

**MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) PRODUCER ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE  
(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)**

**Location:** Virtual via Zoom

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**MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 24, 2025**

Item  
No.

**(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse welcomed all participants to the meeting.

**(2) ROLL CALL**

**Present**

Hung K. Doan, Qi Zhou, Arshdeep Singh, Emily Burgueno, Lena Ortega

**Absent**

Kenneth Sparks, Tania Zuniga Moreno, Minkah Taharkah

**CDFA Staff in attendance**

Tawny Mata, Michael Wolff (CDFA OARS)

Raisa Rahim (CCST Fellow)

Logan Dreher, Faye Lessler (CDFA OGA)

Jennifer Huang, Pamela Lee, Andi Sitchler (Farm to Fork)

CDFA Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel (EFA SAP): **External  
representatives**

Leonard Diggs, Judith Redmond, Vicky Dawley, Don Cameron

**(3) CALL TO ORDER**

Thea Rittenhouse called the meeting to order at 11:09 AM.

#### **(4) DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Tawny Mata presented on the history of the Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation, including the motivation for transitioning funding distribution to block grants.

Michael Wolff discussed OARS's target of 25% of technical assistance fund allocation for projects from Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Rancher (SDFR's). Block grant organizations have consistently achieved this target.

Arshdeep Singh confirmed that more recent iterations of block grants have been improvements from their initial versions. He asked the staff for any lessons they have learned from rolling out the block grants.

Tawny Mata mentioned that some organizations did not have the financial management tools to run block grant model programs thus, OARS is looking at doing a risk analysis assessment of organizations and their capacity when making awards. OARS would also like to ensure the programs have better geographic coverage across the state, and selection of block grant organizations by portfolio balancing and geographic area will be a topic at the next EFA SAP meeting.

Arshdeep Singh highlighted the need to get growers' feedback when putting out block grants to make sure that the logistics are in line with their needs. CDFA should be mindful that growers' work is tied to seasonal cycles that cannot be missed; it is then critical that the administrative work is done quickly so that they can meet their deadlines. Some growers have waited months, and this was too long to wait for a contract to be drawn.

Tawny Mata said that it takes time to make sure that projects adequately meet greenhouse gas reduction requirements of the funding.

Michael Wolff followed by saying that Healthy Soils Program turnover in his experience has been just a two-week time frame at most, not months. He echoed that it takes time to verify that growers are planting the correct species for their local environment.

Tawny Mata added that grant agreements at CDFA take a while to get executed, especially contracts with individual farmers. Some institutions like UC have grant agreement templates and can move faster.

The EFA SAP board has also mentioned 'start waivers' for farmers to begin projects while their contracts are being executed, but Tawny is aware that CDFA does not allow for activities to start before the contract is executed, which is a challenge. She encouraged Grantees to get advance payments.

Michael Wolff clarified that many block grants don't give advance payments due to financial liability concerns.

Arshdeep Singh said the reimbursement timing is 4-6 weeks from block grant to recipient, and that a standardized process is needed for more expedited payment process.

Arshdeep said that it would be better to be paid quickly in full [as opposed to partial advance payments].

Michael Wolff confirmed that OARS can set time-period requirements for block grant organizations to send payments to producers and make it a performance evaluation measure.

Arshdeep Singh asked if the department tracks whether grantees are first time applicants or repeat recipients.

Michael Wolff said they do not currently keep track of all grant recipients, but programs prioritize first time applicants. Michael said he is receptive to analyzing grant beneficiary data as an evolving priority.

Tawny Mata applauded Michael Wolff and his team for HSP for parsing legacy grantees from novel applicants. The department will be incorporating a new Data Management System to better track application history to allow more transparency.

Arshdeep Singh was curious about the timeline for block grant fund distribution this year.

Tawny Mata said that Proposition 4 funding is under the CA Natural Resources Agency, which will provide guidelines on how the money will be spent and are not sure if all the previous HSP practices will be funded.

OARS is planning for a longer application period for a longer application that includes risk analysis and financial documentation and demonstration of applicant organizations about their partnerships and commitments.

Qi Zhou asked what the standard operating procedure is for how block grant funds are distributed to individuals under the California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) grant program.

Thea Rittenhouse clarified that Tawny Mata and Michael Wolff are representatives of the Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability (formerly OEFI), but questions about other programs can be addressed at another meeting.

On Climate Smart programs, Michael Wolff said that the guidelines allow flexibility for block grant recipients to develop their own guidelines for fund distribution to individuals.

Qi Zhou pointed out first-come, first-served practice puts socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers at a disadvantage because they don't have the resources (personnel, indirect funding, etc.) to compete with resource - rich entities.

Tawny Mata added that the idea with block grants is to create smaller application pools and allow block grant organizations to develop a rolling application period and scoring system for a more equitable process. Tawny said that during the last HSP direct to producer grants, technical assistance providers that chose to do a rolling application program and provided technical assistance to complete applications were given priority.

Hung K. Doan wondered how grant reviewers account for bias in the review process.

Michael Wolff said that organizations usually have independent review panels that review applications [and then check that people are scoring applications similarly so that no one person's bias has an outsized effect]. He thinks it is more important to focus on making sure that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have access to submitting successful applications.

Thea Rittenhouse asked the OARS Representatives if they had any advice for the subcommittee [and community overall] on how to best interact with OARS and the EFA SAP or provide guidance.

Tawny Mata recommended participating in the [Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel \(EFA SAP\)](#) meetings and voiced that she has an open-door policy and encourages subcommittee members to keep OARS informed.

Arshdeep Singh volunteered to be a primary point of contact between the subcommittee and EFA SAP.

Tawny Mata said per the EFA SAP bylaws, Arshdeep would not be allowed to vote but invited him to attend the meetings and comment on points discussed by the subcommittee.

Thea Rittenhouse noted that now that the subcommittee has quorum, they can ask for a motion to approve the March minutes.

Hung K. Doan approved the motion, and Lena Ortega seconded it.

Carmen Carrasco conducted a roll call to get members' votes on the motion to approve the minutes.

All members present responded "aye", except for Emily Burgueno who abstained.

Carmen Carrasco noted that the minutes were approved.

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

Thea Rittenhouse asked if the subcommittee wants to elect a chair now that they have quorum or shall they wait for the full subcommittee to be present?

Arshdeep Singh and Hung K. Doan Agreed that it would be better to wait, but it should be written in an email that the vote is coming up.

Thea Rittenhouse underlined that the subcommittee needs to decide soon so it is important that everyone comes to the next meeting.

Carmen Carrasco noted that the next scheduled committee and subcommittee meetings will be in late May and early June.

**(8) PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comments were made.

**(9) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

Thea Rittenhouse thanked attendees and adjourned the meeting at 12:27 PM.