

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)**

**FERTILIZER INSPECTION ADVISORY BOARD (FIAB)**

**Zoom CONFERENCE MEETING**

**July 1, 2021  
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**ATTENDING**

**MEMBERS**

Chris Gallo  
Dave McEuen  
Gary Silveria  
Greg Cunningham  
Melissa McQueen, Chair  
Tim Howard

**CDFA STAFF**

Adriana Avalos  
Dr. Amadou Ba  
Dr. Barzin Moradi  
Elizabeth Moseby  
Emad Jahanzad  
Maria Tenorio Alfred  
Mark Cady  
Dr. Martin Burger  
Natalie Jacuzzi  
Nick Young  
Nicole Nuñez  
Stacy Aylesworth

**INTERESTED PARTIES**

Renee Pinel

**ABSENT**

Jake Evans  
Miguel Duarte

**INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 AM, and introductions were made.

**ROLL CALL**

Roll was called, and a quorum was established.

**APPROVE JUNE 10, 2021 MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Melissa McQueen requested that the board review the minutes from the June 10, 2021 FIAB meeting.

**MOTION:** Tim Howard moved to approve the June 10, 2021 minutes as presented; Chris Gallo seconded. The motion passed with a vote of 6 to 0.

**FREP PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

Mark Cady presented the Fertilizer Research and Education Program's (FREP) - Nitrogen and Irrigation Management Outreach Initiative (Project), including the elements of the proposal, background, three levels of outreach and education, and how funding will be applied.

The FREP Project includes a contract with the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) to hire and train six Staff Research Associates (SRA) to work in county UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) offices. The Project will fund the

hiring of six SRA to work across 12 counties in the San Joaquin Valley and the Central Coast. The initial focus will be on growers who are most at risk of regulatory non-compliance due to excess nitrogen applied.

### Three Levels of Outreach and Training

The first level of outreach is to help growers become aware and understand current regulations and why they exist. There will be workshops, outreach, webinars, on-site farm demonstrations, and in-classroom trainings.

The second level of outreach will focus on management practices to improve nitrogen use and irrigation efficiencies. The goal will be to raise awareness and understanding of management practices appropriate for specific farming operations.

The final level of outreach involves at least two annual on-farm demonstration trials to demonstrate improving nitrogen and irrigation efficiencies while maintaining or improving yields. This level includes on-farm implementation of best management practices, such as weather-based irrigation scheduling using soil moisture monitoring and soil nitrate testing. The focus will be on irrigation efficiency, and possibly mobile irrigation labs to help increase irrigation efficiency. The on-farm trials will provide grower training continuing education units for Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan (INMP) requirements. The data collected will be presented in meetings and events, including grower coalition meetings to promote best nitrogen and irrigation management practices and to disseminate the findings and ongoing work with growers, consultants, and coalitions. There will be a minimum of three publications annually.

### Tracking and Evaluation

During and after the Project activities, there will be tracking and evaluation of successes and where the Project needs adjusting. Questions will focus on increasing efficiency in the field. Analysis will be conducted, questionnaires and surveys developed and implemented, and structured interviews with demonstration growers and farm consultants will take place. Project changes will be made as needed and the Project progress will be reported annually to FREP's Technical Advisory Subcommittee and the FIAB.

### Budget

The total proposed Project budget is \$3,004,859, spanning over three years. This includes \$2,253,298 in personnel costs; \$273,169 in overhead costs; \$195,000 in supplies; \$103,392 in travel; and \$180,000 in other expenses.

FREP is also exploring grant opportunities, including the Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) and the National Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG). FREP has already applied for the SCBG in the amount of \$751,861, and FREP is working with UCANR and University of California (UC) Davis on finalizing the CIG proposal. The CIG, if awarded, will require dollar-for-dollar matching funds. The FIAB Project can be a portion of the required matching funds.

Discussion ensued regarding current available assistance for growers and if there is a need for the additional assistance described in FREP's proposal. The mechanism for funding after the three-year Project was also discussed.

Chris Gallo recognized that there is a need but wondered if the process is being done as well as it should. Gallo asked if the UCCE and water quality coalitions would identify the growers. Cady stated UCANR and coalitions will collaborate to identify the growers who are in need of the assistance. The need tends to be in the eastern San Joaquin Valley. Modeling for groundwater protection formulas are underway and coalitions will continue to acquire raw data from growers and will create groundwater loading estimates.

Gallo asked for clarification on how to proportionately and accurately target the growers that need support by resources requested. Cady replied that with so many small growers, sandy soil, and high value crops, there is a need for expanding capacities across geographic areas with university resources. Some areas' needs are greater than others. Trying to prioritize and be effective with smaller subsets and a defined focus will create measurable progress. The UCCE advisor in the field will cover multiple counties and be able to determine where resources might be more heavily needed.

Chair McQueen thanked Cady for the summary and efforts and acknowledged the need for additional help, even though best management practices are already in place. Certified Crop Advisors (CCA) are already working on nutrient plans and that should not be overlooked. Retailers have a very active role in working with growers on nutrient plans and irrigation practices.

Gary Silveria said as far as CCAs and retailers go, there just needs to be clear direction. The four Rs (Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, Right Place) have been around for a long time and they should be better implemented.

Silveria asked the value of the CIG application. Cady stated it is available for up to \$2 million dollars, though it is not certain if FREP will apply for that much. The CIG has a significant layer of evaluation and study that is not part of what is being asked for from the FIAB. The thought process is that with additional funds, the Project could be more robust, including serving more counties, providing more demonstration projects, and creating better workshops. FREP has the capacity to use the funds.

Silveria asked how many growers the FREP proposal will assist and when that number will be determined. Cady replied that in early 2022 participants will be identified. However, as FREP learns more about communities, the determinations can change. If FREP works with a small percentage of the approximately 35,000 farming operations, there is still a huge amount of work to be done.

Silveria then asked what duties the SRA will perform. Cady stated that the SRAs will be the point person in the county and will be hired early 2022 to start performing outreach and complete tasks. The SRAs will also be in the field doing the on-site demonstrations,

and will be mentored by farm advisors and be managed by the Project Scientist. Each SRA will coordinate with other regions and work out of a county UCCE office. Each will be responsible for two counties and the Project Scientist will manage overall Project coordination.

Renee Pinel asked about the hiring process and if the staff are being hired under a contract by CDFA. Cady replied that UCANR will do the hiring. Pinel stated that the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES) already conducts outreach with growers and coalitions and there could be a collaboration. Cady replied that a collaboration is highly desirable because CURES has already developed a grower training program and has online video resources. However, CURES has not expressed an interest in collaborating on this Project.

Chair McQueen asked if all of the three levels identified are going to be completed each year. Cady affirmed that this is an intensive and robust plan; the intent is to annually have four outreach events, two training workshops, two on-farm demonstrations, two field meetings, and produce three publications.

Pinel also discussed maintaining funds for the Project after the three years is over. Concerns noted were shutting down a good Project that was helping growers, leaving them without any support after the three years was up. Pinel suggested starting at a slower level and a tighter budget and then building up each year. Dr. Amadou Ba said sustainability of the Project has been part of the discussion and funding could possibly be allocated from general funds as the Project progresses.

Pinel noted that targeting key counties could also make the Project more sustainable and stronger. Cady said there is an urgency and funding the Project will address protecting widespread water quality challenges. There is no desire to end the Project after three years; working with UC and writing proposals, it is highly probable that funds will be available after the three years. Cady said the groundwork is done already, the data is available and has been under scrutiny, and the Project is ready to go on the first day. The Project is just waiting for funding to get it up and running. Cady acknowledged the Project is large, but prioritization is going to be collaborative.

Dr. Ba stated that with the \$3 million dollars allocated to the Project, it will take about \$1 million each year from FREP's reserve, but the program will still have the required reserve funds and FREP intends to build the reserve back up. Dr. Ba explained that CDFA's Division policy requires FREP to maintain 50 percent of the annual operating budget in the reserve, which it will.

Pinel asked where additional funding would come from after the project has concluded. Pinel stated that it would be unfair to come back to the FIAB to ask for more money. Pinel wanted to know the commitment for future funding for the Project. Dr. Ba said that previously there was a direct ask for about \$500,000 to supplement the FREP initiative and stated that in the Food and Agricultural code, funds could not be comingled.

Pinel clarified there is a need for FREP funds and not enforcement funds from the Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program (FMIP). CDFA or the FMIP needs to advise the Board on how money will be acquired to keep the Project sustainable after the three years. Dr. Ba iterated that CDFA is continuing to explore funding sources, including the general fund. Cady added that whether funding comes from grants or other available state funds, there will be an effort to receive federal funds. Research on funding sources and acquiring the money continues.

Greg Cunningham and Tim Howard expressed concern about using two-thirds of FREP reserve for this Project, which may not leave money for possible emergencies. However, both were supportive of the Project because there is such a great need. Howard said that it is important not to duplicate efforts of CCAs who are already working with growers.

Cady stated that the annual progress report will be provided to the FIAB every July and will be a good practice to review Project status and progress each year.

Cady stated that the Project will address issues that exist and have been documented, and that the money will be spent as described. Cady reported that hiring staff will begin once funding is approved and funding sources will continue to be identified and applied for. Building up FREP reserves again is part of the initiative and keeping the Project viable in the future after the initial three years is part of the plan. Cady reassured the FIAB that this is not an alternative path but a collaboration with coalitions, growers, and advisors.

### **MOTION**

Greg Cunningham moved to approve the FREP's Project as presented; Gary Silveria seconded. The motion passed with a vote of 5 to 0; there was one abstention.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

### **AGENDA ITEMS FOR SEPTEMBER 29, 2021 FIAB MEETING**

- Center for Analytical Chemistry laboratory tour
- Association of American Plant Food Control Officials Proposal for Slow Released Fertilizers
- Status of Nitrogen and Irrigation Management Outreach initiative
- Board vacancy recommendations

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next FIAB meeting will be on Wednesday, September 29, 2021.

### **MOTION:**

Tim Howard moved to adjourn the meeting; Gary Silveria seconded. The motion passed with a vote of 6 to 0.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM

**ORIGINAL SIGNED BY**

Nick Young  
Environmental Program Manager I  
Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program

Date: 07/01/2021