

**2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Technical Review Committee**

Public Meeting Minutes

May 22, 2014, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

California Department of Food and Agriculture Auditorium
1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Committee Members Present

Joel Kimmelshue, Chair

Robert Atkins

Andrew Breska

Megan Jacobsen

Joanne Neft

CDFA Staff

Crystal Myers

Sue Ichiho

Stephen Tachiera

Monica Aguirre

Jacqueline Castro

Marco Coelho

Gagan Gill

Faye Ison

Carrie James

Erika Lewis-Ortega

Mari McNeill

Anna Shkrabak

James Spencer

Nicole Takehara Martucci

Sarah Weaver

Introductions and Opening Remarks

Ms. Sandra Schubert, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Undersecretary, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance. Undersecretary Schubert thanked the 2014 Technical Review Committee (TRC) members on behalf of CDFA for lending their time and expertise in service of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). Undersecretary Schubert also thanked CDFA's SCBGP team, praising their diligent work on a program that is very important to California. Undersecretary Schubert explained that CDFA receives a huge volume of proposals, likely because California is home to fifty percent of all the fruits, nuts, and vegetables consumed in the United States. Undersecretary Schubert went on to share several updates with the group. There is now a Farm to Fork office within CDFA. University of California, Davis (UC Davis) is in the process of establishing a World Food Center, which could possibly be built in the downtown Sacramento rail yard. Sacramento has adopted the title of Farm to Fork Capitol, due to the robust selection of commodities grown in the area. The 2014 Farm Bill's SCBGP funding has increased to \$100 million in eight years and the funding is more secure than in previous years.

Undersecretary Schubert explained that California was allocated \$19.7 million from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to award to SCBGP applicants in an effort to ensure the competitiveness of California specialty crops. CDFA received 338 concept proposals in Phase I totaling \$93 million. Of these, 142 were advanced to Phase II and invited to submit grant proposals, a total of \$39.8 million. The proposals received underwent a strenuous competitive analysis in the areas of Market Enhancement, Agriculture Education, Nutrition, Environmental Stewardship and Conservation, Plant Health and Invasive Species Impact Mitigation, and Food Safety. For Food Safety proposals, CDFA partnered again with the UC Davis Center for Produce Safety to conduct a separate solicitation process utilizing the technical expertise of that program's grant

reviewers. Undersecretary Schubert encouraged attendees to visit the CDFA and USDA websites for progress reports and further information.

Undersecretary Schubert introduced the 2014 SCBGP TRC Chair, Mr. Joel Kimmelshue. Mr. Kimmelshue is a founding partner and Principal Soil and Agricultural Scientist with Land IQ and has served on the committee since 2009. Undersecretary Schubert thanked Mr. Kimmelshue for his service as the committee chair. Mr. Kimmelshue introduced himself to the group and then provided a brief overview of the SCBGP review process.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Subcommittee Reports

Each subcommittee representative presented a brief summary, commented on the review process and submitted the following Subcommittee Grant Proposal recommendations to the Technical Review Committee Chair.

- **Market Enhancement** – Ms. Joanne Neft thanked Mr. Kimmelshue and CDFA for the privilege of serving on the Market Enhancement subcommittee. Ms. Neft complimented CDFA's SCBGP team on their efficiency and graciousness in facilitating the TRC process. Ms. Neft shared that the people who serve on the Market Enhancement subcommittee are professionals in the field and she learns something new from the group every time she participates. Ms. Neft stated that the Market Enhancement subcommittee had the most proposals to review and they spent a lot of time and energy evaluating the proposals. The subcommittee reviewed 79 concept proposals totaling \$21.4 million and 32 grant proposals totaling \$9.1 million. Ms. Neft moved to submit the Market Enhancement recommendations. Motion was seconded by Ms. Megan Jacobsen. Motion passed unanimously.
- **Agriculture Education** – Ms. Jacobsen commented that Agriculture Education received a good range of applications from all sectors of agriculture. Ms. Jacobsen said that she has served on the committee for three years and enjoys seeing the diversity of the agriculture education proposals submitted each year. The subcommittee reviewed 55 concept proposals totaling \$13.9 million and 18 grant proposals totaling \$4.3 million. Ms. Jacobsen moved to submit the Agriculture Education recommendations. Motion was seconded by Mr. Robert Atkins. Motion passed unanimously.
- **Nutrition** – Mr. Andrew Breska thanked Ms. Crystal Myers and her staff for screening the grant proposals and complimented the staff on being very receptive and helpful in summarizing the subcommittee's comments. In addition, Mr. Breska appreciated the broad range of reviewers on the subcommittee in the field of nutrition. The subcommittee reviewed 67 concept proposals totaling \$18 million and 22 grant proposals totaling \$7.2 million. Mr. Breska moved to recommend the top nine scoring Nutrition proposals and return the remaining proposals to the applicants with constructive feedback. Motion was seconded by Mr. Atkins. Motion passed unanimously.
- **Environmental Stewardship and Conservation** – Mr. Kimmelshue stated that during his six years on the committee, the SCBGP has continued to receive higher quality proposals each year. Mr. Kimmelshue commended CDFA's process as very straightforward and objective and the subcommittee as knowledgeable. Proposals ranging from nutrient management to water conservation as well as other hot topics. Mr. Kimmelshue stated that the subcommittee reviewed 68 concept proposals totaling \$19.6 million and 29 grant proposals totaling \$8.3 million. Mr.

Kimmelshue moved to submit the Environmental Stewardship and Conservation recommendations. Motion was seconded by Ms. Neft. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Plant Health and Invasive Species Impact Mitigation** – Mr. Atkins explained that the Plant Health and Invasive Species Impact Mitigation subcommittee was composed of plant pathologists, entomologists, and other agricultural industry representatives. Mr. Atkins voiced his concern that this subcommittee received the least number of proposals and urged CDFA to conduct more outreach to previous and potential submitters. The subcommittee reviewed 34 concept proposals totaling \$9.7 million and 14 grant proposals totaling \$4.5 million. Mr. Atkins moved to submit the Plant Health and Invasive Species Impact Mitigation recommendations. Motion was seconded by Ms. Jacobsen. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Kimmelshue thanked CDFA for their work on the SCBGP and noted that, over the last five years, each year has been better than the last. Mr. Kimmelshue appreciated that CDFA is continually seeking feedback on how to improve the SCBGP process; he added that the process is very thorough and CDFA is doing a great job.

Final Motion

Mr. Kimmelshue moved to submit the SCBGP TRC recommendations from five subcommittees to CDFA for review. The motion was seconded by Ms. Jacobsen. Motion was opened for discussion. Motion passed unanimously. Mr. Breska reiterated that the Nutrition subcommittee strongly recommended that only the top nine scoring proposals receive funding and that the remaining proposals be returned to the applicants with constructive feedback.

Public Comment

The meeting was opened for public comments. No comments were voiced.

Closing Remarks

Undersecretary Schubert accepted the recommendations of the TRC subcommittees; proposals will be submitted to USDA in early July and announcements are expected in October. Undersecretary Schubert thanked all reviewers and CDFA staff for their time, commitment and hard work in ensuring specialty crops are promoted.