted challenges in measuring changes attributable to specific practices, accounting for uncertainty, and establishing consistent methods for quantifying outcomes across programs and at different scales.
- Members suggested that evaluating existing programs, improving underlying data, agreeing on quantification methods, and establishing feedback loops between program implementation and scientific evidence could help strengthen impact assessment. The importance of incorporating both natural and social sciences was also noted.

Recommendation 7: Technical Assistance

- Members emphasized the importance of technical assistance (TA) in supporting producer participation across different pathways. Discussion highlighted existing technical assistance infrastructure, including cooperative extension and resource conservation districts, that could be leveraged to expand support.
- The Committee considered whether the state should prioritize technical assistance for its own programs while encouraging its provision by other program types, rather than limiting the recommendation to state-funded programs. Members also noted that technical assistance needs may vary across pathways and that further assessment could help identify where support is most needed.
- Improving application processes and making technical assistance more accessible and efficient were additional areas of interest.

Recommendation 8: State Leadership on Policy and Data Sharing

- The Committee discussed the potential role of the state as a policy leader in supporting data harmonization and broader program coordination. Members highlighted the tension between facilitating data sharing and complying with public records and confidentiality requirements.

- Formal data-use agreements and clearer policies governing the sharing and use of program data were identified as potential approaches. Members also suggested coordinating this recommendation with related recommendations on data harmonization and the use of data to assess multiple environmental benefits.

Recommendation 9: Public–Private Collaboration and Funding

- Members supported exploring opportunities to coordinate public and private funding to expand program participation and resources. Discussion included the potential for collaboration with brands, buyers, and other private institutions, as well as opportunities to clarify how private-sector information could inform government programs.
- The Committee emphasized the importance of designing funding mechanisms that work for producers of different sizes and circumstances. Members cautioned that some approaches could reinforce existing inequities, particularly where smaller producers face barriers to accessing carbon markets or other funding opportunities. Improving technical assistance and considering ways to group producers administratively were raised as possible strategies for increasing accessibility.

Recommendation 10: Financial and Risk Management Instruments

- The Committee discussed the potential for financial and risk-management instruments to support producers, including bridge loans and other financing mechanisms. Members highlighted the importance of managing financial risk for family farms and producers who may have difficulty securing affordable capital.
- The discussion also raised questions about how existing risk-management approaches could be adapted to California and whether other mechanisms, such as property-tax mitigation, might fit within this area or another pathway category.

Public Comment and Additional Pathway Concepts

- Public comment raised the possibility of using programmatic or policy-based approaches to generate funding for agricultural practices, including opt-out models, local ordinances, and mechanisms that involve businesses or other sectors. These approaches could potentially combine a funding source with a mechanism for deploying resources to farms.
- Members discussed how such concepts might fit within the existing pathway taxonomy or be considered as idealized pathways. Other examples, including food-related funding mechanisms, were also raised as potentially promising approaches requiring further consideration.