

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

Location: Online via Zoom

Contact:

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MEETING MINUTES OF August 29, 2024

Item No.

(1) Welcome and Introductions

Farmer Equity Advisor, Thea Rittenhouse welcomes everyone at 1:03pm.

Secretary Ross welcomes committee members and thanks them for their service, provides a comment on the Local Food Assistance Program (LFAP) and the most recent round of Farm to School Incubator grant program. Secretary commends the committee's work and contribution to the health of the community.

Thea Rittenhouse- No major department updates

(2) Call to Order – Committee Chair Justin Miller

Committee Chair, Justin Miller calls the meeting to order at 1:06pm on August 29th.

Present: Beverly McKinney, Lovepreet Kaur, Patrick Mitchell, Josefina Lara Chavez, Veronica Mazariegos-Anastassiou, Anna Nakamura Knight, Wendy Kornberg, Luis Elizondo, Justin Miller

Absent: Kerry McGrath

(3) Action Item

a. Approval of Minutes of May 23, 2024

Voting – All present members voted yes

Minutes approved

Public Comments: None

(4) Discussion Items

a. BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee Update- Thea Rittenhouse

The Land Equity Task Force (LETf) Liaison, Qi Zhou gave an update on the last LETf meeting in Fresno on August 15. The taskforce formed several sub-committees to address grants and resources, committee outreach and resources development/saving. The next meeting of the LETf will be in November in the Central Coast.

The BIPOC Committee heard similar presentations to those that will be given today to this committee from the DWR, CUSP Program, and Budget overview.

Public Comments: None

b. Overview of Final Governor's Budget- Arima Kozina, Deputy Secretary for Admin & Finance

This year's total budget shortfall was \$44.9B dollars, \$17.3B had been addressed in an early action agreement (outlined during the last meeting), but the May revise included an additional \$27.6B shortfall that needed to be addressed. For CDFA's budget, some funds were restored from the originally proposed cuts.

The budget included 42.4 million dollars in reductions, which was less than what was originally proposed, and 159.9 million was protected, which demonstrates the Administration's commitment to many programs. There were 6 budget change proposals (BCPs) that were approved totaling \$168.8M, mostly in emergency action, and under \$100M for a border protection station.

The investments that CDFA protected as one-time General Fund (GF) programs: \$52.8M Farm to School Incubator has been protected, \$21M for the Methane Reduction Program was preserved through shifting funds into a future Fiscal Years and different funding source (from GF to Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund- GGRF). \$20.6M of State Water Efficiency Enhancement Program (SWEEP) money is protected but won't be available to 2026-2027 and is now in the GGRF fund. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is not expected until FY 26/27.

\$33.2M in the CA Nutrition Incentives Program was protected, as well as \$17.9M for the California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Grant Program. Initially, there were different pots of funding for CUSP, but new language has been added now, indicating the funding will cover weather related disaster relief. \$14.4M for Farms to Community was preserved. The caveat on these investments is that no future new investments in these programs are expected.

There were early action investments, including \$22.1M for the fruit fly response, and approved BCP included the Blythe Border Protection relocation project.

GF one-time reductions: In Healthy Refrigeration, and Water Efficiency Technical Assistance Programs. There was also reversion of funds for some programs that had balances left due to different reasons, including SWEEP, Community Resilience program, CUSP TA (\$200k), Pollinator habitat, multi-benefit land repurposing program, and the Governor's Office BIZ drought and flood relief program.

Other statewide reductions: Through an expenditure freeze, position sweep, and an 8% reduction to state operations. The impacts of these are not yet known.

Committee member Luis Elizondo- What will the next year's budget look like?

Arima Kozina- The 8% in operations reduction is meant to solve an anticipated budget shortfall for both 24/25 and 25/26. May budget revises also help with the projections.

Committee member Veronica Mazariegos-Anastasiou- How does the Dept make a case for future funding of these programs that are being cut now? Is there a strategy or evaluation to determine if program will be re-funded?

Arima Kozina- For certain programs, there are specific metrics that can be quantified (e.g. greenhouse gas reductions), but for the most part, each program is tasked with making their own analysis to quantify benefits for when GF is available, on a case-by-case basis.

Public Comments: None

c. SSPAC's Priorities Survey Results- Thea Rittenhouse

The survey is an agenda item from last meeting, in response to a request from SSPAC committee member Anna Nakamura Knight to create a survey to capture the SSPAC member priorities. Thea Rittenhouse shared a table of the results, which were organized in three areas: 1) challenges (land, capital, market access), 2) main topics to be discussed 3) potential outcomes, and asked members for next steps.

Committee Chair Justin Miller opened the floor for discussion. Member Knight asked for time to review and proposed to hold off discussion until a future meeting.

Member Mazariegos asked if the committee can provide feedback between now and the next quarterly meeting. Chair Miller confirmed members can do so via email directly to him, with a cc to Thea and Carmen.

Member Luis Elizondo commented that more review of survey results, action is needed and proposed committee begins to discuss the items they can address. Chair Miller asked everyone to review the table and brainstorm action plan(s) to address their priorities.

Mr. Elizondo asked how the priorities/topics can be brought to the people at CDFA responsible for writing RFPs, as he believes this is where a change can be made, for instance, the CUSP program.

Thea Rittenhouse mentioned that there will be discussion today about CUSP but additionally, she can arrange for program managers of certain grant programs to attend future SSPAC quarterly meetings and discuss RFPs, for instance, the new Community Food Hubs program. Ms. Rittenhouse asked committee members to submit actionable items in advance of the next meeting, or as Mr. Elizondo suggested, take something more specific, like the drafting of RFPs to discuss individually.

Member Mazariegos agreed with Mr. Elizondo, saying that the table should serve as a framework for priorities but also look at existing programming, and how can these priorities be incorporated into new initiatives.

Committee Chair Miller Justin asked members to brainstorm and submit their actionable items via email.

There is a question in the Q&A chat- Attendee would like to share financial resources that may help producers based on the items shared here. Thea Rittenhouse shared the Farm_Equity@cdfa.ca.gov email to submit the information. Member Knight asked for a copy of the priorities survey table to be shared with the committee.

d. Presentation from Department of Water Resources (DWR) – Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Technical Assistance Program for Underserved and Small-Scale Farmers

Thea Rittenhouse introduced Jane Gray from Dudek, Lauren Crotty from DWR, Catherine Van Dyke from CAFF, and Ngodoo Atume, from UCANR. Lauren Crotty introduced other staff on the call.

Jane Gray opened the presentation mentioning the underlying legislation pieces that were considered in the Under resourced Community Technical Assistance (URCTA) program design including AB 685, human right to water, SGMA, and AB 1348 the Farmer Equity Act, from which the program pulled much of the language for defining a small-scale farmer and program eligibility criteria. The human right to water component was particularly important since about 1M Californians lack access to safe, clean, and affordable drinking water and most of this population is in underserved, underrepresented communities. Native Americans are in a category where they are not afforded access to clean, safe water thus, the population was also considered in the program.

Program purpose- 1) communicate and engage with underrepresented communities, 2) communicate with groundwater sustainability agencies, and 3) provide technical assistance. Program partners: UC Davis law clinic, The Water Foundation, CAFF, UCANR The eligibility criteria for small farmers under the program had a 1-year, open comment period.

There are 3 pieces to URCTA eligibility criteria for small farmers: 1) Somebody that is socially disadvantaged (per AB 1348), grazes livestock on rangeland, and has gross meat sales income of less than \$1 million per year. 2) Or operating 80 acres or less (also needs to qualify under one or more additional criteria points- SDFR, selling more than 50% through direct markets, cultivating crops and not represented by a commodity group, and moving into regenerative agriculture practices. The program understands that the regenerative practice definition is still in development at CDFA and will be updated once that definition is available.

3) Farmer or rancher operating 200 acres or less and meets additional criteria (SDFR, diverse crop mix of 4 or more crops, 75% sales through direct market, no representation from a commodity board/trade group, undergoing transformation from conventional to regenerative).

Committee Chair Justin Miller asked for clarification on what representation from a commodity board is, and to clarify the definition of direct marketing.

Jane Gray- A good example for this type of representation is the CA strawberry commission.

Mr. Miller made an additional comment on whether a farmer that sells through a commodity board but not necessarily involved in their work would be considered represented.

Lauren Crotty- The commodity board representation is an optional criterion, at long as you meet two other criteria points, you qualify. For direct market, the program refers to farmer markets or direct to consumer.

Jane Gray continued- The provision of the technical assistance (TA) services is within SGMA designated basins thus, applicants need to be in these areas to be eligible for the TA.

Jane discussed the Support and TA services provided over the past 3 years, including materials in several languages including Mixteco, Punjabi, and others. 7 videos in 9 languages, and able to provide more support in other languages. The TA is provided through a needs assessment TA provided includes groundwater level monitoring, aquifer testing, soil moisture monitoring, and groundwater quality testing, analysis of well interference, well location, design and construction, among others.

Jane asked committee members of their knowledge of URCTA- and asked for an opportunity to collaborate. Lauren Crotty- provided clarification that the URCTA is not a grant program, but all services are provided free of charge.

Committee members Anna Knight asked for clarification on the two-tier system for small farmers of 80 acres and below that have specific needs, and 200 acres or more who have different needs, but doesn't see the two-tier system for ranchers, what is the reason for this and how is the program ensuring ranchers are getting the support they need?

Lauren Crotty- The program was not looking to define what a small-scale farmer is but find a set criteria to say these are the small-scale individuals the program is trying to serve through technical assistance. At the beginning of the program, ranchers had an income gap, but that was changed as ranchers expressed there would be no way for them to qualify for program based on a \$1M income limit. The program also has flexibility and if something is not working, they can assess and change it.

Committee member Knight asked how a producer can prove that they are employing regenerative agricultural practices, since these are hard to observe and measure.

Lauren Crotty- The program is looking at ways to quantify the practices to be able to defend and justify having them in their criteria. Perhaps they will ask that applicants participate in one of CDFA programs for regen ag. The program has not had an opportunity to work with someone that defines themselves as regen ag grower yet but are open to learning more.

Jane Gray added that everything is accompanied by a site visit preceded by a phone assessment, and the program does not move forward without an evaluation.

Anna Knight- Under the URCTA program, what is a diverse crop mix? When it comes to citrus, oranges, mandarins, this may seem diversified, but probably not as the

program intends. Member Wendy Kornberg had a similar question about how the program developed the idea of crop diversity.

Lauren Crotty- Formal feedback suggested a higher number of crop types, so this was a way to compromise. The four-crop type is meant more for the larger acreage farmers. Originally, their cap was 50 acres, but the feedback was that it was too low. Lauren reminded everyone that farmer needs to meet 2 or more criteria points.

Catherine Van Dyke commented that CAFF is grateful to be part of the process. CAFF wanted to prioritize that resources are getting to those most at risk with SGMA, which may be different from the definition of a small farmer. CAFF just hired 7 folks that will be providing TA, since SGMA is different for each sub-basin.

Ngodoo Atume - UC Davis small legal clinic provides support for producers through 1:1 support.

Member Knight- Legal issues are a challenge for some farmers affected by SGMA and said that the legal piece of the adjudication is the largest threat for many small farmers.

Lauren Crotty- They are excited about the legal clinic, as they are looking at the adjudication and pumping pieces. For now, the program is limited to SGMA designated basins.

Jane Gray suggested that members contact their assembly member/ senator to let them know about your needs and priorities.

Anna mentioned that she did not learn about the public comment on the definition until late June. It is important for farmers to stay informed, as many are not aware how much SGMA will impact them.

Lauren Crotty clarified that the program did not have a comment period, but rather asked for feedback from different organizations including Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) after they shared the information with them.

Public comments: None

Thea Rittenhouse asked members to move the small farmer discussion item at the end.

Committee took a break from 2:29p to 2:34p

e. CDFA CUSP Grant Program: Expansion of Relief Grants to include “Disaster Relief”- Input on Program Priorities and Disaster Scenarios facing CA Small-scale Producers- Faye Lessler, Grant Analyst with the Grants Office

Faye Lessler- There is up to 17M in funding for extreme weather and other climate impacts. The Grants Administration Office is requesting feedback from this Committee on the proposed new guidelines on allowable costs. Ms. Lessler clarified that the OGA has no official date for the funding availability, and information on a public RFP or internal for current CUSP block grant administration is not yet available. Once the information is updated, they will make sure to share with this committee.

Ms. Lessler presented and reviewed the table containing the new CUSP- expenses that have not been officially approved yet.

Comment in the Q&A box- Meaghan Donovan at UCANR asked to clarify if the expenses are specifically for flood.

Faye clarified that the expenses are not only for flood, but for extreme weather-related impacts.

Thea Rittenhouse- Explained that comments from the public should be made at the end of the presentation and after committee members have a chance to discuss.

Committee member Beverly asked if the information has been shared with current CUSP TA providers.

Faye Lessler- Yes, the information was sent out to regular CUSP TA providers as well as block grant administrators.

Member Josefina Lara Chavez asked if there are parameters around photos accepted for loss verification purposes.

Faye Lessler clarified that there are no specific guidelines for photos, but comparison photos between two periods are allowed to demonstrate damage.

Josefina mentioned that for flood damage, photos were a challenge. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) sometimes takes a while to come and inspect damage. From a technical assistance aspect, it would be good to provide guidance for farmers on the type of photos they need to have in cases of emergencies, so they are better prepared.

Committee Chair Justin Miller asked if the photos need to be geo-tagged. Faye Lessler comments that is not a requirement. Mr. Miller commented that he has not seen anything for permaculture crops, like trees or vineyards.

Faye Lessler explained there are some expenses included for orchards.

Committee member Luis Elizondo- Has not seen beehive loss included in the CUSP program before but is aware of the USDA Emergency Relief (ERP) program. Isn't there an overlap between both? Commented he applied to ERP as he sustained heavy beehive losses in 2022 and mentioned the potential for double dipping between similar programs. ERP asked to compare losses between 2018/20219 to 2021/2022.

Faye- Although the guidelines are not completely finalized, CUSP will allow producers to go back to year 2022. She will make a note about this question to ensure it gets addressed.

Thea Rittenhouse- Commented that this could be addressed during CUSP verification of losses to ensure a farmer has not received funds from the USDA or other programs. The idea is for CUSP relief to support farmers that for some reason, have not qualify for other relief funds.

Faye- If a producer were to get assistance from USDA, but has additional expenses for a different loss, CUSP would consider the eligibility.

Member Veronica Mazariegos commented that when growers have a highly diversified farm, the ERP program is not too flexible, as it is mostly one-crop oriented, thus, she appreciates the flexibility CUSP has to offer. Commented that when a farmer is a tenant and incurs infrastructure loss, how can CUSP help in addition to avoiding tension between owner/tenant?

Member Knight- Acknowledged how much more inclusive extensive CUSP is especially as a single-issue farmer concerned with biological pests & quarantine damage. Asked if crop losses related to a quarantine (and not the actual pest) are included in CUSP. Some organic producers are not allowed to sell their produce even after treating the disease or could not get organic inputs for treatment.

Faye Lessler- This round of CUSP funding includes pests for livestock. The question about crop losses due to quarantine will be brought to management for consideration.

Justin Miller commented that he echoes Anna's comment. Added that CUSP should also consider the replacement of trees for growers. Older trees that are taken out of production have more value than newer trees. When insurance companies value these older trees, they should consider the value of the tree at that stage, which is significantly higher than a new tree.

Committee member Wendy Kornberg asked if CUSP applies to small cannabis farms- since in California, cannabis is defined as an ag product, not an agricultural crop.

Faye Lessler- This is a great question that will need to be discussed further and will be bringing it to management.

Member Josefina Lara Chavez- Mentioned the mental crisis that comes with all emergency situations. For farmers that seek mental health services- will this be allowed?

Faye Lessler- She will bring this up to management. Finalized the presentation saying that the feedback on the new CUSP guidelines is due to the OGA via email on September 4, 2024.

Member Veronica Mazariegos- Asked about the grant amount limits for individual farmers. Is there guidance on minimum/maximum awards, as she has seen variations depending on TA organizations.

Faye Lessler- The existing funding for drought caps the amount at \$20,000 per annually (not necessarily from Jan to Jan). CDFA checks/ verifies- if a farmer is eligible for the 20k in a year, and if expenses are different, they can still apply for the difference. For now, this amount is not expected to change.

Thea Rittenhouse commented that committee members can also provide feedback on the CUSP amount, if they feel it should be different.

Member Mazariegos commented that the amount is good, but other program amounts could be higher. Some TA providers start at 5k, which seems small.

Faye Lessler asked if the question is whether a farmer can apply for 20k for flood and another for 20k for wildfire relief within the same period, which is not allowed.

Veronica rephased the question to ask that if farm A is experiencing a certain disaster, and farmer B is experiencing a different issue, can they each apply for the emergency that relates specifically to them, as opposed to CUSP being used for one single item (e.g. drought) Can CUSP evaluate the scenarios for each farmer?

Faye Lessler- Yes, the new CUSP guidelines allow different farmers to request funding for different types of extreme weather-related expenses, and farmers can request relief going back, so the program is more inclusive in that sense.

Anna Knight commented that one of the key challenges for CUSP is that funding is available through TA providers. Her understanding is that during the last round of CUSP funding, there were not enough TA providers to apply for the TA component. What is the plan about increasing engagement so this funding can get to the farmers?

Faye Lessler- Thanked Anna for the question and will make a note and bring up to management.

Member Josefina Lara Chavez- Last year during the floods, some farmers lost everything, and they didn't have enough documentation, such as receipts. She would like for the OGA to consider what to do in these cases. In terms of the technical assistance providers, can there be a rubric that can be shared with farmers to make them aware of the type of documents, guidance on what CDFA may need so they are better prepared to apply to emergency programs.

Faye Lessler- This type of guidance was not made available for CUSP drought as the program was transitioning to the OGA, but they hope they can have better guidelines for flood.

Public comments:

Meaghan Donovan- Program Manager, UCANR Small Farms Network.

Comment- Suggested the extreme weather definition to include hail, snowstorms.

CUSP verification checklist- encourages CDFA to expand this to the other items on slide 2 to verify and use as a tool to document the different losses, especially in instances where there are no documents like Josefina explained.

Vang Moua- UCANR Small Farms Network

Comment- Many farmers have a lot of different farming practices, use of tools & equipment, especially high tunnels that use PVC, or wood. A lot of times, they lack receipts or documentation, so he'd appreciate that the CUSP Program be mindful of these cases and the supporting documentation these farmers are submitting.

f. USDA Southwest Regional Food Business Center- Feedback on guidelines for Better Business Grant Program- Carmen Carrasco

Small Farm Business Liaison- Carmen Carrasco- provided an update on the SWRFBC- invited committee members to attend the listening session on 08/30 to provide guidance on the Business Builder Grant Program. There are some pre-established guidelines that CDFA is looking to get feedback on. The presentation is also available for more review, comments are requested by Friday, September 6.

Public Comments: None

g. Definition of small-scale operator as outline on the letter to Secretary

Committee Chair Justin Miller opened the discussion commenting his concern is that there are a lot of different farmers (wholesale, others are high commodity). Some farmers have elevated revenue but higher overhead. Wholesale farmer revenue is smaller, but so are expenses. Suggested that the different type of operations be considered when defining what a small-scale producer is, especially for diverse growers, those that support livable wages for employees, and have a unique experience, as opposed to just gross revenue.

Thea Rittenhouse- Offered some context saying that at the state level, there is no formal definition, but the agency uses the USDA income guidelines for small-scale. Ms. Rittenhouse clarified that there has not been a timeline assigned through the State Board for the definition, but this should be the beginning of the conversation.

Member Anna Knight referenced the letter from the State Board to CDFA, citing that her understanding was that the committee would provide advising on the process of defining what a small-scale producer is. Ms. Knight explained she doesn't believe it is the responsibility of this committee to draft the definition, but rather provide advice on it. This conversation about small farmers is already happening at different agencies, thus, the committee should not be tasked with defining but providing recommendations on what is proposed by others.

Luis Elizondo- If the committee decides to take a stab at the definition, he recommends ownership, revenue, acreage, be considered.

Justin Miller commented that the input of the committee is important in giving farmers a voice, especially since the language from the USA on small-scale is vague.

Member Wendy Kornberg asked if the discussion about small scale can be shifted from a revenue focus to profit. Small farmers are doing many positive things like adopting regeneration practices that are more expensive and represent a higher cost. Suggested the definition looks at profit as a potential definer instead of revenue and what issues would arise.

Member Mazariegos-Anastasiou agreed on the revenue vs. profit and also that it is not the responsibility of the committee to define small-scale, and doesn't think acreage makes a difference, but structure type does, family farm vs. co-op, diverse marketing strategies, and a values-based food supply chain that is more tied to interest in the community (e.g., farm to community).

Josefina Lara Chavez commented that she'd be interested in supporting drafting a definition and asked committee members who else would be interested in this work. Justin Miller agreed and said that since farmers are the ones doing the work and taking the risks, they should be at the table. Mr. Miller commented that he does not want his farm to be defined by someone with a different context.

Member Patrick Mitchell- Commented he appreciates all perspectives. Agreed that the committee should advise on a process to establish the definition, and feels the committee should play a strong role, but not be the sole developers. This is important due to the different points brought forward about diversity of crops, acreage, etc. Suggested the committee creates a document to guide the process for drafting the definition, including who should provide feedback.

Wendy Kornberg- agreed with all, helping to define the process is great, but doesn't see a harm into providing a draft definition to start with. Mentioned the committee represents enough different types of farmers to get started, "if we don't get it rolling, what looks good on paper doesn't work on the field," and this is an important chance to speak for the people the committee represents.

Anna Knight- Said she appreciates the idea about having a jumping off point- Asked if, in advance of the next meeting, Thea R. and Carmen C. can compile what has been done in terms of defining small-scale producers. Reiterated that she feels proposing a process is the

Josefina Lara Chavez commented she agrees with Wendy Kornberg and asked for next steps. Ms. Kornberg said she agrees on the aggregation.

Thea Rittenhouse- The committee can decide as a group on the next steps and reminded attendees they can decide to create a sub-committee on this topic or make a motion to have it as a future agenda item.

Committee Chair Miller suggested to gather the information first and review it collectively at the next meeting to allow everyone to provide their unique perspective. Mr. Miller will follow up with Thea and Carmen on identifying what has been done on the definition of small-scale farmers before adding it to the next agenda.

Thea Rittenhouse- Clarified for the record that the SSPAC committee has agreed not to form subcommittee about defining small-scale producers but would like to gather the public information on the subject available and discussing it before.

h. Topics for Future Agenda Items- Committee members were reminded to submit any proposals for future agenda items via email to Committee Chair Justin Miller with a cc to Thea Rittenhouse and Carmen Carrasco.

(5) SSPAC Subcommittee Updates- Subcommittee Chair Josefina Lara Chavez

Sub-committee Chair Josefina Lara Chavez started by reminding committee members that the SSPAC sub-committee on defining emergencies for small-scale producers, meets every month for two hours. The sub-committee's work involves developing a draft list of what can constitute emergency scenarios and topics for

small scale producers, and identifying and inviting guest speakers to discuss different topics based on the sub-committee's priorities to help them refine the emergencies.

Ms. Lara Chavez shared a draft list of potential emergencies via Google Drive, and asked committee members to take time to review and comment on the list, as they have been given editing permission.

Josefina mentioned that the speaker for the past meeting on Tuesday, 08/27 was Thea Rittenhouse who presented about the CUSP grant program and how successful the program has been in reaching underserved, and small-scale producers.

Thea Rittenhouse- Committee members are welcome to read the draft list provided, and offered clarification that members should interact with the sub-committee and offer comments during the regularly scheduled sub-committee meetings, to avoid discussing topics outside of the main SSPAC meeting agenda.

Josefina Lara Chavez agreed to remove the editing access for regular committee members and will welcome comments via email.

Ms. Lara Chavez mentioned the next meeting of the sub-committee will take place on Monday, September 30th, from 3p-5p.

No comments from the SSPAC committee are provided.

Public Comments: None

(6) Informational Item

Thea Rittenhouse mentioned that the Ag State Board is not able to convene in November for an in-person, all committee meeting, therefore, the target is now for February 2025.

Public Comments: None

(7) Adjournment

Justin Miller, Committee Chair, adjourned at 4:05p