

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

**Location:** Virtual via Zoom

**Contact:** Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

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**MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 20, 2025**

Item  
No.

**(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

CDFA Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse, welcomed SSPAC Committee members and Secretary of Agriculture Karen Ross addressed the group. Secretary Ross gave an update on the budget process and CDFA programs that will get funding after July 1.

**(2) ROLL CALL**

**Present**

Veronica Mazariegos-Anastassiou, Anna Nakamura Knight, Justin Miller, Kerry McGrath, Lovepreet Kaur, Josefina Lara Chavez, Luis Elizondo, Patrick Mitchell, Beverly McKinney, Wendy Kornberg

**Absent**

None

**CDFA Staff in attendance**

CDFA Secretary Karen Ross, Thea Rittenhouse, Carmen Carrasco, Arima Kozina, Nina Bingham, Virginia Jameson, Christina Harrington, Raisa Rahim

**External representatives**

Hayley Reda (Blue Point Planning)

**Public Attendance**

Anaya Benador, Meaghan Donovan

**(3) CALL TO ORDER**

Committee Chair Miller called the meeting to order at 1:18 p.m.

**(4) DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**CA State Budget Updates- Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary for Administration & Finance**

Arima Kozina gave an overview of the most recent Governor's Office budget released on January 10<sup>th</sup>, including Proposition 4/ Climate Bond funding allocations for CDFA. The May budget revise will provide more clarity on the final budget outlook.

Member Veronica Mazariegos asked if the \$200k for the climate bond equipment sharing program has an intended use. Ms. Kozina responded that the \$200k is for CDFA's administrative overhead of setting up the program (FY25/26) but the funds for the actual program are \$13.74M.

Member Beverley McKinney asked if the proposed funds are predicated on the passage of a new farm bill. Arima Kozina confirmed that they are not as these are CA State funds and not Federal funds.

Member Kerry McGrath asked if the Healthy Soils program will get restructured (traditional vs. block grant) to allow for practices that are currently not covered (e.g. fencing). Arima Kozina said she is unsure on how this program will get revamped but there will be a public comment period. Thea Rittenhouse said the Scientific Advisory Panel (OEFI) discussed the structure of grant programs at their last meeting.

### **Departmental Updates (wildfire response, Farm to Community Food Hubs)**

Thea Rittenhouse- CDFA has been actively involved and learning about the impacts of wildfires for small-scale producers and farmers. CDFA's CUSP program expanded to include extreme weather relief. CUSP block grant administrators in the LA region are currently processing applications.

Christina Harrington- The Farm to Community Food Hubs Program is now open. The RFA was adjusted to include the feedback received during the public comment period. Virtual office hours are available and review of draft applications for qualifying applicants.

No public comments were submitted.

### **(5) ACTION ITEM- APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A motion was made to approve minutes of the December 5, 2024, SSPAC Advisory Committee meeting, seconded by member Anna Knight. The motion passed on a vote (10-0).

### **(6) DISCUSSION ITEMS (continued from Item No. 4)**

#### **BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Update- Hung K Doan, Committee Chair**

Hung K Doan recapped February's quarterly BIPOC meeting, where the budget was discussed and the formation of a subcommittee to develop an accountability process for organizations administering CDFA's block-grant funds.

Secretary Ross asked if the concern was that block grant programs might be leaving some applicants out of the process or if the BIPOC Committee wants to make sure there is accountability for block grant fund administrators for not excluding people.

BIPOC Committee Chair, Hung K. Doan clarified that in some cases, applicants are being left out but also some applicants are having to wait long periods before accessing the funds. There are also no accountability mechanisms in place.

Josefina Lara Chavez asked if the BIPOC Advisory Committee has discussed how DEI initiatives will be affected by the changes coming from the new Federal Administration. Secretary Ross responded that CDFA is committed to ensuring all producers have opportunities in California.

Member Veronica Mazariegos asked that since the BIPOC and SSPAC committees are not in statute, if that is something that should be considered to guarantee their work going forward. Veronica added both committees should be collaborating closer on this subject.

Committee Chair Justin Miller added that Tribal representation also came up during the BIPOC Producer meeting. SSPAC does not have any tribal representatives at this time.

Josefina Lara Chavez expressed concern about questions from farmers and farm workers regarding immigration raids and how technical assistance providers can offer support. The committee discussed several resources.

Secretary Ross mentioned a series of trainings for the agricultural sector that have been offered to ensure people have access to red cards and learn about their rights. CA Dept of Labor will also be providing additional trainings soon.

#### **SGC Land Equity Taskforce Update- Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor**

The LETF is working on their report to the Governor's Office on how to address land access, barriers and challenges. Some of these recommendations come from the Farm Equity Report. The LETF meets quarterly to hold discussions and site visits to better understand the challenges around access to land. The LETF is currently working on their draft report and will be meeting soon for their review. Once the draft is ready, the LETF will seek input from this Committee. A summary of the LETF's work will be presented at the next CDFA State Board meeting on March 4<sup>th</sup>.

The survey to inform the SGC's recommendations to the Governor's Office is open in three languages and members are encouraged to fill out the form.

No public comments were received.

#### **USDA Southwest Regional Food Business Center Update- Carmen Carrasco, Small Farm Business Liaison**

The SWRFBC partners in California continue to provide technical assistance support to food and farm businesses. The initiative also includes a competitive and non-competitive grant program. The TA-linked (non-competitive) grant programs are currently open in Northern California and Southern California partners will open their programs soon. The competitive grant program will be open in the Fall 2025.

Luis Elizondo asked if Central California will be covered. Carmen Carrasco clarified that CSU Fresno is the organization managing a TA-linked grant program in the Central Valley. Josefina Lara Chavez asked if for capacity building, only food and farm businesses are eligible to apply. Carmen confirmed that is the case.

#### **Resources for farm workers and Ag employers- Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor**

Thea Rittenhouse shared the farmer & farmworker resource page from the California Farmworker Foundation, which includes links to the red card tool. CDFA is doing its best to share as many resources as possible. The CA Department of Labor will be organizing a future webinar for employers to offer legal resources.

Josefina Lara Chavez said they have not finalized the definition of an emergency for small farmers, but one of their points of concern is income loss for farmers due to policy

changes. Josefina would like to know how farmers can be protected and protocols that can be standardized to support them.

Thea said that CDFA is doing its best to help farmers and farm workers to get connected to resources available, but more conversations on this subject are needed. No public comments were made.

**UC Davis Small Farmer Water Justice Clinic Presentation- Christopher Mouawad, JD Candidate, UC Davis School of Law**

Christopher shared a presentation about the Water Justice Clinic, and said the Clinic will continue to support the definition of an emergency for small farmers that the SSPAC subcommittee is working on.

Anna Knight asked how the Clinic engages with GSA's and what is their response rate to feedback provided by the Clinic. Are GSA's receptive to input?

Christopher Mouawad responded that the response rate from GSA's has not been absolute, but they have been able to reach middle ground in some cases. A more receptive response from GSA's is expected as the Clinic continues to work on the ground with other partners.

SSPAC Committee Chair Justin Miller added that having access to legal advice for farmers is a good resource.

Public Comment from Anaya Benador- PhD Candidate- UC Santa Cruz asked about groundwater adjudications, how small farmers were not included, and how that has influenced the Clinic's recommendations and legal advice.

Christopher Mouawad provided examples of how the Clinic has addressed adjudication matters in the past, particularly those seeking stipulations.

**CDFA Climate Resilience Strategy- Virginia Jameson, CDFA Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands/Nina Bingham, CDFA Senior Environmental Scientist/ Hayley Reda, Blue Point Planning**

Virginia Jameson and Nina Bingham shared a PowerPoint presentation on CDFA's Climate Resilience Strategy. CDFA and partners that are working on the strategy are seeking feedback from the Committee on structure, topic areas, and equity lens.

Committee Member Luis Elizondo commented that bee colony loss is a big concern, and the impact of their loss is not always addressed.

Virginia Jameson mentioned that one of the pillars of the Climate Resilience Strategy includes pollinator habitats but will seek to re-categorize the importance of bees.

Wendy Kornberg agreed with Luis regarding bees. Wendy recently lost rabbits due to the heat waves, and she would like to advocate for the development of micro grants for these small farmers that don't have the resources to balance these losses. Wendy added that there is no support for cannabis growers, as climate change gets worse, there needs to be more support for farmers/growers during the transition period.

SSPAC Committee Chair Justin Miller offered to help with grant writing.

Member Anna Knight asked what is meant by sustainable farm economy in the Climate Resilience Strategy.

Virginia Jameson clarified that a sustainable food economy was meant to say that farmers are making a living wage but open to suggestions on re-wording the language.

Anna Knight mentioned that she would like to see support for H2A processes for farmers and to provide farm worker housing. It is also important to include safety net programs when farmers are going through a transition period or experiencing an emergency.

Member Veronica Mazariegos commented that the topic of energy comes with added regulations, thus it is important to provide funding for farmers to adapt to new technologies.

SSPAC Committee Chair, Justin Miller shared concerns about farmworker housing, and regulations around the use of diesel trucks in terms of energy efficiency.

Hayley Reda presented the equity outcomes within the Climate Resilience Strategy that seek to help evaluate what equity means in agriculture.

Wendy Kornberg commented that rangeland management should also be part of the strategy.

No public comments were made.

#### **(7) SSPAC SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES**

SSPAC Subcommittee Chair, Josefina Lara Chavez shared the link to the draft definition of an emergency for small scale producers and ranchers and encouraged main committee members to review.

A revision clause was included in using the USDA's definition of small-scale producers.

Josefina Lara Chavez asked if the SSPAC Committee supports drafting their own definition for small scale producers.

SSPAC Committee Chair, Justin Miller and Wendy Kornberg agreed the SSPAC should define what a small-scale producer is.

#### **(8) TOPICS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Thea Rittenhouse added the definition of small-scale producers as a topic for future agenda items.

On CDFA grant program overhead allocation, the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee has formed a subcommittee to address accountability of organizations managing block grant programs.

#### **(9) IN-PERSON JOINT MEETING WITH BIPOC PRODUCER ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Thea Rittenhouse suggested that for the pending joint meeting with the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, perhaps the definition of small-scale farmers can be addressed as a collaborative effort.

**(10) PUBLIC COMMENT**

Meaghan Donovan- UCANR Small Farms Network- Commented that all climate related challenges are layered and the UCANR Small Farms Network appreciate and welcome all coordination efforts to help agencies and farmers connect to resources.

**(9) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

The public meeting was adjourned at 4:02 p.m.