

MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
BIPOC PRODUCER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

Location: Hybrid - In-Person & Zoom
CDFA Citrus Pest and Disease Division Office
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MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 19, 2026

Item
No.

(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor, welcomed the BIPOC Advisory committee members and welcomed Committee Chair Hung K Doan to start the meeting.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present

Qi Zhou
Hung K Doan, Chair
Arshdeep Singh
Dennis Hutson
Donald Sherman
Emily Burgueno
Lena Ortega
Mireya Gomez-Contreras

Absent

Kenneth Sparks
Javier Cruz
Tania Zuñiga Moreno
Minkah Taharkah

CDFA Members

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor
Carmen Carrasco, Farm to School Network Lead
Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration
Carolyn Cook, Assistant Director, OARS
Lydia Maranga, Analyst I
Sylva Carpenter, CDFA Executive Office Intern
Sarah Ansell, Executive Fellow

(3) CALL TO ORDER

BIPOC Advisory Committee Chair, Hung Doan welcomed everyone to the first quarterly meeting of the year 2026 and called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.

(4) CDFA DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

- Legislative Office- Sarah Ansell, Executive Fellow

Sarah Ansell provided updates on current bills of interest to farmers which include the Wine Labeling Act, the Water Supply Protection Act (which would require regional water boards to create regulations), the new minimum wage for agricultural workers, and proposed changes related to 'best by' dates. Sarah also informed members about additional upcoming bills, such as the Food Bank Donation Tax Credit, and SB 1419, which would change the current definition for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (SDFR's) to consider more economical and structural factors. One notable bill she highlighted was SB 52 - which would codify the two CDFA producer advisory committees to ensure their continuity beyond changes in political administration. Thea Rittenhouse will share a summary of these bills and will be shared with committee members by Thea Rittenhouse.

Committee Member Arshdeep Singh requested additional information on SSB 1419, and the changing definition of BIPOC, as this is the first time he has heard about this bill. He emphasized the importance of informing other committee members and producers about these bills.

Arima Kozina, the Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration, explained to the committee that changing the definition of SDFR's would have broad implications, as the CDFA relies on the current definition to guide programs and engagement with these groups. Arima suggested committee members keep an eye out for legislative hearings where this bill might come up, to provide their input and testimony about how keeping the current definition is helpful for SDFR's in obtaining grants and technical assistance. Thea Rittenhouse recommended sharing a fact sheet with committee members. This is an effective way to inform the committee and the public about upcoming hearings.

Additionally, Thea noted that Committee Member Minkah Taharkah and her organization, the Farmer Justice Coalition, is aware of this bill and can be contacted for more information or updates about hearing dates.

Committee member Donald Sherman said that people need to be aware of the information, so it doesn't go unnoticed and said it reminded him of what happened 2-3 years ago at the federal level when farmers sued about a loan forgiveness program for BIPOC farmers calling it reverse discrimination.

Public comments: None

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

Arima Kozina informed members that the Administration's budget was released on January 10. She also noted that Spring Finance Letters, which include additional budget items that respond to budget emergencies, are issued on April 1.

Arima emphasized the May budget revision, which is the most significant update. With current budget projections, CDFA has a \$3billion deficit. More details about the budget's status will become available once tax return data is received. Currently, CDFA's budget is being reviewed in Assembly Subcommittee 4 and Senate Subcommittee 4. Arima reminded members that there will be opportunities for public comment in late May and early June during these subcommittee hearings.

In addition, Arima noted a major procedural change related to the Climate Bond. The Senate no longer reviews most of CDFA's primary bond budget items; instead, it hears the climate bond more broadly. Committee members and members of the public interested in CDFA appropriations or the Climate Bond are encouraged to listen to those hearings.

Comments from the public: None

- OARS Program Updates – Carolyn Cook, Assistant Director, CDFA Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability

Carolyn Cook provided updates on the Healthy Soils (HSP) and State Water Efficiency and Enhancement (SWEEP) Programs, highlighting recent progress and strategic efforts to develop block grant model application guidelines. She acknowledged the recommendations the BIPOC Committee submitted, which asked CDFA to take into consideration geographic coverage and partner organizations that focus their efforts on underserved or SDFR producers. Carolyn said that over the past year the OARS Office has been carefully reviewing and incorporating this feedback into program guidelines. Carolyn brought to the committee's attention a major shift in grant administration—from issuing grants directly to farmers to a block grant model in which funds are administered through regional partner organizations.

Current solicitation efforts are focusing on reaching underserved communities and strengthening support services, including improving customer service for producers. Carolyn stated that HSP and SWEEP Program received budget appropriations related to the Climate Bond, Proposition 4 which was passed in 2024.

- a) Healthy Soils received \$65 million to be appropriated in two phases. The Program has already received the first batch.
- b) SWEEP program received \$40 million. 40% percent of these funds will be dedicated to vulnerable and disadvantaged populations such as tribes and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

The bond money also allows for expanded technical assistance to support not just producers but also organizations that will be applying for block grants. Together with UCANR, CDFA will develop a technical assistance program to support organizations applying and implementing these block grants. Carolyn's team is working on internal

policy to develop and refine documents that will guide and strengthen future grant awards.

Carolyn walked the committee members through how the block grant will be administered and implemented, emphasizing the program's accountability approach. The program plans to open for concept proposals in April, with full proposals to follow later in the summer.

Mireya Gomez-Contreras, committee member, wanted to know if there's any room for presenting customer service standards or expectation requirements that promote customer relationships. Carolyn stated that the program will host in-person training for all the block grant recipients. She also noted that in the Climate Bond, there is much emphasis on serving and encouraging relevance to Tribal communities, thus CDFA will be reserving some funding in the SWEEP solicitation for Tribal applicants for block grant administration.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh asked whether the increase to 40% of Climate Bond funds allocated to SDFR's is the expected change, since the previous phase allocated 25%. Carolyn confirmed that the change is correct and explained that it is driven by bond language and applies to all agencies administering bond funding.

Thea agreed to share the presentation with committee members.

Public comments:

Mary Jane Galviso from Filipino Farmers' Cooperative asked about the criteria to award grants because their organization has made several attempts without luck. Committee Chair Hung asked Mary to reach out to a UCANR advisor in their region or to reach out to him (Hung) directly. Regarding grant applications, Mary can directly apply or can work with a technical assistant to get guidance.

Anna Larson from CalCAN asked about the timeline for the block grants, specifically how long the concept proposal and full proposal periods would remain open for applicants. Carolyn explained that the concept proposal period will be open for 4 weeks, and the full proposal period will be open for 6 weeks.

(5) ACTION ITEM - Approval of December 9, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Committee Chair Hung K Doan called for a motion to approve December 9, 2026, Minutes. Committee member Lena Ortega moved to approve the minutes, and committee member Arshdeep Singh seconded the motion. All committee members unanimously approved the Minutes.

(6) DISCUSSION ITEMS

- SSPAC Advisory Committee Update- SSPAC Chair Justin Miller

SSPAC Committee Chair Justin Miller shared updates. The committee is still working on developing a definition of small-scale producer. To support this effort, a workgroup will be formed to gather diverse perspectives from presentations and understand how to effectively serve farms of different sizes. The committee has already listened to several presenters and the information collected from various backgrounds will help in developing the definition.

- SGC Agricultural Land Equity Taskforce Final Report – Qi Zhou, ALEFT Liaison, LETF members

Committee Member Qi Zhou and SGC staff Camille Frazier presented a summary report from the CA Ag Land Equity Task Force. The task force, which was established by statute in 2022, developed recommendations on how to equitably increase access to agricultural land and food production and traditional tribal agricultural uses. The report was finalized and submitted in December 2025. The resulting report outlines both the challenges and opportunities related to agricultural land access in California, including the ongoing consolidation of agricultural land. Each goal in the report includes at least four to six subgoals. The task force drew from insights shared by farmers and ranchers' testimonies during hearings and spent considerable time learning about land tenure issues. The full report also includes a comprehensive set of appendices supporting agricultural land preservation.

Qi Zhou noted that the report highlights a recent trend of increasing consolidation of California agricultural land, which has led to institutional speculation and making it difficult for producers and tribal land stewards to compete fairly.

Committee member Emily Burgueno also emphasized the importance of including definitions for disadvantaged groups and tribal land stewards in the report.

Thea Rittenhouse also mentioned about the importance of having land purchase ordinances at the local and regional level to try to encourage transparency. Other issues included land stewardship, land tenure, supporting urban agriculture, among other issues. Thea will share the full report with committee members.

There is approximately \$1 million available in local assistance funds associated with the task force recommendations report. Emily informed the committee members that there will be webinars regarding this funding in early April. A communication will be sent out to all members with the report links.

Public comment:

Mary Galviso raised a concern that farmer cooperative organizations are struggling to keep farmland in operation due to various regulations and an aging farmer population. Mary wanted to know if the cooperatives are included in the report. Committee member Mireya Gomez-Contreras made a follow-up question on how the task force's recommendations might support cooperatives in addressing these challenges.

Committee member Camille Frazier explained that the task force heard directly from cooperatives and ensured that farmer-led cooperatives were included in the recommendations. She noted that the report aims to remove existing barriers to eligibility.

Committee Chair Hung Doan thanked the task force committee members

- Recommendations Report on small-Scale Farms and SGMA Implementation: Catherine Van Dyke, CAFF and Ngodoo Atume, UC-SAREP

Catherine Van Dyke and team presented a draft report on ways to provide technical assistance to small-scale producers on SGMA implementation guidelines. The report is funded by the Department of Water Resources. The team engaged small-scale producers across 23 counties. The intended audience for this report includes groundwater sustainability agencies and state agencies with the goal of supporting SGMA implementation in a way that prevents disproportionate impacts on small-scale farmers. The team assessed the risks and barriers and opportunities that are available for small scale farmers.

The draft report defines small-scale producers as individuals directly involved in the daily operations of a commercial farm focused on local food production. The report highlights four key opportunities of interest to the BIPOC committee: 1) identifying small-scale producers at the local level, 2) coordinating efforts to help them stay in business ensuring their inclusion, 3) value in groundwater management, and 4) supporting farmers through transition pathways.

Ngodoo Atume mentioned several allocation-related recommendations such as groundwater markets, on-farm research, allocation models, SGMA fees, and adjudications. The team has also developed a detailed toolkit for Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) to help them identify vulnerable producers and small-scale farmers, enabling more effective support for these groups.

The team would be happy to receive any feedback from the committee or CDFA on the draft report.

Committee member Emily Burgueno asked how tribal water rights are addressed in the SGMA report. Catherine Van Dyke explained that tribes fall outside the scope of SGMA because the state cannot regulate a sovereign nation. Instead, the report provides recommendations only for entities that are subject to current state regulations.

Committee member Donald Sherman asked about the purpose of the fees and how they would help farmers gain access to more water. Catherine explained that the fees support a range of activities, including developing demand and supply management tools, funding monitoring services, and establishing recharge projects. Ngodoo Atume added that the fees also cover administrative needs, such as operational costs.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh noted that farmers often lack sufficient information about the fees being charged.

Public Comment:

A public member, Mary Galviso, noted that dairy operations require significant amounts of water and suggested to consider how fees will be applied to those operations. Ngodoo Atume responded that the report includes terminology and identifies which groups are considered vulnerable. She also mentioned that the State Water Board operates a dairy program that regulates water quality.

- CDFA Prop 4 Program Updates and Committee Priorities – Thea Rittenhouse

Thea Rittenhouse informed the committee that CDFA received a portion of the state climate bond funding to invest in various programs. She asked committee members to provide input on these programs so that, as June approaches, she can determine which speakers to invite and better understand the direction the committee would like to take. In addition, Thea noted that the block grant administration process is not expected to change significantly. Programs will also offer extended public comment periods and opportunities for engagement.

The Farm to School Incubator Program received 20 million in additional funding to support the growing and selling of whole foods to K–12 public schools and early childcare centers. This program is expected to roll out early to mid-2026.

The Urban Agriculture Program will have a second round of funding like round one. The CDFA is seeking to hire an urban ag coordinator position to administer the program. Thea Rittenhouse also provided updates on other programs:

1. Two Farmers' Market Infrastructure Program (Mobile Farmer's Market and Year-round infrastructure). Expected later in 2026. CDFA needs to conduct outreach and engagements related to these new programs. A total of \$20 million has been allocated to support certified mobile farmers markets throughout the state.
2. Equipment Sharing and Cooperative Development Grant program. This is a new program funded by Climate Bond. The funding will also include technical assistance to serve disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. The program is still under development, and Thea is part of the team working on it.

3. Tribal Food Sovereignty Grant Program has approximately \$14 million which will be administered by the CDFA Office of Grants Administration. CDFA is working closely with tribal governments through government-to-government consultation in the development of this program.

For Healthy Soils and Tribal Food Sovereignty programs, Thea Rittenhouse and CDFA team are already getting started with consultation process. Thea asked committee members how they would like to engage with the program so she can share their input with program staff.

Committee member Emily Burgueno wanted to know the type of compliance the state has to meet, to fulfill government-to-government consultation. Emily recommended CDFA to have engagement sessions with tribal land stewards as they do have knowledge, experience, perspectives, and expertise on Tribal Food Sovereignty.

Committee member Dennis Hutson asked how applicants will get access to the information they need to apply to block grant organizations, noting that customer service had been lacking in previous rounds. Thea explained that the BIPOC subcommittee held extensive discussions on strengthening accountability and those recommendations helped to inform these new guidelines.

(7) TOPICS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Committee Chair Hung Doan asked members to email Thea Rittenhouse or Carmen Carrasco with any future items they would like added to the next meeting agenda.

(8) NEXT MEETING: June 16, 2026

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 16, 2026. Thea Rittenhouse informed members that CDFA is still planning a joint meeting in December. Any committee member who wishes to attend is welcome, and travel expenses will be reimbursable. Members who have not yet registered with CDFA Travel were reminded to do so and to email Thea for assistance with the required paperwork.

(9) PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public member Mary Jane Galviso requested clarification on the difference between the joint meeting and the committee meetings, which Committee Chair Hung explained. She also asked whether technical assistance would be available for individuals submitting SWEEP applications. Committee Chair Hung will follow up with Mary to provide the necessary information. Additionally, Mary asked about the eligibility of nonprofit organizations, and Thea Rittenhouse confirmed that they are eligible to apply.

(10) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

Committee Chair Hung Doan adjourned the meeting at 12:50 p.m.