

MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

BIPOC 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 JUNE 16, 2026

(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Thea Rittenhouse welcomed committee members and members of the public to the meeting.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present

Hung K Doan
Arshdeep Singh
Tania Zuñiga Moreno
Emily Burgueno
Qi Zhou -
Javier Cruz
Kenneth Sparks

Absent

Minkah Taharkah
Lena Ortega
Mireya Gomez-Contreras

Resigned

Dennis Hutson

CDFA

Karen Ross, CDFA Secretary
Nicholas Anicich, Farm to School Program Manager
Nina Bingham, Senior Environment Scientist
Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor
Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration
Ana Chan, CDFA OARS Staff
Habib Asadullah, CDFA Rural Economic Advisor
Tawny Mata, OARS Director

(3) CALL TO ORDER

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor welcomed members of the committee and members of the public. The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Committee Chair Hung Doan.

(4) CDFA DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

- Legislative Office- Carney King, Deputy Secretary of Legislative Affairs

Carney provided legislative updates on the current bills. One of the bills that was of interest was Farmer Equity Act, which would have changed the definition of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. However, the bill failed and it is unlikely to be revived because the author was not reelected.

- CDFA Budget Update- Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary of Administration & Finance

Arima Kozina provided an update on a two-party agreement budget. However, CDFA will need a three-party agreement (including the state) to have the budget signed. Arima further informed the committee members that negotiations are ongoing, and the legislature is working on behalf of all constituents and CDFA will wait to hear the final decisions.

Some of the highlights of the two-party agreement are CDFA proposals (subject to change), have moved forward. They include:

1. Industrial Hemp Program: this would pay off the debt to the Ag Fund for starting up this program and shift it to federal hemp program. Arima stated that nothing will change in terms of how the program is administered.
2. Animal Care Program: This program was passed as part of Prop 12, to be moved to general fund.
3. Reappropriations: these are small proposals such as State Racetrack Leasing Commission and other federal backfills.
4. Prop 4 funding: CDFA received funding from Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund or Cap and Invest reductions and requested for the funds to be expended in the future year. The negotiations are ongoing with the Legislature.
5. Farm to School Program: This includes ongoing funding of Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainable (OARS). It has been approved as one-time funding even though the budget allocated may not be enough.

6. California Nutrition Incentive Program: The Assembly added \$15 million which is a one-time funding for local food purchase assistance.

Arima stated that there was a significant reduction of federal money (about \$10.5 Million) that would have helped in fruit fly mitigation program. After two-party agreement, CDFA is hoping to continue the fruit fly program throughout the state. Additionally, Arima stated that CDFA proposed a general fund to create a position that will be responsible for mandatory agricultural statistical reporting to USDA.

Public comment: none.

Committee Chair, Hung Doan thanked Arima and introduced Secretary Ross to speak to committee members.

- Karen Ross, CDFA Secretary

Secretary Ross thanked the committee for its leadership and commitment as part of the advisory to the department. Secretary Ross emphasized the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion amidst economic challenges. In addition, she encouraged committee members to continue their work in advising CDFA on top priorities to bring economic and community success in their farming operations.

Public comments: none

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor provided a quick update on Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. She asked if anyone in the committee had been a grantee of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program or would like to be a grantee in the future, to take the survey and provide feedback to CDFA and USDA. Thea emphasized how the survey will be critical to CDFA as it looks forward to getting public feedback and input that would be helpful in making changes to the program.

- CDFA Climate Resiliency Strategy Final Report- Nina Bingham, OARS

Nina Bingham shared briefly on the release of the climate resilience strategy for California and provided strategy overview. She stated that the document prioritizes fostering climate smart, resiliency, and regenerative food systems which could mitigate climate changes and improve soil health, restore biodiversity, enhance ecosystems, and contribute to human health.

The link to the document was shared with the committee members and the public to read further. The website is interactive to help people who would like to learn what the state is doing with agricultural programs.

Committee member Emily Burgueno wanted to know whether the tribal governments and land stewards were given opportunity to provide input to the strategy report and if so, how many. Nina confirmed that they were engaged through CDFA formal outreach approach which included setting up of several tribal listening sessions that were conducted virtually. Emily suggested that Nina's team consider tribal engagement, noting that California is home to more than 100 tribal governments. She also offered to provide support with tribal engagement efforts if CDFA needs assistance.

Secretary Ross thanked Virginia Jameson, Nina Bingham, and their team for the work that went into putting the Strategy report together.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh inquired if the report is going to help the farmers or if there were things in the report that would benefit the farmers to see a difference in their farms. Nina Bingham stated that there are work streams that came out of the strategy report and are ongoing such as compost strategy, led by CalRecycle in coordination with CDFA. This will address things like sourcing, producing, and applying compost. Another work stream will be how to advance pathways on climate smart agricultural practices and getting producers funded, and improving measurement and monitoring, reporting and verification process. This will be hosted through CDFA and will move forward over the next course of the year.

Secretary Ross added that having the documents helps CDFA staff to do their work within the agency. The Secretary emphasized the importance of developing the documents because of the work CDFA has done in the past and would be beneficial to a new administration- to see a future driven pathway building on great work accomplishment.

Nina Bingham let the committee members know of the appendix page about the equity principles in the back of the document as a resource to help in improving the strategies.

Public comment: none

(5) ACTION ITEM

- Approval of March 19, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Committee Chair Hung K Doan raised a motion to approve March 2026 minutes. Qi Zhou moved the motion to approve and Arshdeep seconded the motion.

The Minutes were approved unanimously.

(6) DISCUSSION ITEMS

- SSPAC Advisory Committee Update- SSPAC Chair Justin Miller

Thea Rittenhouse provided updates on SSPAC committee discussions on behalf of the Committee Chair. She informed committee members that Small-Scale Producer Committee has formed a work group to discuss the small-scale definition, and a structure was established on how to go forward with that. If any committee member would like to join, they are welcome to check out the SSPAC webpage.

- SGC ALEFT Final Report Summaries and TA Contract Update – Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Thea Rittenhouse informed committee members that the Land Equity Task Force summaries are now available on the webpage and are translated. There are one-page summaries in multiple languages that committee members can share with other contacts in their region.

In addition, Thea shared that Strategic Growth Council is almost finalizing two local assistance contracts (worth \$500,000) of which one will be serving tribal groups and the other serving small-scale and underserved producers. These are not yet finalized but once done, they will be announced in July.

Thea will provide updates in between committee quarterly meetings but for those working on land access and land acquisition type projects can seek support from the contracted organizations. Thea shared the SGC website link.

Committee member Tania Moreno asked whether members would have access to the list of contractors and the criteria used to determine eligibility for free services by July. Thea confirmed that they would have access to that.

Public comment: none.

- Prop 4 Program Timeline updates and webpage – Thea Rittenhouse

Thea Rittenhouse let committee members know that CDFA is compiling all programs related to Prop 4 funding to be under one page on the webpage making it easily accessed. She further informed members that the Tribal Food Sovereignty Grant Program tribal consultation letters were sent out on June 5th. The tribal consultation period is open through September 4th, 2026. CDFA will hold tribal roundtables during the consultation process, followed by regional engagement sessions.

Committee member Emily Burgueno offered to assist in any way or host regional engagement sessions for tribal nations in San Diego County. Emily inquired about CDFA efforts in ensuring more tribal nations are engaged.

Public comments: none

- CDFA Equipment Sharing Program – Dr. Tawny Mata, OARS Director and Program Staff

Tawny walked committee members through the Equipment Sharing Program summary document. The aim was having committee members share insights on how the program can be structured. There is \$15 million set aside for this program and is split into two: Equipment Sharing Program and Cooperative Development Program. The Cooperative Development grant is completely new to CDFA which will require some background work to develop the program. Tawny requested the engagement of committee members to provide specific insights on how CDFA might set up the grant program. She hopes that the program will open in spring 2027.

Committee member Emily Burgueno wanted to know if the Equipment Sharing Program includes tribal governments, which Tawny confirmed that they are included. Tawny noted that the trailer bill language sets a slightly different eligibility than the entire bond – because this bill allows farmer cooperatives to apply for funding.

Committee member Tania Moreno asked whether there would be information available about applications and criteria to be used for selections even though they do not have a co-op or a type of corporation but maybe because they share a piece of land. Tawny stated that this is a scoping period and application materials have not yet been developed. She further explained that the trailer bill language does not allow for an individual farmer or group of farmers even if they're sharing land. Those to apply for grant include a farmer cooperative, a non-profit organization, a tribe, UC Extension, or resource conservation districts which are entities listed as eligible for the funding.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh suggested that the program could purchase equipment, such as a tractor, that farmers could share with proper coordination. He further recommended placing the equipment in geographic areas with a high concentration of small-scale farmers. Tawny agreed with Arshdeep's recommendations.

Committee member Javier Cruz wanted to know if a co-op is eligible for the equipment sharing program, or if the money would be allocated based on the number of people in the co-op. Tawny said it's something that could be put in the application process. Even the definition of what is shared is up for discussion. She further stated that it's something

CDFA team needs to scope and think about when developing a rubric for the scoring criteria for the grant.

Tawny asked committee members to share barriers experienced by farmers other than costs. focus. Committee member Arshdeep shared that the program should consider the maintenance cost of the equipment and transportation costs. Tawny confirmed that it is a challenge as she has learned from other organizations. Arshdeep added that some of the new equipment might be challenging to operate due to technology used, hence, needing technical support.

Committee Chair Hung Doan also added that there might be limited availability of the shared equipment due to high demand during peak seasons. In addition, Hung stated that there's a likelihood of additional cost for designated staff to assist with equipment scheduling. Further, Hung noted that it can be challenging to share equipment in a co-op model due to underlying issues such as perception of mistrust, hierarchical issues, liability, renting costs, language barrier etc.

Tawny asked a follow-up question on the shared equipment if it's needed at one very discrete specific time and becomes hard to share – and how that will fit it in the program. Committee Chair Hung Doan suggested that if there would be a threshold number of farmers who need it, it should be made available. He recommended having someone designated in scheduling so the equipment can move around and reach those who need to use it within a week.

Committee member Javier Cruz recommended the program to invest in a cooler given the challenges to preserve produce during harvest. Tawny supported the idea while encouraging the members to think about the investment cost wise. This will also be determined by the decision of what the minimum and maximum grant award size is. If grant sizes are small, the program has to think of long-term management because it won't be able to support somebody managing equipment sharing schedule.

Committee member Tania Moreno sought clarification whether the program will also focus on allocating funds for specialized equipment such as a tractor. According to Tania, specialized equipment proves to be a challenge in a co-op set up when it comes to sharing. Tawny let the members know that there is no decision made yet on what kind of equipment to be considered. The program might want to include a statement of need in the grant application to get a collective public priority.

Committee member Javier asked whether co-ops would have to fill out their own survey to determine the priorities in their region. Tawny confirmed that it was a good idea and suggested that setting aside a small grant that could support outreach activities such as

develop a plan of scheduling and maintenance. This will be useful and would help prep grantees to submit strong applications. Javier suggested the program should focus on the equipment that could be shared such as a cooler given the challenges of finding enough farm labor.

Tawny stated that the program is open for ideas and this can be considered as postharvest equipment. However, members should bear in mind on the cost aspect of such equipment, and the program will need to decide what will be the minimum and maximum award size because the program must take into consideration of number of awards to manage. Tawny asked members on what can be done to ensure the kind of investments selected lasts for a while.

Committee member Tania Moreno inquired whether the funds will be focused on specialized equipment only and Arshdeep asked if the equipment needed to be environmentally beneficial. Tawny reminded the committee members that the 15 million total also includes administrative costs and a subcontract for cooperative development. Tawny explained to the committee members that the legislation establishing the program identifies socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and limited-resource farmers and ranchers as key groups the program is intended to serve, but the program cannot award funding preferentially based on those characteristics or demographics. She asked the committee members if they had any ideas on how the program can still effectively advance that goal by making sure farmers and ranchers are benefiting. Committee members Arshdeep suggested it be worded small scale awards and Javier added that this can be done based on the size of the farm.

Thea Rittenhouse suggested that the committee can utilize the USDA small scale definition based on the gross annual income and not based on acreage. A new definition is in the process through the work of the CDFA Small Scale Producer Advisory committee, and Tawny can incorporate that once committee members have finalized. Committee Chair Hung Doan suggested barriers that small farmers face should be considered as well in addition to reaching out to other organizations to tap into their experiences.

Tawny enquired from committee members if it would be beneficial to have pre-grant (6-9 months) fund that would assist in the planning phase to put together the logistics such as community outreach, proposal development, community equipment assessment needs, etc. and all members were in favor of the idea. Committee chair Hung asked if the amount to be set aside will affect the funds for equipment sharing program. Tawny stated that the planning grant cost has not been scoped yet. However, she is concerned about lower resources organizations not being able to submit a competitive application.

Tawny also asked committee members to think about in the scope of what the grant will pay for. For instance, an organization orders a piece of equipment and gets reimbursed. It will not be multiple grants unless time is set aside for training and this could happen during the planning stage and then continue into the purchasing of the equipment. She also pointed out that the program will not pay someone to manage the grant indefinitely. This requires those groups that get the grants figure out within a year or two on ways to keep maintaining the equipment.

Committee Chair Hung wanted to know how organization could be made accountable if there were complaints about sharing issues. Tawny stated that CDFA doesn't have leverage on how the equipment is shared once somebody buys the equipment whether it is during the grant term or beyond the grant term. The only thing the program will do is to keep track of that performance and to consider if there are future funding. She emphasized that it would be nice to have well thought questions included in the applications phase and the justification of need and the demonstration of buy-in and having a plan. According to Tawny, this is where the most power is for the program to make sure these grants

Committee Member Kenneth Sparks stated that organizations should be called into accountability and CDFA should ensure that there's awareness made to provide opportunity for diverse applicants.

Tawny Mata mentioned that the type of funding for this program is a one-time funding but there's a budget proposal that includes a permanent technical assistance staff that would do longer term monitoring beyond the grant money. This would allow CDFA to see longer term outcomes. She thanked the committee members and let them know that they can reach out to her for a meeting or a chat if something comes up from the questions shared. Tawny will come back to the committee when the program outline has been established and would have something to react upon.

Committee member Arshdeep asked whether recipients of block grants are eligible to apply for Equipment Sharing Program grants and citing that there might be those who didn't do well with accountability. Tawny stated that in the block grant applications, it states that part of final grant decision will be based upon past performance. Therefore, it will be a factor whether somebody gets a second round of funding or not.

Committee member Arshdeep made a follow-up question of whether it is CDFA or a grower (farmer) who owns carbon credits. Tawny let members know that CDFA does not manage carbon markets. The grower owns the carbon credits.

Public comment: none

- CDFA Farm to School Program 2026 Request for Proposal (RFP) – Nick Anicich, Farm to School Program Manager

Nick shared with committee members briefly on the vision of Farm to School program. one of the highlights was that the program ensures every student at every school has access to freshly prepared, locally sourced, climate smart, organic and regeneratively grown food. The goal for this program is to connect learners back to where food comes from and let them experience the journey and make it part of their lives.

In addition, Nicholas let members of the committee know that California Farm to School Incubator Grant Program is in its fourth round of funding. He highlighted that the Farm to School Program has distributed \$86.9 million to 375 different Farm to School projects since 2021. He also stated that 100% of the producer's grantees funded are veterans and socially disadvantaged or limited resources farm households. The last round of funding was spread across supply and demand and technical assistance across state.

Currently, Farm to School Program has \$20 million to distribute but when the BCP budget is finalized, the program is expecting another \$20 million totaling to one round of \$40 million. He further added that any public school is eligible to apply as long as they operate the National School Lunch Program or the Federal Meal Programs. In addition, there is Farm to School Technical Assistance Subaward Grant Program which will likely receive \$5 million – this is to be given to organizations that can offer technical assistance.

Nicholas let the members know that the Farm to School Program is expecting two block grants for readiness and planning for schools. He encouraged members of the committee to apply for implementation grant next year. Additionally, the program is also expecting \$1 million award or two \$500,000 awards for readiness and planning for producers. There would be \$1 million available for an organization to work statewide to support tribes and advance Farm to School programs.

Committee member Kenneth Spark wanted to know if there's a way reimbursement process can be quicker than the current process to reduce financial strain experienced by small farmers. Nicks stated that since the process has been involving regional staff reviewing the invoices, the process has changed by minimizing one layer of review.

Regarding supporting schools so they can continue getting produce from small scale farmers, committee member Javier Cruz suggested that schools be supported financially to purchase produce and that will go a long way in benefiting a farmer in the long-term.

CDFA Secretary Karen Ross asked Nicks whether people know about Kitchen Infrastructure and Training (KIT) investment from California Department of Education which is focused on infrastructure rather than food reimbursement. The investment is for the Universal Food Program which is designed to address infrastructure issues handling produce and storage. She noted that many legislators questioned whether schools have adequate storage and cold facilities, which likely influenced the proposed KIT funding in the current legislative budget. This year, \$700 million has been proposed but it is a competitive application process, according to Nicholas.

Committee member Javier wanted to know if schools would be considered if they applied for KIT grant so they can continue working with small scale farmers. Ancich acknowledged that schools could apply and the program looks in depth the specificity of the project – whether they've been working with a farmer. Additionally, the application should have an education component. Nick walked through the committee members about the application process and scoring criteria.

Public comment: none

- CDFA BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Vacant seat: Filling a vacant seat process – Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Thea Rittenhouse informed committee members that Mr. Dennis Hudson resigned his position in April this year. She appreciated the committee members for their commitment and time to attend the meetings. Thea shared with members bylaws document and walked them through the process of selecting a new member.

Thea let the committee members know that in the past committee members were not decided solely by CDFA but through external panel. She mentioned that in the current process, members could review the applications and recommend their top choices to Secretary or CDFA could get an external advisory group to do it. The difference between the two options is that if the process is done by the committee members (reviewing and recommending, it will take less time. If CDFA looks for external committee to review, then Thea will have to advertise the position and get applications. She asked if the members are willing to help with reviewing questions and scoring process. The committee members agreed to do the selection process.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh suggested selecting 3 committee members selected to review the applications and committee member Tania Moreno supported the idea. Thea proposed that the selected group would review the applications and present their recommendation to Secretary Ross, who will choose a new member by the September meeting. All members agreed with the suggestion. Thea noted that three committee

members would need to volunteer between August and September to serve as reviewers. Committee member Tania Moreno, Minkah Taharkah (in absentia) and committee chair Hung Doan volunteered to be the reviewers. The committee agreed that one month would be sufficient for the review process. Arshdeep and Qi Zhou offered to serve as backup if Thea is unable to get a reviewer from the absent committee members. Thea will share review questions in advance to those who agreed to be reviewers.

Committee member Arshdeep moved the motion to approve the selection process for the vacant position. Committee member Javier Cruz seconded the motion. All committee members in favor responded "aye". The motion was approved unanimously.

Public comment: none

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Samiha Hamdi let the committee members know that Fresh Approach is partnering with Roots for Change on their RFSI survey to gauge investment in the middle of supply chain infrastructure. Samiha shared the following link:

<https://forms.gle/QMc5REkxNdc8xMvN6> for members to share among members of the community and their networks. Samiha further informed committee members that Coco and Michael are the ones spearheading and handling the survey.

Thea let the committee members know their input will be much appreciated because all information collected will be helpful in designing the Food Systems infrastructure mapping data.

(7) TOPICS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Committee Chair Hung Doan encouraged committee members to submit topics for future agenda items to him or Thea via email.

(8) NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Sept 17, 2026. This will be a virtual meeting but if there would be available venue in Fresno for in-person, then it would be made a hybrid option.

Public Comment: none

(10) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

Committee Chair Hung Doan thanked everyone and appreciated their time and their thoughtful discussions. The meeting was adjourned at 12:55pm.

