

MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
SMALL-SCALE PRODUCER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

Location: Virtual via Zoom

Contact: Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

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MEETING MINUTES of June 18, 2026

(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor, welcomed committee members and called the meeting to order.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present

Justin Miller, SSPAC Chair

Luis Elizondo

Beverly McKinney

Anna Nakamura Knight

Josefina Lara Chavez

Lovepreet Kaur

Kerry McGrath

Wendy Kornberg

Lovepreet Kaur

BIPOC Chair

Hung Doan, BIPOC Committee Chair

Absent

Patrick Mitchell

Veronica Mazariegos Anastassiou

CDFA Staff

Dr. Tawny Mata, OARS Director

Carney King, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs

Carmen Carrasco, Farm to Fork

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Lydia Maranga, Executive Office

(3) CALL TO ORDER

Thea Rittenhouse called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m. Committee Chair Miller asked for co-facilitation assistance for latter portion of the meeting.

(4) CDFA DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

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

Arima provided an overview of two-party agreement and clarified that there are two weeks between the two-party agreement and the final budget (CDFA is required to pass a budget by June 15th). According to Arima, most of the items in the two-party agreement have been approved to move forward. Though there is a reduction of 10.5 million from the budget, CDFA requested state funding for fruit fly trapping program. Some of the programs included in the state funding request include:

- 1) Industrial Hemp Program and Animal Care Program: the programs were developed through Prop 12 and were using borrowed funds, Arima noted that there was no structure in place of how these programs would be funded. Therefore, CDFA has requested a general fund to support these programs. According to Arima, there is a proposed transition to move Industrial Hemp Program from a state-regulated program to a federally regulated program, becoming a USDA program.
- 2) Other budget items: CDFA Biocontrol program facility repairs, augmentation of IT services, reappropriations, and change of CDFA indirect costs definition in Food Ag Code. Arima also stated that there are other appropriations that were not approved but were proposed. They include Farm to School Grant Program, Market development work, and technical assistance funding within the Farm Equity Office. The fund was approved as one-time funding rather than ongoing funding.
- 3) CNIP and LFPA programs: The Assembly added \$15 million, a one-time general fund for the California Nutrition Incentive Program and \$15 million one-time fund for local food assistance, LFPA program. CDFA is waiting for the final budget.
- 4) Prop 4 funding: This is open for further discussion and negotiation. The discussions include funding for Greenhouse Gas Reduction fund appropriations and reappropriations (anything coming from Cap and Invest program and proceeds from auctions). This proposition will proceed to a three-party agreement.

Committee member Luis Elizondo asked Arima to confirm whether Farm to School Program will be an ongoing funding or it is just one time fund. Arima confirmed that the Assembly and the Senate proposed a one-year (2026-2027) funding for the Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability (OARS) and a one-year funding for the Farm to School Program.

- Legislative Office- Carney King, CDFA Deputy Secretary of Legislative Affairs

Carney King provided an update of bills that would have effect on small-scale producers. Below is the summary of the bills:

- AB 52: This is to formally codify the Farmer Equity Advisory Committees into law and will protect the advisory committees from any political changes.

- AB 1603: The bill has gone through several amendments. Recently it has been amended to ban pesticides that use any PFAS chemical ingredient because of the concern of the chemical getting into water and food sources. The bill is still being worked on and is still receiving opposition from the ag industry.
- AB 1812: The bill is to ensure that the compost produced and sold in California meets organic requirements and doesn't contain plastics.
- AB 1848: This bill is set to increase seed registration fee from \$40 to \$100 annually. The changes are expected next year.
- AB 2326: The bill is to extend the Broomrape program to assist farmers manage the weed. The funding for this program will come from Noxious Weed program.

Committee member Luis Elizondo sought clarification on the recent town hall meeting with Assembly woman who had conversations about a bill that would assist farmers get land access. Luis wanted to understand how that would work, and whether that requires a budget. Arima stated that there are certain limitations to what can go into the budget, adding that new programs are passed as legislation first. Then there will be analysis done to ascertain if the legislation will require money to implement.

- CDFA Climate Resiliency Strategy Final Report- Thea Rittenhouse

Thea Rittenhouse let committee members know that the first climate resilience strategy for California agriculture was released on April 2nd this year. She stated that the report builds upon the California Ag Vision for 2030 which prioritizes climate-smart, resilient and regenerative food systems that can help to mitigate climate change. The report will also improve soil health, restore biodiversity, enhance ecosystems and contribute to human health. Thea further explained that the report is organized in three pillars: 1) supporting a thriving and resilient food sector, 2) protecting natural systems critical to agriculture, and 3) encouraging resilient agricultural practices. The report is a work of two-year process which included public listening process and public comment period. In addition, the report has case studies built in, showcasing various profiles of farms and other groups working to address climate resiliency. The link for the report is provided here:

www.cdfa.ca.gov/climate. For those with questions about the report can reach out to Nina Bingham or Virginia Jameson, Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands.

Additionally, Thea reminded committee members to take the survey for Specialty Block Grant administered by CDFA staff to ensure they receive feedback for program improvement and how to tailor the program to serve all Californians better. The survey is anonymous and members were encouraged to share the link with their contacts and reminded them that the program is meant for research organizations, non-profit entities etc., and not for individual farmers and ranchers. The staff are also going to have public comment sessions this summer for those interested in providing feedback. Here is the survey link: <https://forms.office.com/g/T304jL0wp2>

Public Comments: none

(5) ACTION ITEM- Approval of March 2026, Meeting Minutes

Committee member Luis Elizondo moved a motion to approve the March meetings minutes. Committee member Wendy Kornberg seconded the motion, and all members present said "aye". The March minutes were approved unanimously.

(6) COMMITTEE UPDATES

- BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Updates- BIPOC Chair Hung K Doan

Since Hung K Doan was unable to attend, Thea provided a summary of the presentations done during the BIPOC meeting.

- Land Equity Task Force Final Report Summaries and TA Contract Update – Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Thea Rittenhouse informed the committee members that the Land Equity Task Force Report has been made public and is available in nine different languages on the web page. She stated that there was approximately \$1 million left for technical assistance contract to assist the work of the Land Equity Task Force. Bids were solicited and are in the final phases of awarding that contract. According to Thea, the contractor will be available after July 1st to start helping individual farmers and ranchers with land acquisition projects or for technical assistance.

Committee member Elizondo wanted to know how the TA contract relates to AB524 bill. Thea said that AB524 was proposed last year and did not deviate much from the proposed structure of what the contract is going to do.

Public comments: none

(7) PRESENTATIONS

- CDFA Equipment Sharing Program – Dr. Tawny Mata, OARS Director and Program Staff

Tawny Mata provided some background on Equipment Sharing Program document she had shared earlier with committee members. She let committee members know that there was \$15 million set aside for an equipment sharing program from the Climate bond. The legislation passed a trailer bill on how the fund is to be spent, which also included that CDFA consults both advisory committees (SSPAC & BIPOC). Further, Tawny stated that the trailer bill split the fund into parts (Equipment Sharing Program and Development of Farmer

Cooperatives). The program is currently in a scoping phase for the equipment sharing program and would appreciate the committee's contributions.

Committee member Beverly McKinney wanted to know about the types of other items besides equipment that should be considered for grant. Tawny stated that the questions are for Equipment Sharing Program. However, the Cooperative Development in the trailer bill is a grant that would be given to a specific entity to support the development of farmer cooperatives. According to Tawny, there's a lot of expertise in the state and therefore the program is reaching out to some organizations to see how they could serve those needs.

Committee member Beverly asked whether individuals could be reimbursed if they use their personal trailers to pick up and deliver the shared equipment. Tawny explained that this could be part of program's input phase and noted that they have received similar questions from others. She added that while there may be different types of equipment involved, the size of the grants and what qualifies for reimbursement are key factors that will be considered as the program continues to develop.

Tawny also informed committee members that there is a high likelihood that this program will be a one-time funding and won't be helpful in the items that long-term need assistance such as gas reimbursements and other disposable items. Tawny asked members to think of the continuity of the program beyond the grant funding.

Committee member Beverly suggested that some training should be offered to shared equipment users and to also learn about the program. Tawny supported the idea and stated that it would be good use of non-equipment funding to have organizations dedicate staff time to creating training modules for equipment. Committee member Beverly McKinney asked if forklifts will be considered and stated that they can be part of the list of the items suggested for consideration.

Committee members Luis and Beverly also wanted to know if the existing informal sharing can be utilized by creating incentives through financing farmers to be able to rent the shared equipment, which Tawny stated that the grant is designed for organizations and not individual farmers.

Committee Chair Justin Miller asked if farmers could consider buying equipment that is frequently used such as compost spreader and utilize the skills, they have instead of putting money aside for technical assistance. Tawny asked committee members if it's worthwhile to set aside a planning grant for eligible organizations prior to getting their equipment. The planning grant is meant to assist the organizations to help in things like

developing agreements. Committee Chair Justin Miller and committee member Josefina Chavez supported the idea.

Tawny concluded by inviting any committee member to schedule a meeting with her to discuss the appropriate size and structure of grants awarded to organizations. She noted that issuing many small grants could pose challenges in ensuring high-quality services and maintaining effective financial oversight.

Public comment: none.

- CDFA Farm to School Program 2026 RFP – Nick Anicich, Farm to School Program Manager

Nick Anicich let committee members know that the Farm to School Program is almost at public comment period stage. He also shared with committee members briefly on the vision of Farm to School program. one of the highlights was that the program ensures every student at every school has access to freshly prepared, locally sourced, climate smart, organic and regeneratively grown food. The program comprises regional staff that connect with farmers and producer engagement specialists who assist with school food procurement.

Additionally, Nick stated that the program is in fourth round of grant funding and is in early development stage. The program will be open for public comments by end of June. The program plans to have applications open from August through the end of October and awards will be done Spring of next year. Further, the program plans to have 3 grant track opportunities: 1) K-12 procurement and education for schools, 2) Farm to School Technical Assistance Sub-award Grant, and 3) Farm to School Producer and Food Hub grant.

Committee member Anna Knight asked about Track 2 (Readiness for Producers) to better understand the type of assistance producers receive and whether those services are already being provided by producer liaisons in the field. Nick explained that many small-scale farmers face challenges that affect their resilience, such as limited relationships with schools, reliance on grants to stay in business, and insufficient planning. He noted that Track 3 is designed to support producers and food hubs in applying for funding to expand their production, processing, and distribution capacity so they can better sell to schools.

Public comment: none

(8) DISCUSSION: SMALL SCALE DEFINITION

- Work Group Draft Framework

Thea Rittenhouse provided committee members with a summary report for the workgroup members Luis Elizondo and Beverly McKinney, who were voted to consolidate themes from presentations and a survey to assist in putting together a draft framework for the committee to consider. Based on the discussions, the working group felt that the current existing USDA definition is not an issue but keeping the USDA benchmarks of \$350,000 or less is indicative of a small-scale farming operation. However, there are members who felt that the numbers should be adjusted upward, considering that it's more expensive to do business here in California. The group proposed the numbers to be within the range of \$100,000 - \$ 1 million in gross annual income.

Committee member Beverly stated that the consideration is not about solving farmers' problems but it's for looking at all kinds of vulnerabilities that have been discussed during presentations and the cost it takes to carry out an implementation.

Public comment: none

- Work Group Next Steps – Possible Action Item

Committee member Josefina Chavez requested members to be granted additional time to review the documents to familiarize themselves with the content. Thea agreed and proposed a two-week period for reading the materials and asked members to provide comments, which all committee members agreed.

Committee member Josefina asked if she could join existing workgroup. Due to Bagley Keene rule, Thea Rittenhouse informed them that they can form a separate workgroup of not more than 2 persons as long they are reading from the same shared documents and they share notes to receive comments from all other members. The comments will be submitted via email directly to CDFA staff.

Thea Rittenhouse called for a motion to form a second work group consisting of committee members Josefina Chavez and Wendy Kornberg. Committee member Beverly McKinney moved to approve the formation of the workgroup, and committee member Luis Elizondo seconded the motion. All committee members voted "Aye." The motion was unanimously approved.

Committee member Josefina Chavez asked whether funding for various programs, particularly under USDA, will be affected during the change in the federal administration. Thea Rittenhouse stated that the legal department is currently managing the situation and will provide updates once they become available. She also noted that an injunction has been granted.

Public Comments: none

(9) NEXT MEETING: September 19th, 2026

Thea Rittenhouse announced that the next meeting will be September 19, 2026. Details of the meeting will be provided before the date approaches.

(10) ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.