

CDFA California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Program Technical Assistance Provider Survey

Authors: Krista Marshall, Meaghan Donovan, Ruth Dahlquist-Willard

University of California Small Farms Network

Survey summary

Funded by the California legislature in 2021, the CUSP program provides a wide range of resources for underserved and small producers across California. This program focused on providing vital direct financial assistance for farmers who have been impacted by extreme conditions, from COVID economic relief to drought and extreme weather conditions. In addition, technical assistance (TA) organizations were funded to provide educational support around critical operational, financial, and farm management topics. This survey presents feedback from TA organizations who received funding to distribute direct financial assistance and technical services during the first round of CDFA CUSP Program work (from 2021-2023). The results from this survey showcase the success of TA organizations in reaching diverse communities of small- to mid-scale underserved producers and effectively utilizing CUSP grant resources (**Box 1**). To ensure that the CUSP program continues to successfully reach underserved communities, this study also outlines suggestions to support TA staff capacity building. Below are survey highlights:

- The CUSP program provided culturally appropriate direct technical and financial support to farmers and ranchers of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic identities across California.
- Technical assistance organizations utilized bilingual skills to do outreach and technical assistance in 9 languages.
- Application support for CUSP grants and other direct financial assistance to farmers were the areas of work that required the greatest amount of staff capacity – suggesting investments in staff capacity and resources to support underserved producers is a successful strategy to continue improving public resource accessibility.
- To continue building on successful CUSP programming, survey respondents outlined an interest in creating shared repositories and clearing houses for technical resources, improved communication and coordination across organizations, more streamlined CUSP direct financial assistance administration, and improved communication across TA organizations.

Box 1

Program reflections from the CUSP technical assistance organizations

“We applaud [our grant representative at CDFA] for their professionalism, support and guidance. They were always available and responsive, and was a joy to work with”

“We are slowly building relationships with Latinx producers in our area and still have a lot of work towards that effort... being able to provide producers with application assistance will continue to help strengthen that relationship”

Background and objectives

The California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Program facilitates opportunities for small to medium scale and underserved producers to access *critical* direct financial support and technical assistance amidst unpredictable and urgent challenges to their viability.

The first cohort (2021-2023) of CUSP technical assistance (TA) organizations were funded to provide direct financial relief grants as well as technical support related to farm business management, farm operational concerns, financial planning, and marketing. Given the dynamic scope of this technical assistance work and history of inaccessibility of grant programming to underserved producers, it is essential to gather feedback on program outcomes to ensure continuous success. The UC ANR Small Farms Network conducted a survey in summer 2023 of CUSP TA organizations from the 2021 cohort to gather this feedback. Specifically, we aimed to:

- 1) Provide an overview of the activities and communities reached through the CUSP program,
- 2) Identify gaps in resources and capacity to support CUSP TA organizations, and
- 3) Capture input on program improvements that would address challenges to ensure the CUSP Program continues to meet the needs of underserved and small farming communities.

Survey approach

The UC ANR Small Farms Network designed the CUSP TA Provider survey in spring 2023. Through an interactive process, Small Farms staff incorporated feedback from UC ANR Community Education Specialists familiar with CUSP programming. Once a final draft was completed, the survey was distributed to the CDFA Office of Farmer Equity and select partner organizations to provide a final round of feedback on the survey scope and questions. In summer 2023, the survey was distributed to all points of contact who worked on technical assistance activities as part of the 2021 CUSP grant program cohort. Fifteen surveys were completed, which suggests that at least one staff from each organization provided feedback. The results were analyzed and summarized by staff from the UC ANR Small Farms Network.

Results

CUSP TA providers assisted farmers in accessing critical financial resources

Approximately half of the CUSP TA organizations were non-profit partners, and the rest were Resource Conservation Districts or UC Cooperative Extension. The CUSP TA providers connected producers to financial and technical resources across the state of California. The focal point of CUSP TA providers' work was connecting farmers with financial resources – including CUSP grants, other state grants, and federal grants – as well as assisting them with the application process (**Box 2**). Only 9% and 15% of the activities reported involved farm business management and financial planning or on-farm operational strategies, respectively. While only one of several activities in the scope of CUSP work, this was lower than anticipated considering that business management is an activity outlined as part of the programming. Given that most TA organizations were assisting with financial opportunities for underserved and

Box 2

Most common technical assistance provided through CUSP-funded work

- 1) Application assistance for state economic relief programs
- 2) Application assistance for federal economic relief programs
- 3) Direct grant assistance with CUSP funds
- 4) Technical assistance about tools and strategies to mitigate on-farm challenges related to drought and extreme weather
- 5) Farm business management and financial planning

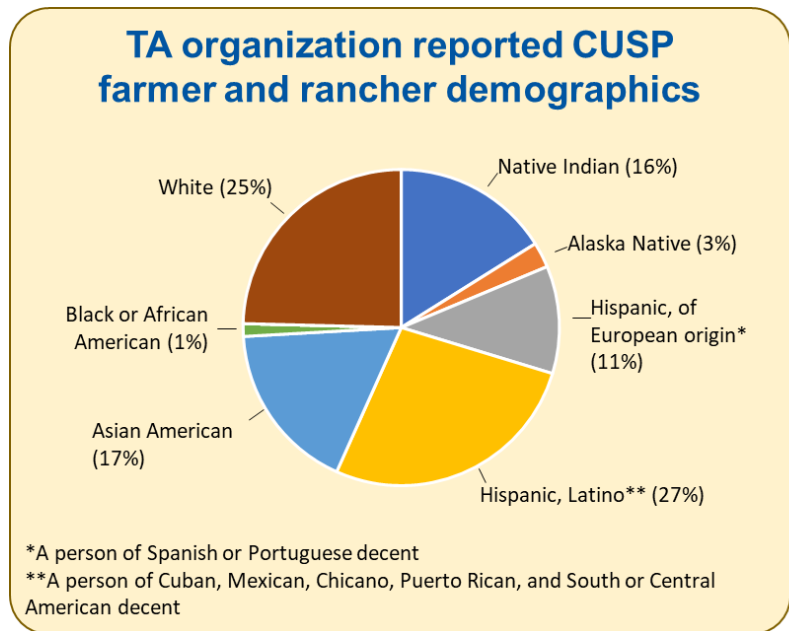
small producers, it is not surprising that just over 50% of technical assistance involved one-on-one farm or office visits, emails, phone call, or other remote assistance. Other technical assistance activities included small and large group events such as tailgates, workshops, and field days (totaling approximately 38% of reported activity types).

CUSP TA providers served diverse populations throughout California. The CUSP program successfully reached many producers who identified with races and ethnicities considered underserved or socially disadvantaged as defined by AB 1348 (Figure 1). Technical assistance organizations reported that they worked with producers who identified as Hispanic (Latino and of European origin), Black, Asian American, White, Indigenous, and Alaska Native. TA organizations also reported that the producers they worked with held diverse gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic identities such as being a beginning, veteran, women, limited resource, or LGBTQIA farmer and rancher.

Additional Focus Needed for Black Producers

While the racial and ethnic demographics reported by CUSP TA organizations showcases the importance of targeted technical assistance in reaching underserved communities, the percentage reported for assisting Black farmers and ranchers was a small proportion. When comparing CUSP TA provider reported percentages to the 2022 US Census data for California, Black demographic representation was approximately 6 points lower. Although the USDA Census of Agriculture demographic data for Black farmers is much lower than the state population level, it may be fruitful to implement a more targeted effort around reaching this community of underserved producers in funded work given the history of discrimination faced by Black producers.

Figure 1



Feedback on Preferred Terminology for Communities Who Have Experienced Systemic Discrimination

TA providers were also asked to report what terminology farmers and ranchers they work with preferred when identifying themselves broadly as communities who have experienced discrimination and systematic oppression. The terminology that resonated the most with producers was “underserved farmers and ranchers” and “BIPOC farmers and ranchers” (23% and 15%, respectively). Other terminology that was reported included “socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers” (15%), historically underserved farmers and ranchers” (12%), and “limited resource farmers and ranchers” (12%).

CUSP Programming Reached Farmers Throughout California

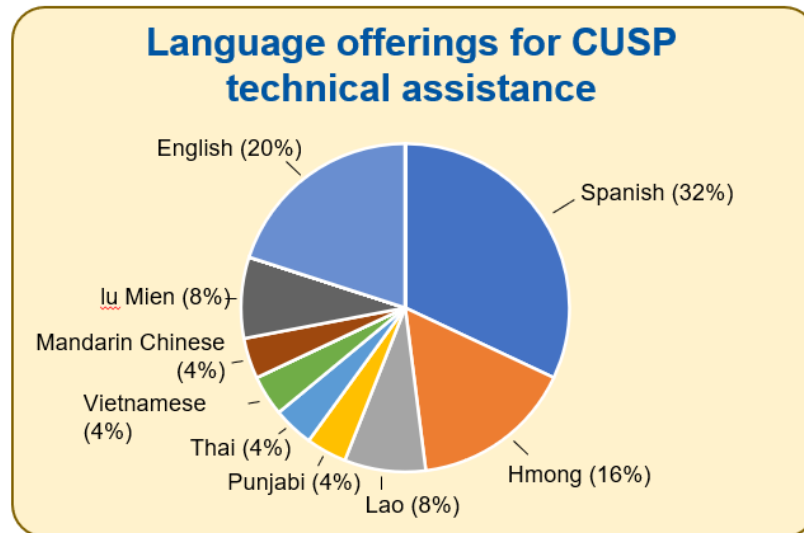
The farmers and ranchers served by the CUSP Program were also located across many geographic regions of California. The South Coast (including counties such as Los Angeles and San Diego) was the region with highest representation (23%). However, other geographic regions represented in the survey were similarly

reported and spanned the Central Coast, San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area, Sacramento Valley, and North Coast (all 15%). During the first round of CUSP funding, there was no CUSP programming reported for the Inland Empire and Imperial Valley, Northern Sierra Nevada Mountains, and Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. However, in the most recent round of funding for 2023, the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (RCD) was selected to administer direct financial assistance. Further programming and targeted outreach efforts in these regions would be useful to ensure that farmers and ranchers located in these areas have opportunities to access critical resources – especially given that these regions have all been impacted by extreme weather and drought conditions.

TA Providers Offered Technical Assistance in Nine Languages

Producers served by CUSP TA providers spoke a wide range of languages including Spanish, English, Hmong, Lao, Lu Mien, Punjabi, Mandarin Chinese, and Thai (**Figure 2**). In total, CUSP TA providers offered technical assistance in 9 languages. This included bilingual programming for farmers and ranchers who spoke one of these languages as their first language with minimal English proficiency. Organizations employed bilingual staff (47%), hired outside translation services (18%), or collaborated with partner organizations (29%) to do outreach and technical assistance. The wide range of language offerings in the CUSP Program and emphasis on bilingual staff support showcases an exciting shift in the diversity of TA organizations in agriculture and the effectiveness of multilingual programmatic work.

Figure 2



Educational resources and knowledge needed to deliver effective CUSP TA programming

Running a small-scale farm or ranch requires knowledge on a wide range of topics, including agricultural production, business management, marketing, and regulatory compliance. While TA providers may focus on a particular topic, for example sustainable production practices or financial planning, having a working knowledge of other aspects of farming assists TA providers in best serving their clientele. To increase their knowledge in areas outside their own expertise, TA providers often seek out training or resources on supplemental topics. However, having the capacity to find resources that are both useful and reputable can be onerous. To learn more about what resources CUSP TA providers were interested in and needed for

their work, this survey solicited feedback on technical topics relevant to the CUSP Program and the ease in which they could find resources.

TA Providers utilized a wide range of resources for their CUSP programming

Based on survey feedback, TA organizations accessed a wide range of technical resources to design and guide their work including topics like finances and marketing, regulations, and on-farm production practices. However, their access frequency and ability to find relevant resources ranged depending on the topic. Based on survey responses, there may be specific challenges around finding relevant supplemental resources related to regulatory and legal topics (indicated by “never”, “rarely”, or “sometimes”; **Table 1**). While slightly less reported, there were TA organizations who reported that they had challenges finding relevant resources related to finance, marketing, and on-farm operational topics.

When supplemental resources were successfully acquired, the most used formats included webinars (20%), conversations with staff from other TA organizations (20%), In-person events (17%), online videos (11%), and social media (11%). There was, however, a wide range of reported formats utilized to build technical capacity for CUSP related programming (see Supplemental Appendix Q17).

Table 1

Frequency that CUSP technical assistance providers were able to find relevant supplemental resources to design and guide their programming						
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Not Applicable
Financial & marketing		3		2	1	3
Regulatory & Legal	1		5		1	2
On-farm operational		1	3	2	1	2
Grant management & logistics	1	1		2	3	1

TA Providers are seeking specific technical resources for their programs

Identifying more specific topics that TA providers find relevant to their work could be useful to designing targeted capacity-building efforts and supports for successful future programming. To dig deeper into the details of each supplemental technical resource category that organizations were seeking out for their programming, survey respondents reported their interest in specific topics relevant to their work within the scope of the CUSP Program.

For **financial and marketing resources**, respondents were seeking a wide range of supplemental technical resources for business planning, application guidance and criteria for farmer funding opportunities, online sales platforms, risk management options such as crop insurance, new marketing channels, and the transition process for organic productions. Responses were distributed relatively equally across the response options for financial and marketing topics, suggesting there is a broad interest and need to build capacity around these topics.

Similarly to the broad interest reported for financial and marketing resources, there was interest in a wide range of **regulatory and legal topics** including pesticide safety, groundwater management (E.g., Sustainable Groundwater Management Act), food safety, and land use. In contrast, the other two broad categories had more targeted needs around supplemental information.

On-farm operational topics of interest were irrigation system design, evaluation of drought stress in specialty crops, and utilizing new technologies, tools, or equipment. This is not surprising given that the

CUSP program has a focus on assisting farmers and ranchers with challenges specifically related to extreme weather and drought.

While **grant and logistical** resources were not as widely needed across the CUSP Program TA organizations, there were a few respondents who noted that they were seeking resources on grant record keeping as well as outreach and communication strategies. Finally, one organization noted in the open-ended response that they were seeking materials relevant to CUSP programming that were already translated into languages spoken by their stakeholders.

Capacity building for the CUSP Program TA organizations

A large portion of TA organizations reported that their time and staff capacity was spent working directly on CUSP Program TA and outreach activities (**Box 3**) such as direct on-one-on grant application assistance (23%) or communication and outreach to farmers (23%). Other direct TA activities like conducting workshops (7%) were noted but less frequent. While many organizations reported that CUSP Program TA and outreach activities required the greatest amount of the time and capacity, activities related to both the management of direct farmer grants and overall administration of the CUSP award itself ranked high in requiring significant capacity. These activities represented around 47% of the responses and included tracking and reporting grant metrics, managing direct assistance logistics, finding additional technical resources for TA staff, and coordinating across different organizations. While there is a baseline amount capacity required to administer grant programming and manage internal logistics, respondents noted that logistical and coordination activities can be burdensome to successfully running the actual TA programming and outreach.

Box 3

Top 5 CUSP activities that required the greatest amount of staff capacity

- 1) Providing one-on-one direct application assistance to producers
- 2) Communication & outreach with farmers
- 3) Tracking and reporting CUSP activities
- 4) Managing logistics of direct farmer grant assistance and CDFA communications
- 5) Finding additional educational & technical resources

Coordinating and collaborating improved program capacity and efficacy in reaching underserved producers

Approximately 75% of TA organizations engaged in some degree of coordination and collaboration with other partners on CUSP Program work. For those organizations who did coordinate and collaborate in their CUSP Program work, they reported that their capacity and program effectiveness was greatly improved. The most prevalent activities that TA organizations coordinated and collaborated on included creation of TA resources (33%), direct grant assistance for farmers (22%), outreach and communication efforts (17%), and creation of CUSP events or workshops (17%). These coordination and collaboration efforts helped organizations reach broader, more diverse audiences and supported improved capacity for technical assistance (**Box 4**). This feedback around the benefits of coordination and collaboration on TA work for the CUSP Program showcases the importance of creating opportunities to work together to support mutual efforts in reaching underserved and small producers across California.

Box 4

Collaboration was key to success for organizations that worked together

“We had greater outreach and communication with more diverse growers when collaborating”

“...We found best practices from other CUSP organizations”

“Creating and sharing technical assistance resources to relay to our producers where appropriate [worked well]”

Activities to address capacity challenges and further enhance successful programming

There was a wide range of activities outlined in survey results that may help improve staff capacity to manage grant logistics, build stronger collaborations, and address support gaps such as the for the technical resources outlined above. The suggestions outlined focused on increasing internal activities facilitated by CDFA (and/or other supports such as UC Small Farms Network) to build technical expertise through exchanging knowledge and experiences between CUSP TA organizations. For example, webinars on relevant technical topics, facilitated discussions between CUSP TA organizations, CUSP Program office hours, and grant management workshops were of interest. One survey respondent wrote in an additional suggestion for a curated and updated website of resources for TA providers to reference for their programming. Implementation of these internal activities would provide an excellent opportunity to address challenges around accessing relevant technical resources for CUSP work as outlined. These activities would also offer opportunities to facilitate intentional relationship building and strategic coordination between a wide range of TA organizations to further enhance the effectiveness of everyone's collective work. In addition to internal capacity-building activities for TA organization, more opportunities for feedback throughout the CUSP grant cycle were of interest. Some activities highlighted by respondents included check-in surveys to provide CUSP Program progress and the creation of a pipeline for direct farmer feedback to CDFA.

TA provider suggestions for continued improvement of the CUSP Program

While the CUSP program has shown the positive impact of targeted technical assistance efforts for increasing support of underserved producers across CA, it is also critical to highlight common challenges and address gaps to ensure program longevity and success. Areas where TA organizations experienced the most challenges in successfully administering CUSP TA direct grant assistance and programming were partner communication and grant coordination across organizations as well as internal programmatic criteria guiding farmer grant administration. Communication and coordination challenges between CUSP organizations that were noted in open-ended responses highlighted minimal to no communication about grant application assistance capacity, grant award periods, potential overlap in farmer clientele, and feedback for farmer applications that were denied. Further, inconsistencies in application requirements and reporting templates for direct farmer granting processes across organizations were highlighted by respondents as a significant challenge – and was also reflected as popular suggested changes to internal CUSP programmatic structures.

Grant funding structure had benefits and drawbacks for successfully administering TA

These highlighted challenges could be, in part, related to intentional grant programmatic structures that empowered TA organizations to tailor grant eligibility, application requirements, and solicitation timelines to their contexts and regions of work. While this did offer flexibility, the lack of consistency developed across CUSP granting organizations paired with insufficient internal coordination structures may have ultimately resulted in communication challenges and barriers to ensuring accessibility for underserved producers. Further, the coordination and collaboration efforts for this block grant-style program require a significant amount of staff time so there may be capacity issues at play as well. One example provided by a respondent discussed how inconsistencies in required application documentation to CUSP direct financial assistance programming across organizations made the grant inaccessible for producers who did not possess those documents. This is a common challenge for underserved producers that inhibits their access to many financial assistance programs and a partial reasoning behind the design of a direct grant program like CUSP. Another contributing factor may also be a lack of internal systems that enable CUSP Program staff to quickly access resources that outline the variable grant timelines, grant application requirements, and checklists for the direct grant assistance programs being run by different organizations. This example outlines the potential usefulness of pairing changes to internal programmatic structures with increased coordination support and resources to ensure long term success of the CUSP program.

TA Provider suggested modifications to the CUSP Program to address challenges and ensure success

A broad range of potential changes to address internal programmatic challenges were presented in the survey and TA provider responses were equally distributed across the response options (**Box 5**). This could suggest that TA provider needs varied across organizations due to differences in current internal capacity, scope of work for the CUSP Program, and/or farmer stakeholder needs – amongst other contexts. Nonetheless, broad themes around improved consistency of direct grant assistance administration and more lines of communication seem to be a welcome change, and would likely help to streamline the grant process to address inconsistent accessibility challenges as outlined. In addition, more tangible resources such as a searchable database to confirm farmer eligibility and templates for grant reporting may be useful for improving process consistency while maintaining flexibility as intended by the program.

Box 5

Potential changes to internal CUSP programmatic structure of interest to TA organizations (ranked from most to least responses)

- A searchable database to confirm farmer eligibility for CUSP direct assistance grants
- Improved consistency of farmer applications and required documentation across direct grant awarding organizations
- Improved communication across organizations around award periods and farmer eligibility
- More accessible and consistent reporting templates for farmers who were awarded grants
- More consistent direct grant assistance solicitation and outreach across direct grant awarding organizations
- More clearly defined requirements and expectations from CDFA of CUSP-awarded organizations
- More consistent scoring rubrics of farmer applications across direct award granting organizations

Actions to address challenges and gaps in CUSP program support are already under way. For example, there is now a CUSP Direct Producer Resources webpage that provides information on CUSP-granting organizations and application periods. This is a great start and could be built on with the implementation of internal working groups that connect TA providers, create space for sharing technical resources, and streamline coordination efforts across organizations. Further, the creation of an internal platform such as online clearing houses for shared technical resources and outreach materials as well as databases to maintain farmer eligibility information could be useful. However, if internal technical resource gaps and programmatic structural challenges are to be addressed with a goal of ensuring long-term CUSP program success, there will also need to be capacity building efforts for CDFA program staff. The staff currently carry out a wide range of responsibilities to ensure effective CUSP programming so it will be essential to maintain support for current work and direct resources for internal capacity building over time where needed.

Supplemental Appendix

CUSP TA Provider Survey Questions and Results

Q1 - What geographic region(s) of California did your CUSP-funded TA programming reach?

Region	Percentage	Count
Central Coast	15.38%	2
South Coast	23.08%	3
San Joaquin Valley	15.38%	2
Bay Area	15.38%	2
Sacramento Valley	15.38%	2
Inland Empire & Imperial Valley	0%	0
North Coast	15.38%	2
Northern Sierra Nevada Mtns	0%	0
Southern Sierra Nevada Mtns	0%	0
Statewide	0%	0

Q2 – How would you characterize your organization?

Organization type	Percentage	Count
Non-profit organization	55.56%	5
Resource Conservation District	11.11%	1
UC Cooperative Extension	33.33%	3
Tribal Government	0%	0
County ag commissioner	0%	0
County government	0%	0
Other	0%	0

Q3 – What types of TA was your organization able to provide farmers through CUSP-funded work?

Activity type	Percentage	Count
Direct grant assistance with CUSP COVID-19 economic relief funds	11.76%	4
Direct grant assistance with CUSP drought relief funds	14.71%	5
Application assistance for state economic relief programs	23.53%	8
Application assistance for federal economic relief programs	20.59%	7
Farm business management and financial planning	8.82%	3
Technical assistance about tools and strategies to mitigate on-farm challenges related to drought or other weather-related challenges.	14.71%	5
Other*	5.88%	2

*One write in response for “other” noted they provided bilingual application assistance

Q4 – What formats did you use for your CUSP TA programming?

Programming format	Percentage	Count
One on one farm or office visits	27.59%	8
One on one emails and phone calls, or other remote assistance	24.14%	7
Small group events (e.g., tailgate meetings)	17.24%	5
Larger group events (e.g., workshops)	17.24%	5
Field days	3.45%	1
Online events	6.90%	2
Other	3.45%	1

*One write in response for “other” noted they used social media for educational materials

Q5 – What demographics did your CUSP TA programming and direct grant assistance serve?

Racial and ethnic demographic	Min	Avg	Max	SD
Native Indian	0	16.10	100	30.38
Alaska Native	0	2.60	26	7.80
Hispanic, of Spanish or Portuguese origin	0	11	90	26.72
Hispanic, Latino	0	27	60	21.18
Asian American	0	17.40	80	28.32
Black or African American	0	1.30	5	2.05
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
White	0	24.60	75	23.91

Q6 – What additional demographics did your CUSP TA programming reach?

Demographic category	Percentage	Count
Beginning farmers and ranchers	25%	7
Women farmers and ranchers	32.14%	9
LGBTQIA farmers and ranchers	10.71%	3
Farmers and ranchers with limited resources	28.57%	8
Veteran farmers and ranchers	3.57%	1
None of the above	0%	0

Q7 – What terms do farmers and ranchers served by your TA programming prefer to use when identifying themselves as part of groups who have experiences discrimination and systemic oppression?

Terminology	Percentage	Count
Historically underserved farmers and ranchers	11.54%	3
Underserved farmers and ranchers	23.08%	6
Underrepresented farmers and ranchers	7.69%	2
Under-involved farmers and ranchers	3.85%	1
Socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers	15.38%	4
Farmers of color	7.69%	2
BIPOC farmers and ranchers	19.23%	5
Limited resource farmers and ranchers	11.54%	3
Other:	0%	0

Q8 – Please use the space below to provide additional comments and input on the terms used to identify the farmers and ranchers served by CUSP

“small/family-owned farmers and women farmers”

Q9 – For CUSP-related activities, what languages did your organization do outreach and offer technical assistance in?

Language offering	Percentage	Count
Spanish	32%	8
Hmong	16%	4
Lao	8%	2
Punjabi	4%	1
Vietnamese	4%	1
Mandarin Chinese	4%	1
Cantonese	0%	0
Thai	4%	1
Iu Mien	8%	2
Khmer	0%	0

Korean	0%	0
Mixtec	0%	0
English	20%	5
Zapoteco	0%	0
Triqui	0%	0
Other	0%	0

Q10 – How did your organization reach farmers and ranchers who speak languages other than English?

Language outreach	Percentage	Count
We have bilingual staff who speak the relevant language(s)	47.06%	8
Outside translation services	17.65%	3
Partner organizations	29.41%	5
Community members volunteering	0%	0
Translation apps	5.88%	1
Other	0%	0
We do not offer our TA in languages other than English	0%	0

Q11 – If your organization needed supplemental information to design and guide your CUSP activities, how often were you able to find relevant resources for the following topics:

Resource topic	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Not needed
Financial and marketing resources	0	3	0	2	1	3
Regulatory and legal resources	1	0	5	0	1	2
On-farm operational resources	0	1	3	2	1	2
Grant management/logistical resources	1	1	0	2	3	1

Q12 – For financial and marketing resources, what specific topics was your organization seeking supplemental information on to assist farmers?

Topics	Percentage	Count
Operating online sales platforms	13.33%	2
Advertising and marketing, such as on social media account	6.67%	1
Business planning	20%	3
Risk management tools such as crop insurance	13.33%	2
Analysis of risks and benefits of new marketing channels	13.33%	2
Planning crop production to meet demands of direct marketing channels (e.g., direct to institutions, CSAs, farmer's markets)	0%	0
Transition process to certified Organic production	13.33%	2
Application guidance and criteria for farmer funding opportunities	20%	3
Other	0%	0

Q13 – For regulatory and legal resources, what specific topics was your organization seeking supplemental information on to assist farmers?

Topic	Percentage	Count
Labor or safety	0%	0
Fertilizer reporting (e.g., for Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program)	0%	0
Pesticide safety or compliance	25%	1
Food safety	25%	1
Groundwater regulations (e.g., Sustainable Groundwater Management Act)	25%	1
Other	25%	1

*One write in response for "other" noted they needed information on farm land regulations

Q14 – For on-farm operational resources, what specific topics was your organization seeking supplemental information on to assist farmers?

Topic	Percentage	Count
Irrigation system design or maintenance	50%	2
Pump efficiency tests	0%	0
Evaluating issues with groundwater wells	0%	0
Implementing new strategies to improve water use efficiency (e.g., drip irrigation, irrigation scheduling, soil moisture monitoring, etc.)	0%	0
Transitioning management practices to improve water conservation (e.g., soil health practices)	0%	0
Evaluating signs of crop drought stress	25%	1
Other technologies, tools, and equipment	25%	1
Other	0%	0

Q15 – For grant management and logistical resources, what specific topics was your organization seeking supplemental information on?

Topic	Percentage	Count
Record keeping	33.33%	1
Grant reporting	0%	0
Grant writing, drafting subcontracts, or creating MOUs (for direct assistance)	0%	0
Payroll management	0%	0
Expense tracking	0%	0
Outreach and communications	0%	0
Other	66.67%	2

*One write in response for “other” noted they needed information to improve communication between partners for CUSP work

Q16 – Were there any additional topics your organization was seeking supplemental resources for that we did not cover? If yes, please use the space below to elaborate on those resources.

“Translated materials about programming specifically what requirements were needed and detailed information about what grant qualifications for growers”

“Specialty crop information in regard to production, crop establishment, and harvesting”

Q17 – What kinds of formats for technical resources did you access to increase staff capacity and inform your CUSP TA programming?

Resource format	Percentage	Count
Webinars	20%	7
Online videos	11.43%	4
In-person events	17.14%	6
Conversation with staff from other organizations	20%	7
Listservs	5.71%	2
Downloadable guides	2.86%	1
Information clearing houses	2.86%	1
Printable field guides	5.71%	2
Social media	11.43%	4
Conferences	2.86%	1
Other	0%	0

Q-18 – Reflecting on your experiences with CUSP, what is most needed to ensure your organization has the resources and tools necessary to provide technical assistance to small to medium scale and underserved producers?

“More communication between Program Coordinators and Technical Assistants to be able to provide applications that are going to get funded and provide growers with information as to why their application was not accepted/waitlisted Having an option for technical assistance providers to be the 'middle man' for these producers that are not always tech savvy or have the capacity to do paperwork/follow up where needed for their applications”

“The most needed resource to be able to provide TA to these growers are the capacity to follow up with grant applicants. Partner organizations who receive CUSP dollars to give out to farmers are sometimes not aware of the work and demand when it comes to CUSP grants. Some of them may take too long to respond to questions regarding applicant documents, etc. Partner organizations should have adequate capacity to answer emails, phone calls, or other forms of communication to be able to provide necessary information when requested.”

“Our bilingual staff was critical in serving Latino/Hispanic producers in our area. It would have been helpful if the timing of the financial assistance programs were in better alignment with the release of the federal funds. For example, we had many producers eligible for the ERP Phase 2 that could have used technical application assistance, however, our grant project term ended before we were able to support them”

“Well developed and updated website”

Q19 – What types of activities required the greatest amount of your staff’s capacity? Please select the top 3-5 activities.

Activities	Percentage	Count
Tracking and reporting CUSP funded activities	20%	6
Providing one-on-one direct grant application assistance to producers	23.33%	7
Managing the logistics of direct farmer grant assistance and communicating with CDFA	10%	3
Communication and outreach to farmers	23.33%	7
Conducting workshops or educational activities with farmers	6.67%	2
Finding additional educational and technical resources	10%	3
Coordinating with other CUSP-funded TA providers	6.67%	2
Other	0%	0

Q20 - When working on CUSP funded activities, how often was your organization coordinating and collaborating work with other CUSP-funded groups who may have had overlapping constituencies of farmers and ranchers?

Response option	Percentage	Count
Never	11.11%	1
Rarely	11.11%	1
Sometimes	55.56%	5
Often	22.22%	2
Very often	0%	0

Q21 - What aspects of your CUSP-funded TA programming did you coordinate and collaborate with other organizations about?

Activities	Percentage	Count
Coordination of CUSP-related TA events and workshops	11.11%	2
Creation of CUSP-related TA events and workshops	16.67%	3
Creation of TA resources	33.33%	6
Direct grant assistance for farmers	22.22%	4
Outreach and communication efforts	16.67%	3
Other	0%	0

Q22 - What worked when collaborating with other CUSP-funded organizations?

“Creating and sharing TA resources to relay to our producers where appropriate”

“We had a greater outreach and communication with more and diverse growers when collaborating”

“Finding best practices from other organizations”

Q23 - What challenges did your organization face in coordinating with other CUSP-funded groups?

“Finding organization that had outreach strategies that we could benefit from”

“Some challenges our organization faced was minimal communication to some partner organizations. I think that they didn’t have enough staff capacity to administer CUSP grants and direct communication with each other”

“Not knowing what groups were CUSP-funded and the lack of outreach to TA providers when funding was available. As well as lack of organization from CUSP administering organizations providing clear notifications of application process/timeline”

“Challenges with scheduling time for applications”

Q24 – What types of activities could the CDFA CUSP program implement to improve staff capacity and/or addresses gaps in technical resources to work on CUSP-related programming?

Activities	Percentage	Count
CUSP office hours for CDFA support	15.38%	4
Processes for direct farmer feedback to CDFA	15.38%	4
Webinars and other resources to increase staff technical expertise	15.38%	4
Grant writing, reporting, and management workshops	11.54%	3
Input and check in surveys for CUSP grantees to provide progress feedback	11.54%	3
Facilitated meetings with other CUSP grantees to exchange ideas and learn from other organizations' experiences	15.38%	4
Coordination of CUSP events and efforts	15.38%	4
Other:	0%	0
None of the above	0%	0

Q25 – What changes to internal administrative processes or programmatic structures would help improve the success of CDFA’s CUSP activities?

Internal changes	Percentage	Count
More clearly defined requirements and expectations from CDFA of CUSP-awarded organizations	10.34%	3
Improved consistency of farmer applications and required documentation across direct grant awarding organizations	13.79%	4
More consistent direct grant assistance solicitation and outreach across direct grant awarding organizations	13.79%	4
More consistent scoring rubrics of farmer applications across direct award granting organizations	10.34%	3

Improved communication across organizations around award periods and farmer eligibility	17.24%	5
More accessible and consistent reporting templates for farmers who were awarded grants	13.79%	4
A searchable database to confirm farmer eligibility for CUSP direct assistance grants	17.24%	5
Other	3.45%	1
None of the above	0%	0

*One write in response for “other” noted they would like to make sure organizations take the CUSP checklist as a supporting document serious

Q30 – How can this program be made more accessible for underserved farmers and ranchers?

“Providing feedback when applications are not accepted and given the opportunity to reapply”

“It is difficult for small and socially disadvantaged farmers to have supporting documents and records on hand, organized and in their archives because of language, cultural, and financial literacy barriers. Thus, it would be helpful if organizations limited supporting documents as requirements because a lot of times these underserved growers aren’t able to provide such documents due to time and barriers listed above”

Q26 – If you would like, please use the space below to provide additional input and reflections on what worked well for you organization as well as what could help to improve future grantee experiences and CUSP program effectiveness.

“We are slowly building relationships with Latinx producers in our area and still have a lot of work to put towards that effort. Being able to provide producers with application assistance and feedback would continue to strengthen that relationship.”

“I want to applaud Carmen, our grant representative, for her professionalism, support, and guidance. She was always available and responsive, and was a joy to work with.”

“Filling out the CUSP application one-on-one with growers to make sure there are no errors. CUSP checklist and providing photos/videos as supporting documents helped A LOT when growers weren’t able to provide other documents.”