

Report on the BIPOC Producer Committee Survey

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Report Overview

This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted in partnership between University of California, Davis students and Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, in November 2023. It presents perspectives and ideas gathered from committee members of the newly formed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Producer Advisory Committee. Specifically, it summarizes committee members' understanding of the Farmer Equity Act of 2017; their priorities as members of the committee; and research, informational, and/or training needs committee members identified.

Our research involved primary data collection in the form of an anonymous survey administered through the Qualtrics online survey platform. The findings of this survey are provided as an aid for members of the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, established to ensure the implementation of the Farmer Equity Act of 2017, for agenda setting and designing strategies to promote inclusivity and address inconsistency in the California agriculture sector. Findings show that the BIPOC Advisory Committee members identified land tenure, access to capital, and access to markets as their primary priorities while highlighting the need to examine intersections between these issues and to develop metrics to better understand their impact on BIPOC producers.

Survey Findings

We organized the survey findings below by question.

(1) How would you rank your general understanding of the AB 1348 Farmer Equity Act?

Committee members were asked to rank their understanding along a scale of not very knowledgeable, somewhat knowledgeable, moderately knowledgeable, and very knowledgeable. The most common response from the committee members was moderately knowledgeable, followed by somewhat knowledgeable (Figure 1).

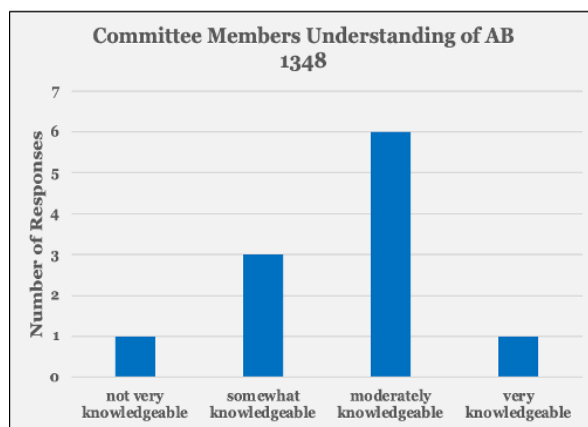


Figure 1. BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee members' assessment of their understanding of AB 1348, the Farmer Equity Act, CDFA BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Survey, n = 12, November 2023 (author's data)

(2) If you ranked yourself with a not very knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable understanding, please expand on any areas of confusion. OR If you ranked yourself with moderately knowledgeable or very knowledgeable understanding, please expand on what you know about the Farmer Equity Act.

Committee members identified areas of understanding that the intent of AB 1348 was identifying BIPOC producers as a socially disadvantaged group and requiring CDFA to involve socially disadvantaged farmers in the deliberation and implementation of policy to achieve equity and inclusion in terms of access to resources for BIPOC producers. For example, one participant responded, "The Farmer Equity Act brings the opportunity to finally be intentional and effective with addressing the needs of small and medium scale BIPOC farmers. From identifying us as a group that historically has been underserved and struggling with limited to [no] access to resources to giving us decision-making power on how to better design programs, reach community members, distribute resources, provide financial aid, channel climate-smart

technology, etc.”. Another participant responded similarly, “...it was created as more of a value statement to solidify the use and importance of the term Socially Disadvantaged Farmer & Rancher in legislative terminology. [It] was used to ensure that BIPOC farmers are centered in the use of this phrase so there is no confusion and less likelihood that they will be left out of access to certain resources”.

Areas of confusion centered around how the intent of AB 1348 will be accomplished and the exact definition of socially disadvantaged farmers. One participant wrote, “Based on the definition, if you are a beginning farmer that is let’s say Asian, are you considered socially disadvantaged? Since you haven’t face[d] any discrimination? Are LGBTQ+ Farmers considered socially disadvantaged?”. Another participant wrote they would need more information on “how it will improve [socially disadvantaged farmers]”, and “what impact is it currently having.”

(3) From your perspective, what is the biggest overall challenge BIPOC producers face in California?

Committee members identified land tenure multiple times as a key issue BIPOC producers face in California. “Land access” and “land tenure” were recurring responses to the question. It is important to note that access to capital was connected to the issue of land tenure and access. For example, one participant responded: “Access to farmland. Support to purchase the land.” This brings us to the other issue most commonly identified, access to capital, which was another recurring response from committee members. For example, one participant wrote, “Access to funding without the constraints.” Not only access to capital but funding without constraints was specifically mentioned multiple times.

Two responses from committee members identified the lack of diversity of the CDFA itself as the biggest challenge, and questioned whether there is enough representation of BIPOC producers beyond the committee within the CDFA. One noted, “there was not enough BIPOC representation at the CDFA.” Other challenges addressed involved access to technical and financial assistance, language barriers, and access to fair markets. See Figure b. for a complete table of responses for question 3.

(4) From your perspective, which of the main challenges identified in the Farm Equity report is the most important / you would like to address?

This question asked committee members to rank the importance of challenges identified in the Farm Equity report, with 1 as the most important and 5 as the least (CDFA 2020). Based on the responses, “Land tenure” was ranked the most important challenge to address (Figure 2). The other challenges, “Language access: Information available” and “Technical assistance: trusted local TA provider,” were both ranked very similarly as the next most important. “Outreach: lack of knowledge about CDFA programs,” was ranked the fourth most important challenge. Lastly, “Engagement with Ag Industry/ CDFA Board and Commissions,” was ranked fifth by the committee members as the least important challenge

Challenges identified by the Farmer Equity report	Average Ranking
Land tenure	1.45
Language access: Information available	3.00
Technical assistance: trusted local TA provider	3.00
Outreach: lack of knowledge about CDFA programs	3.55
Engagement with Ag Industry/ CDFA Boards and Commissions	4.00

Figure 2. BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee members’ ranking of challenges identified in Farmer Equity Report, CDFA BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Survey, n = 12, November 2023 (author’s data)

identified in the Farmer Equity Report.

(5) What is your top priority as a committee member of the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee?

One central theme identified by committee members was the goal of advocating for BIPOC producers at the policy level. For example, one committee member's response was, "outreach and voice at the policy level." Similar responses used wording such as "deliver messages" and "advocate." Committee members similarly identified the goal to hold the CDFA accountable such that the programs and solutions to challenges faced by BIPOC producers are aligned with BIPOC producers' concerns and needs. For example, one committee member wrote, "My top priority is to see how the CDFA will help BIPOC producers like me. To see that they are not just using BIPOC farmers for vote or as a token." Others responded in kind with intentions to help "revamp programs to address the continuing challenges and better fit the needs of BIPOC farmers." A few responses noted the priority of creating a better understanding of the challenges BIPOC producers face, especially about the CDFA and its mission, such as "Understand the mission of the CDFA, especially the BIPOC grants" and "My priority is to listen to patterns of how the problem is being described." To summarize, frequent responses were: advocating for BIPOC producers, holding CDFA and policy stakeholders accountable, and increasing CDFA's understanding of the challenges BIPOC producers face. See Figure c. for a complete table of responses to question 5.

(6) What informational / research and training needs do you feel you need or would like access to as a committee member?

Responses from committee members suggest a relatively balanced interest in each listed research, informational, and or training needed from the question. The results did not indicate a particular interest in one need over another. Responses for "other needs" varied: "Language: Other than English TA staff"; "Data and metrics overview"; "If the CDFA cares about equity, is there any internal study/stats on how diverse the CDFA is?"; "Accountability measures that are in place for technical service providers and organizations that distribute CDFA Grants,"; "Secure funding." Of these responses, interest in accountability mechanisms of technical service providers and grant distributors is an important need not mentioned before.

(7) Are there any "products" or "outcomes" you would like to see as a result of the formation of this committee?

The outcomes and products identified by the committee members revolved around successfully advocating for BIPOC producers and increasing representation at the policy-making level. One committee member responded that they wanted to see that "BIPOC farmers' voices will be lifted up and more BIPOC farmers feel comfortable to speak up about their needs and concerns." Committee members also indicated goals of increasing accessibility to CDFA programs and grants for BIPOC producers. For example, committee members responded with "Better, more timely processes for grant distribution" and "Application processes become easier for the people to apply to." Committee members indicated a strong desire to be able to receive "metrics and data" regarding the outcomes of policies and solutions to measure the effect of the committee's efforts. Another response indicated a desire to examine the diversity of the CDFA. See Figure d. for a complete table of responses to question 7.

(8) What would you personally like to gain from being a part of the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee?

By far the main theme identified from the responses of the committee members was committee members' desire to network amongst other BIPOC producers, form connections, and gain experience and knowledge that will inform the committee members' ability to advocate for their concerns and the concerns of other BIPOC producers. Overall, networking and relationship building were mentioned in 6 out of 9 total responses to the question. Other themes were desires to make meaningful, personal impacts in addressing the needs and challenges of BIPOC producers. One committee member wrote, "I want to make a difference in my community and know that my concerns are being heard when bills are passed." In short, common themes identified were desires for networking/relationship building and creating meaningful positive change for BIPOC producers and the committee members themselves. See Figure e. for a complete table of responses to question 8.

Summary and Discussion

There are several recurring themes throughout the survey that suggest areas of interest and action for the committee. Land tenure was shown to be of great concern and a top priority for multiple committee members to address. Responses from questions 3 and 4 both indicate this (see Figure 2 for question 4 and Figure b. for complete responses to question 3). There was a key connection identified between land tenure and access to capital, which suggests that access to capital should be a key focal area as it is a barrier preventing BIPOC producers from accessing land, equipment, etc., thereby limiting their ability to access markets. It may be beneficial for the committee to examine the connections between issues such as land tenure, access to capital, and access to markets, to identify how these issues interact. Other barriers were identified, such as language barriers and difficulty accessing existing CDFA resources such as grants.

Another recurring theme was requests to examine the internal diversity of the CDFA. The CDFA may be interested in providing data describing its current diversity and any existing efforts that seek to address diversity and increase inclusion. Should they want to, committee members, especially producers, could share their knowledge of and experiences interacting with the CDFA and specifically discuss how the historical and current composition of the CDFA staff has shaped these experiences.

Lastly, the committee members acknowledged how this committee is in a unique position to network both within the committee and outside to create positive change for BIPOC producers. Because this committee is one of the first of its kind, members might be interested in how similar committees or advisory bodies in other states have been able to influence policy; this could be facilitated by CDFA staff. Committee members made suggestions about collecting data and metrics regarding the effectiveness of their work, emphasizing that there needs to be results, not just efforts. Committee members could collaborate to decide on what this effort would look like in terms of the types of data, who collects it, how it may be collected, and toward what ends; importantly, CDFA should provide resources to help the committee conduct this data collection and analysis so the research effort does not fall upon committee members themselves. Overall, by utilizing this committee as a platform and leveraging the networking that comes out of it, the committee members have the opportunity to influence policy for BIPOC producers across California.

Acknowledgements

This survey and report is a result of a collaboration between UC Davis students and Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor for the CDFA, as part of a project pairing students with community partners. The class Community Development, Rural Change in the Industrialized World, taught by Dr. Ryan Galt, introduced students to the various social, political, environmental, agricultural, economic, and historical forces that interact to shape the experiences of communities and individuals in rural areas. We want to give special thanks to Thea Rittenhouse for her guidance and the opportunity to engage in this survey and report. We'd like to thank Fiorella Loli for her help throughout the project. We'd also like to thank Dr. Ryan Galt for his continued support, feedback, and help facilitating this collaboration. We would also like to thank Carmen Carrasco for her help reviewing our findings and report. And finally, we would like to thank the members of the BIPOC Producer advisory committee for your time and energy participating in the survey and for your dedication as members of this committee.

References

CDFA, 2020 Report to the California Legislature on the Farmer Equity Act (2020). California Department of Food & Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/farmerresources/pdfs/2020FarmerEquityReport.pdf>.

Appendix

Figure a.
Table of Responses for Question 2

(2) If you ranked yourself with a not very knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable understanding, please expand on any areas of confusion. OR If you ranked yourself with moderately knowledgeable or very knowledgeable understanding, please expand on what you know about the Farmer Equity Act.	
Areas of Understanding	Areas of Confusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Farmer Equity Act brings the opportunity to finally be intentional and affective with addressing the needs of small and medium scale BIPOC farmers. From Identifying us as a group that have been historically underserved and struggling with access to resources, to giving us decision-making power on how to better design programs, outreach community members, distribute resources, provided financial aid, channel climate smart technologies, etc.” • “Increasing inclusion and equity at CDFA” • “I know that it was created as more of a value statement to solidify the use and importance of the term Socially Disadvantaged Farmer & Rancher in legislative terminology. I was used to ensure that BIPOC farmers are centered in the use of this phrase so there is no confusion and less likelihood that they will be left out of access to certain resources. It created the Farm Equity office and established the role of a Farm Equity Officer.” • “It’s a legislature to require the department of food and agriculture to ensure the inclusion of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of food and agriculture laws, regulations, and policies and programs.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I will need more info about the act itself. How will it improve the SDFR's. What impact its currently having.” • “Based on the definition, if you are a beginning farmer that is lets say Asian are you consider socially disadvantage? Since you haven't face any discrimination? Are LGBTQ+ Farmers consider socially disadvantage?” • “I think I understand the intent of the Act. However, I am not certain how the Act will be accomplished.” • “I have not read it yet”

Complete list of survey responses for Question 2 BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, November 23, n=12 (authors' data)

Figure b.

Table of Responses for Question 3

(3) From your perspective, what is the biggest overall challenge BIPOC producers face in California?

- “Land, Capital and Market access”
 - “access to capital access to land access to non-gmo seeds access to equipment financial literacy grant writing guidance to forming non-profits”
 - “They are poorly represented at ground level. Outreach is very poor to them. They need to have more stronger voice in policy making.”
 - “Land access”
 - “Representation and transparent: At our last meeting, it was clear, most staff/leader at CDFA are Caucasian and female. There was not enough BIPOC representation at the CDFA. Thea the farm equity advisor, is great, however she is not a member of the BIPOC and does not share the same experience of a BIPOC farmers. As a BIPOC producers, we need someone that understand us and advocate for us and not use us as a token.”
 - “The CDFA regulating everything that BIPOC producers do. Farmer question how can Thea Rittenhouse, who is not a BIPOC member lead as a equity advisor?”
 - “Access to funding without the constraints”
 - “Access to farm land. Support to purchase the land. And, access to water to grow the crops. Much of farm land has been industrial farmed. This means the soil is heavily contaminated with chemicals and lacking nutrients. Soils must be regenerated.”
 - “Land ownership, technical assistance support that gives them 100% of the funds rather than splitting it with a nonprofit supporting the process, technical assistance in terms of business development support, direct funding, institutional racism”
 - “Language barriers, historically biases, lack of capacity”
 - “access to fair paying markets due to. competition and rigid market entry points, gate-keepers as leaders, a mindset of "it works so why change it.”
-

Complete list of survey responses for Question 3 BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, November 23, n=12 (authors' data)

Figure c.

Complete Table of Responses for Question 5

(5) What is your top priority as a committee member of the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee?

- “Land Access and Language justice”
 - “to make the best recommendations as possible on behalf of the bipoc committee”
 - “Outreach and voice at the policy level”
 - “To voice the concerns and struggles of the small farmers in my community”
 - “My top priority is to see how the CDFA will help bipoc producers like me. To see that they are not just using bipoc farmers for vote or as token.”
 - “Understand the mission of the CDFA, especially the BIPOC grants”
 - “To help provide more opportunities with smoother processes for BIPOC farmers. This includes helping revamp programs to address the continues challenges and better fit the needs of BIPOC farmers”
 - “To advocate for BIPOC farmers and facilitate information sharing.”
 - “To ensure that the Farm Equity Office & Officers work prioritize the lived experience and knowledge of farmers.”
 - “Deliver messages from BIPOC producers to the state legislatures.”
 - “My priority is to listen to patterns of how the problem is being described, learn the numbers behind BIPOC producers (quantity, spread across the state, # of women producers, etc. I want to understand the landscape and social context a little more, get to. know the people in the advisory committee and build the relationships that will further 1-2 strategic changes that will transform the lives of BIPOC producers in the state over the next 2-4 yrs.”
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Complete list of survey responses for Question 5 BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, November 23, n=12 (authors' data)

Figure d.

Complete Table of Responses for Question 7

7) Are there any “products” or “outcomes” you would like to see as a result of the formation of this committee?

- “See data and metrics showing larger numbers of BIPOC farmers accessing to CDFA TA programs and grants. As a way to measure the impact of our collective effort. See a larger number of TA staff members being prepared to service farmers that speak other languages than english and spanish.”
 - “to see application processes become easier for the people to apply to”
 - “I would like to see more growers representation and voice at state level.”
 - “I would like to see younger generations going back to regenerative agriculture, knowing that there is help for small family farms.”
 - “identify how diverse the cdfa is, if diversity is lacking in the cdfa, thats where we can start. lets start from there”
 - “Better, more timely processes for grant distribution. Grants and opportunities without so many constraints that are more inclusive for BIPOC produce”
 - “Yes. I would like to see data showing the outcome for each year that I serve.”
 - “CDFA's Farm Equity Office uplifting and utilizing the support of stakeholder farmers and farmer serving organizations”
 - “BIPOC farmer's voices will be lifted up and more BIPOC farmers feel comfortable to speak up their needs and concerns”
 - “I'm not sure yet. I would like to be more informed before providing this answer. I'm not fully aware. of what. already exists. but good question.”
-

Complete list of survey responses for Question 7 BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, November 23, n=12 (authors' data)

Figure e.

Complete Table of Responses for Question 8

(8) What would you personally like to gain from being a part of the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee?

- “Learn and get inspired from others committee members. Synergize and create change”
 - “networking and the ability to refer to these programs”
 - “I would like to gain the knowledge so I can share to my community for their benefits.”
 - “I want to make a difference in my community and know that my concerns are being heard when bills are passed.”
 - “Networking, helping to shape policy and voicing concerns of BIPOC farmers.”
 - “I would like to make a difference in California's agriculture industry, especially as it pertains to BIPOC producers. Equal opportunity for BIPOC producers is vital to continued success of California's Agriculture industry.”
 - “A connection to the other famers in the committee”
 - “Gain connections with difference professionals who is also passionate about Equity and Diversity in Ag system and then support each other. Develop leadership skills in Ag DEI system, be one of the leaders in CA to fight for Equity and Diversity.”
 - “experience, key relationships, contextual information”
-

Complete list of survey responses for Question 7 BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee, November 23, n=12 (authors' data)