

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 MARCH 17, 2026

Item
No.

(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse opened the quarterly meeting, welcomed all attendees, and introduced CDFA staff and speakers to the first SSPAC quarterly meeting of 2026.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present

Chair Justin Miller

Luis Elizondo

Beverly McKinney

Patrick Mitchell

Lovepreet Kaur

Veronica Mazariegos Anastassiou

Kerry McGrath

Absent

Anna Nakamura Knight

Wendy Kornberg

Josefina Lara Chavez

CDFA Staff

Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Carmen Carrasco, Farm to School Network Lead

Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration

Lydia Maranga, Analyst I

Carney King, Legislative Manager

Sylva Carpenter, CDFA Executive Office Intern

(3) CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair Justin Miller called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m.

(4) CDFA DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

- Legislative Office- Carney King, CDFA Legislative Manager

Carney King provided an update on the bills introduced or amended since the last SSPAC quarterly meeting. The bills of interest to the committee include Wine labelling, Water Supply Protection Act, Employment (minimum wage for agricultural workers), Food labeling, Foodbank Donations Tax Credit, and a new bill to update the definition of socially definition farmer/rancher within the Farmer Equity Act of 2017. A summary of the bills was provided to members after the meeting.

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

Arima Kozina informed the committee on two major budget hearing dates. The January 10, 2026, budget proposed by the Governor's Office is currently in the Senate subcommittee 4 and will have a committee hearing on April 9th. Arima informed the committee members that there will be opportunity for public comments before the date of the hearing once the agenda is posted. Committee members are encouraged to participate or invite the public during the hearing in the Senate subcommittee 4, and Assembly subcommittee on April 22nd.

Another item is Spring Finance Letters which will be released on April 1st. There will be no big news coming until the budget's May revise is released. Arima can provide updates after couple of hearings to inform on what is next. Arima also reminded the committee members to keep an eye on Senate Subcommittee 2, which covers climate and urged committee members to check the subcommittee's agenda because although it doesn't cover CDFA specifically, there is bond money that is tied to CDFA's programs.

Public comments: None

- Prop 4 Grant Programs Update – Thea Rittenhouse

Thea Rittenhouse provided an update on grants and upcoming programs and initiatives in CDFA's Office of Farm to Fork and Proposition 4 of the Climate Bond

1. The Farm to School Incubator Grant Program has \$20 million available, and program materials are being prepared for solicitation.
2. Two Farmers' Market Infrastructure Programs (Mobile Farmer's Market and year-round farmers' market infrastructure) will be released later in the year, as outreach and stakeholder engagement are still pending.
3. The Urban Agriculture Program received \$20 million through Proposition 4, allowing the Office of Farm to Fork to release a second program solicitation.

4. Other Proposition 4 programs through the Climate Bond include the Tribal Food Sovereignty Program, which will be administered through the Office of Grants and Administration. Approximately \$14 million will be available and CDFA will conduct robust engagements and consultations with Tribal entities throughout 2026.
5. Proposition 4-funded Climate Smart Agriculture Programs include the Healthy Soils and SWEEP Programs which received new funding. Solicitations for organizations to apply to distribute individual farmer grants will be open through May 15th. More information can be found on [OARS webpage](#)
6. Equipment Sharing Program: This is a new program and approximately \$15 million is available for the establishment of a Regional Farm Equipment Sharing Program. This program will be designed to facilitate equipment sharing and potentially lead to cooperative development among farmers and ranchers.

Public Comments: None

(5) ACTION ITEM- Approval of December 2, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Motion to Approve: Member Anastassiou

Motion Seconded: Member Mitchell

All Committee Members present unanimously approved the December 2, 2025, Minutes.

(6) COMMITTEE UPDATES

- BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Update- Hung K Doan

BIPOC Advisory Committee Chair Hung K. Doan provided an update on key items discussed by the BIPOC committee throughout 2025. Discussion topics included improving communication, enhancing language access, and strengthening accountability within CDFA to better serve underserved and historically underrepresented producers. The committee has emphasized the need to develop multilingual and culturally relevant outreach materials to address the growing demand for technical assistance.

The BIPOC Advisory Committee will also be discussing some of the issues discussed in SSPAC Committee such as the definition for Small-Scale Producers.

Comments: None.

Thea Rittenhouse reminded members about the BIPOC Advisory Committee meeting taking place in Fresno on Thursday March 19th and extended the invitation to all committee members and members of the public to join in-person or through Zoom.

- Strategic Growth Council's (SGC) Agricultural Land Equity Taskforce (ALEFT) Final Report update- Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

Thea Rittenhouse informed the committee that the final report was submitted in January 2026. The Taskforce had the opportunity to present the report to the Strategic Growth Council. Key topics highlighted in the report include the prioritization of tribal land stewardship, land tenure, and related recommendations. Additional highlights focused on urban agriculture and ways the State, Legislature, and Governor Office can better support urban agriculture initiatives.

The report summary is currently in English, and the team is working to produce it in 6 different languages (Spanish, simplified Chinese, Korean, Hmong, Lu Mien, and Punjabi). The report is available on the [State of California Strategic Growth Council](#).

Public comments: None

(7) DEFINING SMALL-SCALE FARMS PANEL PRESENTATION

California Small-Scale Producers and Agritourism - Operations

- Rachael Callahan, UC-SAREP Agritourism Coordinator

According to Rachel, USDA does not have an official definition of agritourism but collects related data through the U.S. Census of Agriculture by tracking income from farm related activities. This data excludes the value of agricultural products sold directly to consumers on the farm. She emphasized that agritourism is an important marketing outlet although it remains an active area of research. Rachael noted that 60% of California agritourism operations are on farm businesses that operate on less than 50 acres. Based on the data, she stated that farm size is not a limiting factor in the amount of agritourism income a farm can generate.

Committee member Patrick Mitchel requested Rachael to share her presentation slides. Thea Rittenhouse will share those with committee members once received.

Committee Chair Justin asked whether the data provided for income presented was cumulative and whether there is any data that defines small-scale producers.

While USDA does not define what are considered small-scale producers, Rachel explained on what could be counted as agritourism income and farm income. For example - when a farmer provides hayrides, that is counted as agritourism versus a farmer selling strawberries, which is counted as agricultural income.

Committee Member Kerry McGrath asked if there is potential for obtaining better data from counties to reflect the full economic value of agritourism under local agritourism ordinances. Rachael responded that this is unlikely to happen soon, but continued

advocacy could help move it forward. She explained that the main limitations are the lack of funding to support this type of research and the absence of definitive regulations.

Committee Member Patrick Mitchell asked if there is a statewide regulatory framework. Rachel explained that many states have statutes that provide liability protections for agritourism operators, which also help define agritourism. She noted that while similar legislation has been proposed in California several times, it has never advanced in the legislative process.

Committee member Beverly asked if farm stands count as agritourism and if farm insurance is required. Rachel informed said that agritourism has its own insurance, separate from regular farm business insurance.

- Small scale Farming and SGMA Implementation- Catherine Van Dyke, CAFF and Ngodoo Atume, UC-SAREP

Catherine Van Dyke and team presented a draft report funded by the Department of Water Resources (DWR). The report focuses on ways to provide technical assistance to small-scale producers on Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) implementation guidelines. The team engaged small-scale producers across 23 counties and is preparing a comprehensive final report to present to DWR. The intended audience includes groundwater sustainability agencies and state agencies with the goal of supporting SGMA implementation in a way that prevents disproportionate impacts on small-scale farmers.

The draft report defines small-scale producers as those directly involved in the daily operations of a commercial farm focused on local food production. Instead of using income thresholds, they identify small-scale producers based on vulnerability under SGMA guidelines. Their report highlights four key opportunities of interest to CDFA and SSPAC committees: 1) identifying small-scale producers at the local level, 2) coordinating efforts to help small scale producers stay in business, 3) ensuring small-scale producers are valued in groundwater management, and 4) supporting farmers through transition pathways.

The team would appreciate any feedback from committee members of CDFA for their draft report before finalizing it.

Committee Member Beverly McKinney thanked Catherine's team for including data on older farmers who are retiring and whose land may be lying fallow. She noted that she learned cover crops are encouraged to help reduce pest pressure. Beverly also asked about groundwater recharge. Catherine responded that only certain areas of the state are well suited for recharge.

Committee member Luis Elizondo asked what kind of education is there available for farmers. Ngodoo Atume said that her and Catherine are part of the Underrepresented Communities Technical Assistance (URCTA) Program that provides technical assistance on water regulations to these communities.

Thea Rittenhouse asked about the report's timeline, including when the final report will be released and what potential impact it may have on farmers. Catherine explained that the report will first be submitted to the Department of Water Resources and will be used for both regulatory work and collaborative partnerships. She added that the team will conduct outreach to help inform policymakers about the risks and barriers small-scale farmers face. In addition, they aim to equip local agencies with a toolkit that can help protect small-scale farmers. This resource is expected to be particularly valuable for groundwater sustainability agencies.

Thea asked the team to share the finalized report with her and added that although it is in the context of SGMA, the report might be helpful to SSPAC as they work in developing the definition of a small-scale producer. Committee Chair Justin Miller thanked the presenters for their time.

Public Comment- None

(8) ACTION ITEMS: CREATE WORK GROUP FOR DEVELOPING DRAFT DEFINITION OF SMALL-SCALE

- 2026 Timeline: Draft Definition of Small-Scale Producer

Committee Chair Justin Miller asked committee members to start working on a draft small-scale producer definition and suggested that each member develops their own definition and share it with the group, publicly or anonymously.

Thea Rittenhouse provided guidance on the formation of workgroups while adhering to Bagley Keene rule. Thea emphasized that it would be good if the committee could have a draft small-scale producer definition by the end of the calendar year.

Committee Chair Justin stated that once members are done drafting their individualized definitions, they share it with the workgroup working on the initial tasks of defining small-scale producer.

Thea Rittenhouse provided a calendar timeline (through a PowerPoint presentation) on how the committee can move forward and take next steps. By September the committee should have a draft definition and in October, compile some of the feedback from others. Thea is hoping that the committee will have a draft definition by the December joint SSPAC & State Board meeting. The committee can then revisit its workgroup(s) and see if adjustments need to be made.

Committee member Patrick Mitchell asked whether the committee could have multiple working groups. Thea let members know that the rules do not prohibit several work groups. However, the committee should consider what aspect of the definition each group would be working on, for example, one workgroup can come up with a framework.

The committee asked to have the materials presented so far be consolidated to provide them a baseline - Thea will work on compiling these materials. Committee Member Beverly suggested that the consolidation should be done before the end of April.

Committee Chair Justin Miller proposed the establishment of a workgroup to review the materials that have been presented and small-scale producer definition that each member creates.

Beverly McKinney asked whether a workgroup of 3 or 4 people is feasible, but Thea explained that due to Bagley Keene rules, having more than two people in a sub-group is considered a subcommittee which will require adherence to Bagley Keene guidelines, including posting an agenda 10 days before the group meets and publication of meeting minutes. She also reminded the members to complete the small-scale producer survey that was shared a while ago and suggested one work group could organize the survey answers.

Committee Chair Justin Miller called for a motion to create a work group. Committee Member Lovepreet moved to approve the motion, and Committee Member Luis Elizondo seconded it. All Committee Members present unanimously approved the motion.

Public comment: None.

Thea Rittenhouse asked the committee members to approve Luis Elizondo and Beverly McKinney as inaugural voluntary members of the workgroup. Committee Chair Justin motioned to approve the two members. Veronica Anastassiou moved the motion, and Patrick Mitchell seconded the motion. All members present unanimously approved the motion.

Committee Chair Justin and Thea Rittenhouse asked committee members to respond to the survey and will work with Sylvia Carpenter send out the survey again.

(9) TRAININGS REMINDERS

Committee Chair Justin reminded members to submit their Form 700 and complete their Ethics training. Thea Rittenhouse noted that late Form 700 submissions can result in fines and reminded members to complete any required post appointment training to avoid penalties.

(10) NEXT QUARTERLY MEETING: June 18th, 2026

The next meeting will be on June 18, 2026 via MS Teams.

(11) PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

(12) ADJOURNMENT

Committee Chair Justin Miller called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Committee member Veronica Anastassiou moved to adjourn, and Committee Member Patrick Mitchell seconded the motion. All committee members present unanimously approved the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:44 pm.