

MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE-  
BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) PRODUCER ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE

(ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

**Location:** Hybrid  
In-Person location: Fresno, CA  
Virtual Via Zoom

**Contact:** Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity  
Advisor  
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**MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025**

Item  
No.

**(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse welcomed all participants. Undersecretary Christine Birdsong thanked the committee for their commitment and work.

**CDFA Staff in Attendance**

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor  
Rachael O'Brien, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs  
Carmen Carrasco- Small Farm Business Liaison  
Christina Harrington- Farm to Fork Grant Admin & Outreach Specialist  
Taryn Mori- CDFA Budget Office  
Raisa Rahim- CST Program Fellow  
Geetika Joshi, CDFA Produce Safety Program

**External Representatives**

Brianna St. Pierre (State Water Board)  
Ali Moradi (State Water Board)  
Camille Frazier (Strategic Growth Council)  
Justin Miller (SSPAC Chair)

**Public Attendance**

**(2) ROLL CALL**

**Present**

Hung K. Doan  
Tania Zuñiga Moreno  
Qi Zhou  
Arshdeep Singh  
Minkah Taharkah

**Absent**

Kenneth Sparks  
Emily Burgueno  
Lena Ortega  
Mireya Gomez Contreras

Donald Sherman  
Javier Cruz  
Wendy Kornberg

**(3) CALL TO ORDER-** Committee Chair Hung K. Doan called the meeting to order at 10:11 AM.

**(4) CDFA DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES**

**A) Legislative Affairs**

Rachael O'Brien, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs, said the Department has been tracking bills in Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Natural Resources committees.

Rachael is actively analyzing 16 bills that are high priority and have potentially high impact on the agricultural industry. Rachael is prioritizing analysis of bills like on-site composting, codifying the Farm to Fork program, the Williamson Act, and land access.

On codifying the BIPOC Producer and Small-Scale Producer Advisory Committees into statute, Rachael O'Brien explained that she received the recommendation the day before the proposal deadline, so CDFA was not able to propose in time, but Rachael did pursue avenues with other bills/trailer bill language. Rachael will continue to find other avenues to codify the committee and does not foresee any problems in going through the process in the next legislative cycle, as it is something widely supported and with no fiscal impact.

Committee Chair Hung K Doan asked if Proposition 4 funds land access; Rachael confirmed it is.

Hung K Doan asked if Rachael sees any bills potentially blocking Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and if CDFA is removing DEI language from its websites.

Rachael replied that she does not see a roll-back on DEI work. Rachael added that there have been bills introduced through the legislative process to enhance the collection of demographic information.

Undersecretary Birdsong commented that CDFA is not removing or changing language from its websites and there has not been direction from the Governor's Office to do so. Thea added there have not been any changes in the direction or focus of the Farm Equity Office, and CDFA continues to be committed to serving all Californians.

Rachael O'Brien called attention to a proposed expansion of the Cap-and-Trade program. CDFA programs such as SWEEP and Healthy Soils started with funding through Cap-and-Trade, so the program has been an important source of revenue to provide incentives for growers to implement climate-smart agricultural practices.

Public comment: none.

**B) Governor's May Revise Budget Update**

Taryn Mori from CDFA's Budget Office discussed the main components of the Governor Office's May revision, including budget shortfalls and proposed solutions.

Taryn also gave an overview of the CA legislative cycle and current activities that lead up to the passage of the budget by June 30.

Public comment: None.

### **C) CDFA Farms to Community Food Hubs Grant Program Update**

Christina Harrington of the CDFA Farm to Fork office presented on the progress of the Food Community Hubs program. There have been 165 applications submitted by non-profits, tribal entities, regional conservation districts and others, where operations were mostly from the Greater Los Angeles region. The total funds requested was \$148M. Applicants are serving 150 food producers in partnership with public schools, food banks, Food as Medicine Organizations, and others. Projects are expected to begin in the Fall/Winter 2025, and project duration for Track 1 Planning grants can be for up to 24 months and Track 2, Infrastructure and Operations for up to 60 months.

Donald Sherman wondered if funding will be available for future rounds.

Christina Harrington said she is not aware of any additional funding for the program. The data and successes of projects can also be shared with legislature to help support funding in the future.

Thea Rittenhouse mentioned the Business Builder Grant program through the USDA Southwest Regional Food Business Center as a potential future funding source for similar projects (the program is currently under review from the USDA).

Arshdeep Singh asked how many applications were disqualified, how much funding was available and what are some of the factors considered in the application review process?

Christina Harrington said that 47 applications out of 165 were disqualified and CDFA had \$13.75M to distribute. Christina said the applications undergo a technical review, and grant recipients are selected based on scores and program priorities. The Farm to Community Food Hubs prioritized new community food hubs and 10% of grant program funds were set aside for Tribal organizations.

Tania Zuniga Moreno asked for clarification on the reasons for disqualification. Christina Harrington said that 57% of the disqualified applications were incomplete, and other applicants included costs that were not allowed.

Public comment: None.

**(5) ACTION ITEM- Approval of February 19, 2025, Meeting Minutes**

Hung K. Doan asked the committee for a motion to approve the February minutes. Arshdeep Singh was first, and Javier Cruz seconded the motion.

All members present responded "aye". The Meeting Minutes were approved.

**(6) DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**A) CDFA Produce Safety Program**

Geetika Joshi, CDFA Produce Safety Program Manager presented an overview of the program, which includes the federal produce safety rule under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

Geetika mentioned on-farm inspections and education as key components of the PSP. Farms that are covered under FSMA are required to go through an inspection, which does not provide a pass or fail grade but more of a holistic approach to compliance. CDFA offers farmers an on-farm readiness review (OFRR) prior to an inspection. CDFA works with a third-party contractor to conduct surveys to identify producers covered under FSMA.

CDFA is interested in knowing the language access needs to help producers comply, since the federal regulation does not address multilingual challenges but mentions that information should be provided in a way the farmer and workers can understand. CDFA has identified at least 176 farms that expressed interest in receiving assistance in languages other than English. To address the language barrier, CDFA has three inspectors and one supervisor that are bilingual Spanish speakers. CDFA also has a certified lead trainer on produce safety and a technical assistance program through UC Cooperative Extension to help guide producers through education and steps into compliance.

Member Donald Sherman asked if good agricultural practices (GAP) third party certified farmers need to have a FSMA inspection. Geetika's response was that GAP and FSMA are two different things, so the inspections are still required if the farmer is covered under FSMA rules.

Dennis Hutson asked, "when is the producer subject to inspection requirement of FSMA?" Geetika responded that CDFA can offer producers an OFRR to help them determine if they are covered or exempt under the FSMA produce safety rule.

Hung K Doan inquired about the source for the list of producers that CDFA surveys and the type of training the CDFA third party contractor goes through to protect grower information, as he has heard this concern from growers that shared data via the produce safety survey. Hung said that some farmers have mentioned that inspectors have come to the farm when the farmer is not there.

Geetika explained that CDFA's third party contractor has experienced staff that undergo capacity trainings facilitated by CDFA. Geetika said the PSP works with different entities, programs, and associations to identify producers. If the contractor is not communicating the information accurately, Geetika offered to work together with Hung on developing best practices.

Public comment: none.

### **B) Update from BIPOC Accountability Subcommittee**

Thea Rittenhouse gave an update on the BIPOC Accountability subcommittee for CDFA block grant programs, which is working on identifying recommendations on the block grant process. For the June meeting, the subcommittee will discuss a draft of the recommendations framework.

Subcommittee member Arshdeep Singh attended the recent Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel meeting, where he stressed inserting more checks and balances into the process.

### **C) Update from the SSPAC Subcommittee**

Justin Miller, Chair of the Small-scale Producer Advisory Committee (SSPAC), gave a summary mentioning that the subcommittee continues to work on the definition of an emergency for small scale producers. The subcommittee met with Secretary Ross and Undersecretary Birdsong in May to get feedback on their draft definition.

Justin said the subcommittee will be working on a definition of a "small-scale farm" and will consider a variety of characteristics such as acreage, diverse crops, urban vs. rural farms, crop type, farm stands, meat producers, etc. They welcome input from members of the BIPOC Advisory Committee.

Thea Rittenhouse emphasized the cross collaboration and will share a survey on the topic with both Committees.

Committee chair Hung K. Doan said that UCANR worked with collaborators including DWR and CAFF on a general description of small farms for a drought relief TA grant program.

Public comment: None.

### **D) Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)- options for new fee structure for probationary basins presentation**

Briana St. Pierre explained that under SGMA, the Department of Water Resources reviews plans by local groundwater agencies and where plans are not inadequate or not being implemented, the Department can refer agencies to the Board for enforcement purposes. The Board can then adopt probationary designations on the basin, where they incur fees after reporting as of this year to be paid by April 1, 2026.

Currently, five basins are under consideration and two have been designated as being under probation.

Under the current fee structure, the rate is \$300 per well per year plus \$20 per acre - foot of groundwater extracted. Fee waivers are available for disadvantaged communities, public schools and those with low income.

Ali Moradi presented on two models for fee proposals (fees linearly / exponentially increase with the volume of water pumped in excess). The goal is not to collect the same fee from all farmers but rather based on groundwater extraction so those who extract less water will pay less.

Donald Sherman asked where the fees will go and commented that farmers are being double charged by the Department of Water Resources and PG&E when pumping groundwater.

Briana St. Pierre said that the fees are required by statute, and they are for Water Board staff to develop interim plans to manage basins when GSA's are unwilling or unable to do so.

Arshdeep Singh asked how DWR defines small scale producers and suggested explaining the fee structure to farmers in simpler and clearer terms they can understand.

Brianna St. Pierre clarified that size is based on volume of extraction, and 80% of the pumpers fall within the initial bracket of extraction.

Donald Sherman asked if entities will be providing meters to monitor groundwater extraction. Ali Moradi said no but that they will provide meter recommendations and that everyone extracting more than 500 acre-feet is required to have meters.

Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse echoed a comment made during this presentation to the SSPAC about fee structures for individual landowners that might be sub-leasing land to multiple renters, and how to ensure the protection of these renters.

Public comment: None.

## **E) Summary of Land Equity Task Force Draft Recommendations**

Camille Frazier from the Strategic Growth Council gave an overview of the background and purpose of the committee. The legislation that formed the task force builds upon the 2018 Farmer Equity Act. The Land Equity Task Force (LETF) is writing a report on recommendations to the governor and legislature on how to equitably increase access to agricultural land for food production and traditional tribal agricultural uses. Traditional tribal agricultural use has been a key part of the LETF's considerations. The report will include results from surveys, talks from guest speakers, feedback from site visits and interagency collaborations, and conversations with advisory committee members. This report is due January 2026.

High level goals of the report are to: return ancestral land to California's tribal nations and recognize and remove barriers to sovereignty of California tribal nations, to conserve and protect agricultural land through easements, to address policies' unequal impacts, to ensure equitable access to public funding for land acquisition, among others.

Arshdeep Singh asked if the draft report is available to the public, how they compensate for inequities by size of farm, and what are they doing so farmers that are leasing land can continue to do so.

Camille Frazier confirmed that the draft is public and that the recommendations include setting up protections for disadvantaged farmers, so they are not overly burdened in ways that large landholders are not through policies like SGMA. The recommendations also include mechanisms such as increasing the finance structure to allow farmers to transition from leasing to owning the land, and tax incentives for current landowners to sell land to priority producers.

Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse highlighted that the draft includes renter protections such as right of first refusal, transparency in parcels of land for sale, and fair access to public funding.

Donald Sherman asked if it is known how much public land that is suitable for agriculture is available in the state.

Camille Frazier said that there is no direct data on public land that could be opened for agriculture, but that is one of the interests of the taskforce.

Public comment: None.

**(7) TOPICS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Committee Chair Hung K Doan encouraged members to submit topics for future agenda items to him, Thea or Carmen.

**(8) SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING**

Carmen will follow up with Committee members via email to schedule the next two quarterly meetings.

**(9) PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Coco Sanabria from Roots for Change highlighted that they are working with CDFA on a Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) grant to develop a food systems infrastructure and supply chains mapping project of small scale and medium scale producers. Roots of Change will be hosting virtual and in-person regional listening sessions to gather feedback and welcome input from the committee.

**(10) CLOSING COMMENTS/ADJOURNMENT**

Committee Chair Hung K Doan asked if CDFA has a budget to schedule an in-person meeting for the next or final meeting of the Committee.

Thea Rittenhouse said they will check after July 1<sup>st</sup>

The meeting concluded at 12:42 p.m.