

**MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE-
SMALL SCALE PRODUCER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)**

Location: Zoom Webinar

Contact: Thea Rittenhouse, Farmer Equity Advisor

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MEETING MINUTES OF February 22, 2024

Item No.

(1) CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order on Thursday, February 22, 2024, at approximately 1:05 p.m., Thea Rittenhouse, Farmer Equity Advisor opening the meeting.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present:

Veronica Mazariegos (arrived 1:45pm)
Anna Nakamura-Knight
Beverly McKinney
Wendy Kornberg
Justin Miller
Kerry McGrath
Lovepreet Kapur
Josefina Lara Chavez
Luis Elizondo
Patrick Mitchell

Absent:

None

(3) SMALL-SCALE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ADDRESS: KAREN ROSS, SECRETARY OF CDFA

Secretary Karen Ross of CDFA welcomed the group and provided opening remarks. Secretary Ross underscored the importance of small-scale producers and the need to ensure that California agriculture remains inclusive of small-scale producers. Undersecretary Christine Birdsong also introduced herself.

(4) CALL TO ORDER/ APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Committee Chair Justin Miller

Committee Chair Miller called the meeting to order.

Approval of minutes: All present committee members approved the meeting minutes for the October 17, 2023 meeting. No public comments were provided for this item.

(5) DISCUSSION AND REVIEW: Committee By-laws

Thea Rittenhouse, Farmer Equity Advisor provided a summary of each section of the Committee By-laws. An edit to the by-laws to include the current 4-year term for SSPAC Committee members was made. By quorum, majority of votes, the By-Laws have been adapted by the committee. The by-laws will be posted on the committee public website. Public Comment: None

(6) Governor's Budget Overview

Arima Kozina, CDFA deputy secretary for Admin/Finance, led a presentation to the committee regarding the budget, budget process, administration budget, reductions, contracts, proposals, and a rough timeline regarding funding. Arima Kozina gave a brief overview of investments in different agricultural programs and will provide committee members with a one-pager on these investments. Overview includes the amount invested and the resulting GHG reductions and environmental impacts as well as the provision of food to historically underserved communities. Budget shifts from Current Year to GGRF Budget Year. Budget year one-time spending will be restricted to emergency funds. CDFA is working tirelessly to combat emergencies such as the fruit fly outbreak.

Committee members had questions related to how many recipients of CDFA grant funds are small and medium scale producers. Follow up from CDFA is required to see if data collection from programs includes producer size. Thea Rittenhouse addressed a question related to underutilized CUSP funds, clarifying that the majority of the funding has been allocated, including the currently available CUSP direct producer grants. CUSP funds not currently allocated will be used by the program through reappropriation.

Josefina Lara Chavez asks question regarding program evaluation and mentions there have been concerns around application processes for programs such as the Go-Biz grant program and how these programs are evaluated. Also, if there is funding set aside for emergencies.

Arima Kozina replies that CDFA does not directly evaluate programs from other agencies such as the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (Go-Biz) but can provide feedback in program evaluation.

Arima clarifies that only budget proposals for CDFA for Budget Year are emergencies. Committee recommends processes be in place in place so that farmers are prepared to respond and recovery from emergency, rather than reactionary response. Arima notes that emergency response team at CDFA is growing and there could be future opportunity there.

Anna Knight expresses disappointment that funding for the Farm to Community Food-hub Program is not included in the Governor's budget. She notes that this program hasn't had the opportunity to get off the ground and small-scale farmers are struggling and need support. She asks about what other opportunities there are going forward and potential ways for organizations to access the undersubscribed TA funding for CUSP.

Arima Kozina comments that there will be opportunities to make public comment at Budget Committee hearings and that accessing CUSP funds would only be available for drought-related projects.

Anna Knight expresses concern that if the funding is not utilized it will be difficult to get back and emphasizes the importance of drought relief funding. Arima Kozina replied that she will double check on the encumbrance date versus the liquidation date.

Wendy Kornberg is concerned about fund cuts saying small farmers are not aware of the programs they could participate in. Wendy notes that micro farms are underrepresented, without cost share, and therefore underutilizing programs. She expresses that it is hard to hear that funds are undersubscribed when she knows that there are farmers that could benefit. Arima Kozina agrees that undersubscription is disappointing.

Thea Rittenhouse notes that the Farm2School program has producer engagement specialists located across the state. The Community food hubs program has one staff person (Christina Harrington) and although funding for hubs is not currently available, Christina can provide outreach about the Community Food-hub Program.

Arima Kozina discusses investments on emergency spending, namely fruit fly.

Anna Knight asks what advocacy groups can do to support CDFA with controlling the fruit fly outbreak and if there is a plan to provide compensation for affected producers who are disproportionately small farmers.

Arima Kozina replied that CDFA is waiting to see what funds may come from federal government (CEC funds that would cover quarantine costs). Christine Birdsong adds that there is no compensation funding currently but encourages these issues are brought to congressional representatives. She also raises the work done with eradication that is important to prevent further destruction and packing houses working to cover fruit stripping costs. Christine recommends that those interested should be in contact with the local Agricultural Commissioners.

Thea Rittenhouse noted that the committee could add this as a future agenda item to help provide information to prevent these issues in the future.

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee and no public comments.

(7) CA Legislative Process Overview Presentation

Rachael O'Brien, CDFA Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs presented an overview of the California Legislature, legislative process, and legislative calendar. The presentation included the senate and assembly count and terms, the cycle process of legislation, how bills get introduced, the 2024 Legislative calendar, how many bills CDFA is tracking.

Committee Questions:

Anna Knight asked how to engage Senate Subcommittee 4 and Assembly Subcommittee 2 and best way for the committee is as a whole to engage in either the legislative or budget process.

Rachael O'Brien suggested that committee members learn who the staff are serving on the above committees by calling and reaching out via email or letter and attending hearings and commenting in person.

On the best way for committee members to engage on the budget process, Rachael replied that as a formal CDFA Committee, this type of engagement would happen through Thea Rittenhouse, Arima Kozina, and Rachael O'Brien. The committee can provide the Department with advice and recommendations that the Department can then take into consideration. She recommended against the committee as a formalized body from making formalized comments on moving legislation.

Justin Miller asked how the committee as a whole can influence policy, rather than oppose policy. Rachael O'Brien said that individual committee members may provide policy advocacy but says it is more complex to provide as a formalized body of CDFA.

Justin Miller commented that the biggest roadblock for a small farm is the lack of time to write grants and hopes to advocate making grant writing costs lower and more accessible for farmers.

Rachael O'Brien replied that, first, there is a need to determine if a legislative change would be helpful as sometimes, these types of challenges can be addressed administratively.

Thea Rittenhouse added that this is a topic that could be brought up in future sessions and CDFA could bring in CDFA grant staff to share more information and hear concerns.

Rachael O'Brien noted that while CDFA cannot do advocacy on the contents of a bill, there are opportunities to do advocacy surrounding technical assistance on a bill. Rachael O'Brien concluded on opportunities for future sessions. One option as a future meeting topic could be to invite legislatures and policy makers and provide opportunities for committee members to weigh in on the impact of the Legislation on small-scale producers.

Justin Miller noted that the mission of the committee is not only to raise problems, but a committee that effectuates change.

Rachael O'Brien noted that she flags bills and requests bill analysis from the Farmer Equity Office and that each bill analysis includes a section on equity impact.

Veronica Mazariegos-Anastassiou asked clarifying questions about amendment for Socially Disadvantaged bill. Thea Rittenhouse and Rachael O'Brien noted that those changes in legislation would not fall into CDFA's purview. However, as noted above, changes could be discussed with bill's author during process and the impact on small-scale producers.

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee and no public comments.

(8) TOPICS FOR FUTURE MEETING DISCUSSIONS

The next meeting of the committee will be virtual, but the goal is to have 2 out of 4 annual meetings in person.

A reminder of the process for introducing items to the agenda was made, which is also in the committee by-laws. Members should email Committee Chair Justin Miller to propose agenda items with a cc to Farm Equity Office staff (Carmen Carrasco and Thea Rittenhouse) and keeping in mind that the agenda needs to be made public at least 10 days before the meeting.

The BIPOC Committee suggested the following list for future agenda items:

- How to increase marketing and selling opportunities for small and medium-sized producers
- How to increase information about grant opportunities and provide grant-writing support to small and medium-sized producers,
- Emergency-response and support for small and medium-sized producers.
- How to make events such as the Tulare Farm Show available to smaller farmers and how can smaller farmers market their products.

- Thea Rittenhouse noted that CDFA has a Marketing and Enforcement Division, and this division could be either invited to a future meeting or could pose the question to the Division.
- How to increase visibility about programs and opportunities to small producers beyond FSA as their main point of contact.
- Bringing back Farmers Markets, with more farmer versus pop-up stands. Bringing small producers together without depending on the formal farmers market structure.
- Farmers building connections to organizations above, increase outreach and more flexibility in funding dedicated to organizing farmer gatherings.
- Funding for grant writers for small farmers.
- Grants in general: How technical assistance is applied (currently TA is used more for outreach versus support with grant writing). Discussion surrounding TA, what it means and how it can be improved to support producers.
- How to keep the Community Food-hub Program.
- Climate, flood, disaster, pest management, and compensation; assistance for citrus growers through relief funding (e.g., oriental fruit fly outbreak).
- Expand definition of what constitutes an emergency.
- Accessing private funding for faster emergency response
- Assessment of technical assistance – identifying needs. How are TA providers serving the needs of farmers.
- Farm equipment needs- not all have access to compost spreader/ drill seeder.

Action on above topics:

- Committee members will review list of topics and submit their proposals via email to Chair Justin Miller.

Formation of a subcommittee:

Committee members voted unanimously on the formation of a subcommittee to meet strictly on emergency response with two elements:

- On-going emergence
- Developing a process for response

An ad-hoc meeting to follow up on the finalization of the formation of the subcommittee will be organized before the regularly scheduled meeting of the SSPAC.

(9) PUBLIC COMMENT

Committee asked about status of survey conducted with SSPAC members by UC Davis students to help shape the committee's priorities. CDFA staff will obtain the final summary of the data and share it with committee members before or during the next regularly scheduled quarterly meeting.

Christina Harrington, CDFA Farm to Community Food Hubs Program- Looking for input from stakeholders and farmers on the community food hubs program. Even though there is no funding

currently available Christina is still looking to capture feedback about what this program can look like in the future.

(10) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

The meeting concluded at approximately 4:14 p.m.