

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

**Location:** Virtual via Zoom

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

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**MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 9, 2025**

Item  
No.

**(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor, welcomed the BIPOC Advisory committee members and reviewed Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act procedures. Thea acknowledged members of the public in attendance and explained the process for public comments.

**(2) ROLL CALL**

**Present**

Qi Zhou  
Hung K Doan  
Arshdeep Singh  
Dennis Hustson  
Donald Sherman  
Javier Cruz  
Lena Ortega  
Tania Zuñiga Moreno

**Absent**

Emily Burgueno  
Kenneth Sparks  
Mireya Gomez-Contreras  
Minkah Taharkah

**(3) CALL TO ORDER**

BIPOC Advisory Committee Chair, Hung Doan called the meeting to order at 10:09 am. Thea Rittenhouse introduced Carney King, a new member from the legislative office to the committee.

**(4) Cdfa DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES**

- Legislative Office- Carney King, Cdfa Legislative Manager  
Carney noted that 2025 was a busy year for the Legislature, with 2,397 bills introduced between both houses. 917 bills were sent to the Governor's desk, and he signed 794 into law, while 13% were vetoed.

Key Issues for the legislature this year include climate, housing, energy affordability, artificial intelligence, and Proposition 50 congressional maps. Below is the summary of the bills:

- AB 258 by Assembly member Damon Connolly will generate more revenue for fairgrounds.

- AB 524 by Assembly member Lori Wilson would have created a *farmland access and conservation for thriving communities program* but was vetoed by Governor Newsom due to a lack of ongoing funding for the program.
- AB 732 by Assembly Member Macedo helps County Agriculture Commissioners enforce penalties for neglected crops.
- AB1156 by Assembly Member Wicks creates a solar use easement program on agricultural land as a two-year bill. The bill did not move forward but the author hopes to re-introduce it next year.
- AB1264 by Assembly Member Gabriel is the first bill in the nation to define ultra processed foods and prohibits them from schools.
- SB 72 by Senator Caballero updates the state water plan with new long term supply targets.
- SB 89 by Senator Weaver Pearson prohibits the sale of pesticides containing glyphosate. The bill was held in committee, and it's unclear if it will be reintroduced next year.
- SB 279 by Senator McNerney was signed into law, and it expands exemptions for composting operations on farms.
- SB 493 by Senator Becker is currently on hold, but it was aiming to change the compensation and the title for District Agricultural Associations.

Carney informed Committee members that Senator Monique Limón from Santa Barbara is now leading the Senate, which means there might be changes in committee assignments and Senate priorities.

BIPOC Committee Chair Hung K Doan requested the list of bills that were passed; Carney said he will send the list to Thea Rittenhouse.

Public Comments: None

Secretary Ross joined the meeting and expressed her gratitude towards this Committee. Secretary Ross said she had a chance to attend the joint meeting between the Small-Scale Advisory Committee and the California State Ag Board last week, and the topics discussed such as food security and changes to federal programs such as SNAP were important, as well as hearing from partners like the Department of Social Services and Food Banks. Secretary Ross emphasized the importance of some of the newer programs that were established in the previous federal administration, such as local food procurement assistance (LFPA), the resilient food system infrastructure (RFSI) program, and medically tailored meals that are putting growers' fresh produce into use, as well as Farm to School, which are also helping to address food security issues.

The Secretary thanked Hung K Doan and Justin Miller for their Committee updates to the State Ag Board and mentioned that they should all try to have a joint meeting at least once a year. She pointed out that although CDFA Committees don't have a big travel budget, perhaps there will be opportunities in the future to get together in different parts of the State. Secretary Ross thanked Thea Rittenhouse for facilitating these meetings and for ensuring CDFA Division staff and the Executive leadership hear input and concerns from members of the BIPOC and SSPAC Committees. Secretary Ross concluded by wishing all committee members happy holidays.

Committee Chair, Hung Doan thanked Secretary Ross for giving a voice to BIPOC producers, community members and the public.

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

Arima informed the Committee that the State budget will come out on January 10, 2026, and that she will be happy to come back and provide updates during the long budget process, however, she can give some updates on the Climate Bond funding, known as Proposition 4.

Arima said that CDFA's proposal to the legislature was to request an Administrative Procedure Act (ADA) exemption for Prop 4 programs to avoid CDFA having to develop a full regulatory process for these grant programs and allow the funding to get distributed as soon as possible, but unfortunately ADA exemption was not granted.

Arima clarified that two programs with pre-existing APA exemption are the Healthy Soils and SWEEP programs under the Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability (OARS), so they will move forward sooner than the rest of the programs. She further stated that once the appropriation is completed, Virginia Jameson, Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands and OARS Director Tawny Mata, will be the point of contact for any questions on these programs. CDFA will propose a block grant model for these programs in early 2026. A Request for Proposal (RFP) will be published, followed by a public comment period and feedback from both Small-Scale Producer and BIPOC Advisory Committees will be welcomed. Arima's estimate is to have a solicitation open for block grant partners in the Spring 2026, so they can get the funds to farmers immediately.

Arima reiterated that the rest of the programs under Proposition 4 will have to go through the formal regulatory process, including two farmers' market programs, a program for emergency facilities at fairgrounds, equipment sharing program, and tribal food sovereignty program.

For the equipment sharing and tribal food sovereignty, the timelines should not be affected by the APA exemptions. Currently, CDFA is moving forward in developing the programs and those will get money in the next fiscal year 2026-2027. Therefore, July would be the timeline for those solicitations.

Thea Rittenhouse asked Arima to clarify what APA exemptions mean.

Arima explained that without an APA exemption, CDFA will have to develop regulations for each of these programs- which is a process that is more prescriptive than a normal RFP process and involves drafting legal language and review by CDFA's legal team to make sure there aren't any budget implications. The regulations will go to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for review to ensure they are consistent with the intention specified in the bond language. The public comment process is also more rigid than normal.

Arima concluded that for new programs there would be general socializing of the program and development before they get put through a regulatory process. Some exemptions, like an emergency regulatory process can put a program through an expedited review by the OAL. This creates a shorter public comment period, but it can add up 2-3 months to each grant proposal, as an RFP would be created following the normal process, then the program would go through the extended review by the OAL, and a formal public comment process. Once this process is set, there is no moving it. That will not be the case for Healthy Soils and SWEEP.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh asked how much funding there is for SWEEP and Healthy Soils. Committee member Tania Zuniga asked about the estimated timeline for the equipment sharing program for farmers to apply.

Arima responded that CDFA had appropriated \$200,000 in the current fiscal year – to hire someone to develop the equipment sharing program. CDFA would ask for an appropriation from the legislature for the balance of the funding which is \$14.7M for fiscal year 2026-2027 and is hoping to get the money out by the end of 2026 or early 2027.

Arima clarified that the funding for the equipment sharing program and Tribal food sovereignty is \$14.7M each, \$35.9M for Healthy Soils and \$37.6M for SWEEP.

Thea thanked Arima for the updates and said that she (Thea) will be working with OARS on the equipment sharing program, and the Office of Grants Administration on the Tribal Food Sovereignty Program and will seek engagement from committee members in the new year.

Public comments:

Shannon Davis, member of the public, asked what CDFA is doing to be more budget effective to ensure Californians take advantage of all the grant money and asked if CDFA's current budget allows the agency to work efficiently. Mr. Davis mentioned \$12B in grant funding allocated for farmers through the US Department of Agriculture and \$100M for food banks. Mr. Davis said he doesn't hear about the use of Artificial Intelligence or new technology used for tracking. Thea Rittenhouse responded that the current budget for CDFA's advisory committees is limited, mentioning that committee members are paid per diem and the Farm Equity Office covers travel for in-person meetings.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh added that as a grower, the bigger issue they experience are the delays in the funding releases and how quickly CDFA can get the funds out the door, and not the funding itself. Mr. Singh noted that Proposition 4 funding was anticipated to go out in Quarter 4 of FY25, to start funding distribution early next year, and that the 3-month delay will hurt farmers.

Arima said that the original funding release projections were based on the ADA exemption and approval of emergency regulations, which were projected to take approximately 30 days. The Office of Administrative Law updated their estimate from 30 days to 2-3 months when they realized emergency regulations are needed for every program under Proposition 4. Arima further added that the Legislature determines when CDFA gets the appropriation, but she understands the effect this might have on a farmer's operation, and she will bring back the information to the OAL and Legislature. Arima added that CDFA's budget was reduced by 8% last year, which has impacted the agency's operations and can lead to disruptions in service. Arima asked the Committee to let CDFA know when these things happen to try and concentrate resources towards solving the issue.

Thea Rittenhouse encouraged the public member, Shannon Davis, to continue to attend future meetings as this committee often discusses grant programs, technical assistance, and outreach engagement, and thanked Mr. Davis for his thoughtful questions and comments.

**(5) ACTION ITEM - Approval of September 16, 2025, Meeting Minutes**

All BIPOC Committee members present approved the September 2025 meeting minutes.

**(6) DISCUSSION ITEMS**

- SSPAC Advisory Committee Update- Thea Rittenhouse

In absence of SSPAC Committee Chair Justin Miller, Thea Rittenhouse provided committee updates and thanked members that attended the joint meeting with the State Board.

Thea gave a summary on SSPAC Meeting that was held on Dec 2, 2025. The SSPAC has been discussing a California State definition of small-scale agriculture. Thea gave an overview of what could be part of small-scale agriculture such as livestock production, dairy farms, row crops,

orchards, urban or rural agriculture, and reiterated the SSPAC committee's interest in hearing from different sectors. During their December meeting, SSPAC members heard perspectives from panelists with a background in urban agriculture, small scale dairy and small-scale livestock. Some of the presenters were:

Lynne McBride: Lynne is part of the California Dairy Campaign. She talked briefly on dairy farms, painting more of a picture of what it is like running a dairy farm. She also shared resources about State dairy production in California.

Grace Woodmansee: As a UC Cooperative Extension Advisor in Siskiyou County, Grace talked about small scale livestock production and rangeland management. Grace shared a model that she developed with others in the northern part of the state, about some of the buffers that represent barriers for small-scale ranching and prevent ranchers/farmers from being in business. In addition, Grace mentioned other factors that could help small ranchers to make decisions to keep them in business such as land pressure, wildfire, and changing feed prices.

Urban agriculture presenters (Elle Mari- UCSD- Center for Community Health, Jose Alcaarez, and Cathryn Henning): The presenters talked about different challenges related to urban agriculture putting Southern California into perspective. The two farmers – Jose and Cathryn shared their experiences both opportunities and challenges as urban farmers. Some of the things they discussed were reflective of things the committee has heard.

The SSPAC committee still wants to hear some other perspectives and is interested in engaging with this committee to hear their feedback, since there are small-scale producers in both committees. Thea will share some of the materials, particularly the research paper Grace Woodmansee talked about if someone has interest in the study.

- SGC Agricultural Land Equity Taskforce Update- Qi Zhou, ALEFT Liaison

Qi stated that Agricultural Land Task Force (ALEFT) is made up of 13 members and part of the California Strategic Growth Council. They continue to work on a report on policy recommendations on how to address the agricultural land equity crisis that will be submitted to the Governor by January 1, 2026. The ALEFT has been conducting quarter meeting since October 2023, and the last meeting will take place on December 11, 2025, when they hope to have the report finalized. The ALEFT will host a public celebration to present the report to the Governor's office and the SGC during their February quarterly meeting.

Qi noted that all ALEFT meetings are open to the public. BIPOC Committee members are encouraged to review the draft report on the SGC's website and share feedback or comments via email, in person, or virtually. She added that, beyond regular meetings, the committee hosted community engagement sessions, tours, and educational activities. Additionally, the committee developed a multilingual survey to gather input from producers across diverse communities.

Thea Rittenhouse thanked Qi and let members know that she also serves on the taskforce where Emily Burgueno serves as well. Thea added that when legislation was passed to form the taskforce, there was a small portion of money that would be turned into either a grant program or a research

program. At the SGC meeting in February, when ALEFT members complete their term, the SGC staff will be there to provide details on a small grant program on land access. Thea pointed out that although the ALEFT will not be administering the grant, members of the public can be engaged and guide the parameters for the grant program, which will be for approximately \$1 Million in funding.

Public comments- none

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

Chair Hung K Doan gave a reflection on the progress and outcomes by the committee such more accountability from CDFA, farmers receiving grants faster, and positive feedback coming from farmers. Hung thanked committee members for voicing their perspectives on farming, especially from BIPOC producers.

Arshdeep, a committee member, expressed appreciation for the committee meetings, noting that they allowed him to update members of the Punjabi American Growers Group (PAGG). As a result, they now have a better understanding of CDFA programs. He explained that one of the major challenges growers faced in the past was the lack of clear communication channels, but now such a channel exists. Arshdeep also commended CDFA's efforts to invite Secretary Ross to their annual meeting, where she has engaged directly with growers, and a CDFA booth for farmers to speak with CDFA representatives. These actions were highly valued. He emphasized that providing opportunities for feedback helps build trust, particularly within Central Valley communities. Additionally, Secretary Ross's video messages and kind words have gone a long way in helping growers feel connected to CDFA.

Thea thanked Arshdeep and mentioned about a farmer who reached and mentioned that they heard of CDFA program on the Punjabi radio station. She was grateful to Arshdeep for introducing CDFA program to growers in Central Valley in a different language.

Committee member Javier Cruz said that the feedback he has received from others on the BIPOC Committee's work is that they are doing great things.

Hung Doan brought up the idea of supporting farmers through more technical assistance and language access, as many grants are not available in other languages BIPOC farmers and producers. Hung suggested that moving forward, the committee should work with CDFA on building more language access, outreach, and engagement with farmers.

Thea thanked the committee members and was grateful for their support throughout the years. Thea mentioned the committee's dedication and commitment working with their subcommittee in developing CDFA's block grant program accountability process. Thea reminded the committee members about Prop 4 grant programs, which might be a significant focus of this committee next year, and suggested Fresno as location for a hybrid in-person/hybrid meeting.

Committee member Arshdeep Singh proposed the committee make a list of priority topics to discuss next year and raised concerns about the delay of the programs. Arshdeep said that it's difficult for the farmers to manage programs on the ground and their expectations given the

unreliability of the funding schedules. He suggested CDFA creates a communication system with growers on potential program delays so they can adjust their plans accordingly, or monthly meetings with specific CDFA Division staff.

Committee Chair Hung K Doan talked about the recommendation of setting up an anonymous channel for growers, either by phone or email to communicate directly with OARS Director Tawny Matar or her staff on issues with grant programs. Thea said that OARS is aware of this recommendation and might be considering implementing it when the new grant programs get released. Thea is open for the idea of having regular meetings on pressing concerns from growers and will consult with Dr. Mata to ask for her input on it.

Committee member Tania Zuniga concurred on communication issues and suggested that meetings be recorded, and information and updates be provided in a simplified way so they can share with growers. Tania exemplified the Farm to School program and how it has allowed beginning farmers to build on infrastructure and procurement, positively impacting local communities. Thea acknowledged Tania's comments about enhanced communication channels from CDFA on new programs and working with committee members on ideas to make information more accessible to farmers.

Arshdeep Singh suggested a proactive approach in identifying the three biggest issues for farmers and discussing them at the next committee meeting, rather than waiting for farmers to complain. Hung Doan, the committee Chair, stated that since the committee members work for different clientele, it would be better to do a needs assessment of BIPOC producers to find out their main concerns, and perhaps publish a white paper. Thea stated that CDFA won't be able to lead but could partner with UC on developing a survey and distributing it.

Member Qi Zhou mentioned that it would be good to have a review system for organizations administering CDFA block-grant funds, where they can review comments and feedback from across their clientele, including farmers. Sometimes, an organization might be doing a good job running a block-grant program but one negative comment from a client/customer can put their reputation in question so a review system might be a good way to assess their work.

Public comment: Public member Shannon Davis commented on the use of AI technology as a solutions tool for CDFA to collect complaints or learn from farmers about issues.

**Topics for Future Agenda Items:**

For future meeting topics, Hung Doan encouraged committee members to send their proposed agenda items to him or Thea Rittenhouse.

**(8) NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be a hybrid in-person/virtual meeting in Fresno, tentatively in March 2026 at the usual 10 AM hour, and perhaps a farm tour with Javier Cruz in Madera. Thea will send a doodle poll to the committee to determine the 2026 meeting schedule.

**(9) PUBLIC COMMENT**

Public participant, Shannon Davis raised concerns about school lunch and breakfast programs, noting the significant waste of food, while students still lack adequate nutrition. Mr. Davis also

commented on the importance of efforts for school lunch programs to offer evening meals to students, particularly in rural areas.

Hung again expressed appreciation to Mr. Davis on his comments and recommendations.

**(10) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

The Committee Chair, Hung Doan, thanked all committee members for taking time out to attend the BIPOC meeting. He wished everyone happy holidays. The meeting was adjourned at 11:30am