



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)  
CALIFORNIA ORGANIC PRODUCTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (COPAC)**

**September 13, 2023**

**Meeting Minutes**

**2399 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 200  
Sacramento, California 95833**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Blake Alexandre – Chair  
Phillip LaRocca – Vice Chair  
Wendy Reynolds  
Amanda Felder  
Matthew Grieshop  
Kaley Grimland  
Erin Raser  
Jeffrey Chean  
Will Daniels  
Stefan Parnay

**INTERESTED PARTIES**

Nick Woodrum, CDPH  
Thu Dinh, CDPH  
June Nakagawa, CDPH

**CDFA**

Marcee Yount  
Scott Renteria  
Pamela Rodriguez  
Leslie Fernandez  
Jefferson Scott  
Andrea Cano  
Thomas Osborn

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

David Will  
Sean Feder

**ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS/ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Blake Alexandre, Chair. Roll was called, a quorum was established, and self-introductions were made.

**ITEM 2: PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

**ITEM 3: REVIEW OF MAY 23, 2023 MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Alexandre requested a motion to approve the May 23, 2023 Meeting Minutes as presented.

**MOTION:** Amanda Felder moved to approve the May 23, 2023 Meeting Minutes as presented. Wendy Reynolds seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with Will Daniels abstaining.

**ITEM 4: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATES**

Wendy Reynolds provided the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Organic Program update. For organic complaints, 14 complaints remain open from prior fiscal years. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2023/24, two complaints have been completed and five remain open. For 2023 through August, there were 1,690 renewal licenses and 192 new licenses issued for organic processors.

Thu Dinh presented the CDPH Organic Program's budget and revenue information. For FY 2022/23, actual expenditures for total salaries and benefits were \$716,229. Total direct costs were \$38,761. Total indirect costs were \$221,937, bringing the total program cost to \$976,928. For FY 2023/24, projected expenditures for total salaries and benefits are \$737,716. Total direct costs are projected at \$103,412, total indirect costs at \$282,606, bringing projected total program cost to \$1,123,734. For FY 2022/23, the program collected \$1,134,244, an eleven percent decrease from the prior fiscal year. For FY 2023/24, total revenue is projected at \$1,141,710.

**ITEM 5: FUND USE RECOMMENDATIONS/STATUS OF STATE ORGANIC PROGRAM UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA CONTRACT UPDATE**

Scott Renteria provided an update on the UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) contract deliverables. Joji Muramoto, UC ANR Organic Production Specialist, co-authored the published peer-reviewed journal article *Carbon Sources for Anaerobic Soil Disinfestation in Southern California Strawberry*. The paper demonstrated the efficacy and economics of using lower-priced wheat middlings and dried distillers' grain as alternative carbon sources to rice bran, the predominant carbon source for anaerobic soil disinfestation used as an alternative to chemical fumigation in California strawberry production. Muramoto continues to work on soil borne disease management in organic strawberries targeting Fusarium wilt and Macrophomina Charcoal rot and established two demonstration field trials in Southern California. In April, Muramoto co-organized with local UC Cooperative Extensions (UCCE) two organic workshops that were held in Riverside County and Imperial County. The next workshops are scheduled for Ventura County in October and Sutter County in November.

Renteria also provided an update on the UC Organic Agriculture Institute (OAI) contract objectives. Two new academic coordinators, Krista Marshall and Rob Straser, continue to build relationships, develop extension events, and create new resources for organic growers. Marshall is leading evaluation of organic acreage and is two-thirds of the way completed. Additionally, a map is being created to display organic acreage and crop diversity at the county level. Renteria also reported that an organic rice field day was held in Yuba City on July 29, 2023, and an organic vegetable and seed breeding meeting is being held on September 13, 2023. Future extension events include one in Ventura for organic citrus on October 13, 2023, and another on vineyard grazing and soil health will be scheduled in December 2023. Lastly, work is being done with a video production company to create videos about organic production practices and key organic crops. Recruitment efforts will begin this Fall for two additional academic coordinators who will help launch a new grower mentorship program, farm demonstration network, an undergraduate and graduate field program focused on sustainable organic agriculture. The academic coordinators will also provide training on organic certification and compliance to UCCE personnel and other technical assistance providers and will be available to help growers in transition complete their organic systems plan.

## **ITEM 6: STATE ORGANIC PROGRAM UPDATES**

### i. Vacancies and Terms

Thomas Osborn provided the Vacancies and Terms report. Current vacancies include: one producer; one processor; one consumer representative; one technical representative; one environmental representative; six producer alternates; one wholesale distributor alternate; two processor alternates; one consumer representative alternate; one accredited certifier alternate; one retail representative alternate; one environmental representative alternate; and two technical representative alternates.

Matthew Grieshop suggested that a strategy with achievable goals for filling seats be explored. Osborn noted that there is a dedicated webpage for COPAC outreach, as well as an interested party email distribution list that receives vacancy information routinely. Marcee Yount added that the Program works with the Department's Office of Public Affairs to issue press releases on COPAC vacancies on media outlets such as the program's social media pages. Additionally, diversity efforts include disseminating committee and vacancy information to various chambers of commerce and associations. SOP staff additionally make recruitment efforts at the various workshops and conferences they attend throughout the year.

Members brainstormed target organizations and prospective candidates for current vacancies. It was requested that an outreach document that outlined target organizations to conduct outreach efforts be created and disseminated to members. Chair Alexandre additionally urged members to conduct their own outreach efforts by providing the Prospective Member Appointment Questionnaire to their respective industry associates.

### ii. Revenue from Registration/New Registrations

Andrea Cano presented information on organic registration fees collected by month and year. For FY 2022/23, \$1,755,379 in registration fees were collected and 416 new operations registered with the SOP. Of these 416 new operations, 328 are producers, 123 are handlers, and 18 are processors. The total number of registrants for 2022 was 4,110 registrants. Of the 4,110 registrants, 3,445 are producers, 1,034 are handlers, and 161 are processors.

#### a. Data Sharing Update

Renteria shared that regulations were amended in 2017 that reduced the amount of data collected by the SOP for registration. Efforts are ongoing to better collect information from registrants as there is an understanding that information is requested from multiple entities, such as Accredited Certifying Agents (ACA), though data collected from each entity is slightly different. The new Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rules through the National Organic Program (NOP) have refined certification requirements. An increase in registration revenue is expected as brokers will now be required to register with the SOP.

Regarding data sharing efforts, past obstacles encountered with data sharing with the NOP was that not all information that is required by the SOP was required in the Organic INTEGRITY Database (INTEGRITY). Because it is now a requirement as part of the SOE rules, the SOP is working collectively with the NOP and ACAs to better

coordinate information technology systems to import data directly from the NOP's INTEGRITY. The Department's Office of Information Technology Services is currently reviewing the structure of INTEGRITY and the SOP will work with them on potential options. Efforts will continue for finding ways to reduce the collection of duplicative data from organic growers.

iii. Fund Condition Update

Renteria provided the SOP Fund Condition update for FY 2022/23. Renteria stated that the beginning fund balance was \$2,400,237. Total revenue was \$1,970,987, and available cash was \$4,371,224. Total expenditures were \$2,090,654, cash adjustments were \$203,705, with an ending balance of \$2,076,865.

iv. Compliance and Enforcement/Appeals Summary

Renteria provided the Compliance and Enforcement/Appeals Summary. For FY 2022/23, there were 173 total complaints of which 118 were investigated by the SOP (CDFA or Center for Analytical Chemistry staff); 25 were referred to ACA; 27 were referred to CDPH; two were referred to the NOP; no complaints were referred to the Organic Input Materials Program; and one complaint was referred to the Department of Pesticide Regulation. There were 1,779 total inspections of which 1,150 were conducted at farmers' markets; 229 at production sites; 72 at handling facilities; 12 at processing facilities; 306 at retailers; and 10 at locations not within the above categories. A total of 443 samples were collected of which 383 were surveillance and 60 were investigative. Of the 383 surveillance samples, 15 contained residues above tolerance levels and 21 contained residues below tolerance levels. Of the 60 investigative samples, 19 samples tested above tolerance levels and 10 tested below tolerance levels. Eleven appeals were received, of which four have been closed and seven remain active.

v. Complaint Activity Report

Renteria provided the Complaint Activity Report. For FY 2022/23, a total of 74 open complaints were active, in which 46 were open for more than 120 days; 11 were open for between 90 and 120 days; eight were open for between 60 and 90 days; and nine were open for between 30 and 60 days. An additional 99 complaints had been closed.

vi. Complaint Summary Log

Renteria presented the Complaint Summary Log, detailing complaints and investigations that were assigned and closed for FY 2022/23.

vii. Surveillance Sampling Summary Updates

Renteria provided the Surveillance Sampling Summary updates, detailing the results of samples collected by the SOP during routine and investigative efforts. For FY 2022/23, there were 383 surveillance samples: 76 at farmers' markets; 86 at production sites; one at a handling facility; and 220 at retail wholesale facilities. Of the 36 surveillance samples with residues detected: seven were at farmers' markets; seven at production sites; and 22 at retail wholesale facilities.

viii. Cost Share Update

Cano provided an update on the Cost Share Program. The Cost Share Program for the 2023 period began June 12, 2023, and will remain open until November 1, 2023. To date, 532 applications have been received. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency is currently conducting a final review of the Cost Share grant documents.

a. Reimbursement Level Recommendation

Vice Chair Phillip LaRocca advocated that the reimbursement level be increased to \$3,000 per certification scope, as input costs for organic operations continue to rise significantly. LaRocca asked that CDFA voice support in raising the reimbursement level in its 2024 Farm Bill recommendations to USDA.

Yount mentioned that the previous agreement was not fully expended and that the message needs to get out to small growers to apply. LaRocca stated that producers have voiced that the current \$750 reimbursement level is not worth applying for and an increase in the reimbursement amount would be more appealing for producers to apply.

**MOTION:** Vice Chair Phillip LaRocca moved to submit a recommendation letter to the CDFA Secretary to voice support in the 2024 Farm Bill, a raise in USDA Cost Share reimbursement to \$3,000 per certification scope. Matthew Grieshop seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with no abstentions.

**ITEM 7: NEXT MEETING/AGENDA ITEMS**

The next meeting will be held at the EcoFarm Conference in Asilomar in January 2024. Agenda items will include a strategic plan discussion that outlines milestones and next steps.

**ITEM 8: ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m. by Chair Alexandre.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Danny Lee, Supervising Special Investigator  
State Organic Program