

**MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE-
BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) PRODUCER ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

Location: Online via Zoom

Contact:

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MEETING MINUTES of December 4, 2024

Item No.

I. Welcome and Introductions

CDFA Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse welcomed attendees, followed by a brief address from CDFA Undersecretary Christine Birdsong

II. Call to Order- Committee Chair Hung K. Doan

Committee Chair Hung K. Doan called the meeting to order at 10:15 AM.

Present: Hung K. Doan, Dennis Hutson, Arshdeep Singh, Javier Cruz, Emily Burgueno, Qi Zhou, Minkah Taharkah.

Absent: Mireya Gomez-Contreras, Tania Zuniga, Lena Ortega, Ken Sparks, Don Sherman

III. Action Item

a. Approval of Minutes of August 21, 2024

Due to a lack of quorum, approval of minutes is postponed

IV. Discussion Items

a. Land Equity Task Force Updates- Qi Zhou

Qi Zhou provided an update on the work of the Land Equity Task Force (LETf), which met in person on November 13 & 14, 2024 for its quarterly meeting. The group continues to work on their land equity and access recommendation report due to the Governor in January 2026. The Task Force is currently seeking members for their advisory committee. A LETf land access survey is currently available for farmers to complete. The survey's purpose is to learn about their experiences, challenges, and priorities related to equitable land access in California. The survey is open through Jan. 31, 2025 and available online: <https://sgc.ca.gov/initiatives/alei/updates.html>

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee.

b. SSPAC Updates- Carmen Carrasco

Carmen Carrasco, Small Farm Business Liaison provided this update. During their August 29 meeting, the Small-Scale Producer Advisory Committee (SSPAC) discussed similar agenda items as the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee's August agenda. SSPAC requested more time to discuss the priorities facing small-scale producers based on an internal survey carried out by the Farm Equity Office.

The SSPAC Sub-committee has been working on the definition of an emergency for small scale producers. A draft definition has been created and shared with both BIPOC & SSPAC main committees. The purpose of finalizing an emergency definition is to help CDFA and other State agencies to implement a more effective response to emergency situations, managing and delivering relief assistance.

Public Comment: None

c. Budget Update- Thea Rittenhouse

Thea Rittenhouse, CDFA Farm Equity Advisor, provided a general update on the timeline for the upcoming budget announcement on January 10th, 2025. Additionally, Ms. Rittenhouse reviewed the preliminary overview of new and existing programs funded through Proposition 4, Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which was passed by voters in the November election. Some of the CDFA programs that will receive funding through Prop 4 are: SWEEP & Healthy Soils, Urban Ag Program and Fairgrounds updates.

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee.

Public Comment: None

d. CUSP Program Update- Faye Lessler

CDFA grant program analyst Faye Lessler provided an overview of the new CUSP Program expansion to include extreme weather disaster relief. Committee member Emily Burgueno asked if damage from severe wind is applicable under the newly expanded allowable expenses. Ms. Lessler confirmed that damage from windstorms is an allowable expense. Faye mentioned that the list of expenses for extreme weather relief in addition to updates to the list of drought-related expenses will be available on the CUSP Program website.

Committee members commented on the importance of having tribal partnerships on the ground to support tribal producers and ensuring organizations managing grant funds on the ground develop a process for accountability.

Faye Lessler commented that CDFA does not currently have guidelines for this process, but welcomed the feedback and will bring it back to management for consideration.

Committee Chair Hung K. Doan suggested this topic be added to future agenda items.

Ms. Lessler continued the presentation adding that because CDFA was on a tight deadline to allocate the funds, the Agency asked current CUSP fund administrators to expand their program to include extreme weather disaster relief.

Committee members suggested CDFA work with the Intertribal Agriculture Council as a partner for future programs and recommended not to speed up processes when allocating funds to block-grant administrators, as this can exacerbate inequities and systemic exclusion. Thea Rittenhouse commented that CDFA's OEFI CSA program is looking at ways in which technical assistance providers are serving and prioritizing tribal producers & tribal nations and suggested this topic for a future agenda item.

Other comments from the committee were about the need for standardization of the documentation required for farmers to apply to CUSP and clarification on how much funding block-grant administrators receive to manage funds. Faye Lessler said that each organization is allowed up to 15% of the total funding available for grants, as administrative overhead.

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee.

Public Comment: None

e. CDFA Farms to Community Food Hubs Grant Program Update

CDFA grant administrative and outreach program specialist Christina Harrington provided an overview of the draft Request for Proposals for the CDFA Community Food Hubs grant program. Ms. Harrington provided a presentation of the proposed definitions, structure, timeline and outreach for the program, which is open for public comment through December 6th, 2024. The presentation concluded with time for committee members to submit their public comments during the meeting or to ask clarifying questions regarding the program.

Committee members recommended the language in the draft RFA be changed to specify that priority will be given to a tribally led nonprofit, instead of tribal serving nonprofit.

Christina Harrington acknowledged the comment mentioning that there is an allocation of 10% of funding for tribes.

Committee member Emily Burgueno suggested CDFA try to address the gap with tribal communities by ensuring partnerships with organizations that serve them.

Javier Cruz asked if this is a reimbursement type grant. Christina Harrington confirmed it is but mentioned the option of advance payments for farmers that need money upfront.

Member Qi Zhou commented on the difficulties Asian farmers face when schools and institutions are not familiar with their crops and do not request them for purchase.

Christina Harrington commented that farmers should not be discouraged to apply as institutions are not just schools but can include tribal schools, health clinics, hospitals, and public universities; and these institutions may be interested in sourcing more local and diverse crops.

Thea Rittenhouse clarified that advance payments for non-profit organizations were now allowed due to legislation passed in 2023, but CDFA was already providing advance payments prior to the passage of the legislation.

The presentation concluded without formal action by the Committee.

Public Comment: None

f. Group Reflections & Principle Learnings from Committee- Minkah Taharkah

BIPOC Committee member Minkah Taharkah led the group discussion into sharing their personal reflections, and each committee member took turns commenting on their experiences and learnings from the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee.

Public Comment: Member of the public and farmer Olivia (last name not given) attended the meeting and commented that while looking for resources, she ran into the BIPOC Producer Advisory Committee. She is grateful to know there are resources making a difference for farmers.

V. Topics for Future Agenda Items

Per the discussion above, the following topics were suggested as future agenda items:

1. Mechanisms to develop an accountability process for organizations administering programs using the block grant model (e.g. CUSP)
2. Methods for serving and prioritizing tribal producers & tribal nations

VI. Public Comments

No public comments were submitted

VII. Adjournment

Committee Chair Hung K. Doan adjourned the meeting at 12:12 PM