

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (Department)
FERTILIZER INSPECTION ADVISORY BOARD (FIAB)
WESTERN PLANT HEALTH ASSOCIATION
4460 DUCKHORN DRIVE SUITE A, SACRAMENTO, CA 95834 / HYBRID**

**OCTOBER 14, 2025
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS

Chris Gallo, Vice Chair
David McEuen
Gary Silveria, Chair
Greg Cunningham
Melissa McQueen
Tucker Salles
William Oglesby

MEMBER ABSENT

Jake Evans
Andrew Larson

CDFA STAFF

Amanda Staudinger
Angelia Johnson
Ashley James
Barzin Moradi
Brandi Alston
Elsa Poon
Daniel Rodriguez
Emad Jahanzad
Evelyne Ndiaye
Jenna Leal
Karen Adler
Kris Gulliver
Maria Tenorio Alfred
Medhi Ansari
Minal Patel
Natalie Krout-Greenberg
Nick Young
Nicole Smith
Roshani Shakya
Teresa Bowers
Yanhong Li

INTERESTED PARTIES

Andrew Godfrey
Renee Pinel

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Gary Silveria, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM and self-introductions were made.

ROLL CALL – ESTABLISH QUORUM

Roll was taken and a quorum was established.

APPROVE JUNE 11, 2025, MEETING MINUTES

Chair Silveria requested the board review the minutes of the June 11, 2025, FIAB meeting.

MOTION: Gregory Cunningham moved to approve the minutes as presented; Tucker Salles seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

DEPARTMENT / DIVISION / BRANCH UPDATES

Natalie Krout-Greenberg, Division Director, informed FIAB that many programs within the Department are affected due to the federal government shutdown. The Feed, Fertilizer, and Livestock Drugs Regulatory Services (FFLDRS) Branch is not impacted, but the Department continues to monitor the situation through established points of contact.

The Department will continue to build the relationship with Deputy Commissioner, Kyle Diamantas and other federal partners. On September 9, 2025, the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Strategy Report was released, which discusses food and dietary guidelines and promotes California-grown fresh fruits, nuts, vegetables, and proteins. Krout-Greenberg reiterated that California produces over 400 commodities and in 2024 its farmgate value was \$61 billion. The Department is closely monitoring the MAHA Strategy to ensure it is positioned in a way that provides information to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as the Department continues to collaborate with our federal partners.

Last week, the Department sat on a retailer panel at Reedley College with Costco, Cisco, and others to look at what California is doing in the food safety space. Krout-Greenberg explained that it is important to continue to be a leader in food safety and bring our retailers along to ensure that consumers receive a safe food supply.

The Governor recently signed two bills into law, Assembly Bill (AB) 411 and Senate Bill (SB) 279. AB 411 is a livestock carcass disposal composting bill and SB 279 is a solid waste compostable materials bill, which expands on some of the excluded activity provisions and allows animal manure as feedstock on-farm. Krout-Greenberg emphasized the importance of this space for our Produce Safety Program (PSP).

The Department has been exploring the cost of maintaining outside bank accounts and the interest accrued by outside bank accounts versus accounts within the State Treasury. FFLDRS has three outside bank accounts: Fertilizer Research and Education Program (FREP), Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program (FMIP), and Commercial Feed Regulatory Program (CFRP). In January 2026, the Department is planning to bring all outside accounts under the State Treasury to increase the interest accrued and reduce maintenance costs. Currently, the outside accounts are earning less than 1% in interest, and State Treasury accounts earn 3%-4% in interest (although the percentage fluctuates). Currently, the FMIP account has ~\$100,000 in it and the FREP account has ~\$92,000. The Department estimates that the annual cost to maintain those accounts are ~\$20,000 and ~\$18,000 respectively.

FIAB expressed concern about moving the funds into the State Treasury and requested a special meeting be held in the near future to obtain additional information regarding the maintenance costs and the plan to move the accounts into the State Treasury. Renee Pinel explained that when the accounts were originally moved out of the State Treasury it was not for investment purposes, but to protect these industry funds against state raids when the budget goes into deficits.

Melissa McQueen expressed interest in FIAB making a recommendation to the Secretary of the Department after receiving additional information at the special meeting.

Jenna Leal suggests a joint meeting between the Fertilizer Inspection Advisory Board and the Feed Inspection Advisory Board since they are both impacted. The special meeting will be held on November 5, 2025, after the Feed Inspection Advisory Board meeting.

Leal provided Branch updates, including personnel updates. Leal announced that the Advisory Board Liaison, Brittnie Williams, who is out on maternity leave, gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Leal also praised Maria Tenorio Alfred for stepping in and doing great work while Brittnie is out. Leal also informed FIAB that Natalie Jacuzzi has rejoined FREP as the Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory) and FREP has also advertised its Environmental Scientist position. The FMIP is fully staffed. Mike Davidson, from the CFRP retired after over 40 years with FFLDRS. Ted Bert and Samantha Moran-Defty have assumed supervisory roles for northern and southern California for the CFRP. Elizabeth Moseby, a support staff member, has left the branch to focus on family.

Leal informed FIAB that she met with Virginia Jameson, Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands, and the Climate Resilience Strategy is open for public comment from October 7 – November 7, 2025. Considering the passing of AB 411 and AB 279, the Department is going to look at adding some language in there to make sure that there is congruency for any needs that come out of those two bills being signed into law. If industry has any comments, they must be submitted before November 7, 2025.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Nick Young, Environmental Program Manager I (EPM), thanked Maria Tenorio Alfred, Amanda Staudinger, and Ashley James for assisting with programmatic duties while Brittnie is out. Young further thanked Brandi Alston and Angelia Johnson for their work on the budget and fund conditions.

Young reported for the fiscal year (FY) that ended June 30, 2025, the combined FMIP and Organic Input Material (OIM) accounts had a joint combined beginning balance of \$10,329,773. Revenue was \$7,954,456; expenditures were \$8,380,160; and encumbrances were \$468,185. The ending adjusted combined balance was \$9,435,875.

Young reported for FY2025/26, as of August 31, 2025, the combined FMIP and OIM accounts had a joint combined beginning balance of \$9,904,060. Revenue was \$1,917,002; expenditures were \$1,381,099; and encumbrances were \$688,811. The ending adjusted combined balance was \$9,751,152.

Mill assessment revenue at the close of FY 2024/25 was \$7,614,843, which is aligned with predictions from the June 2025 meeting. The mill revenue has been slowly decreasing, which is by design to reduce the reserve balance. Revenue appears to have slightly increased, but that is due to the registration cycle moving from a two-year cycle to a four-year cycle.

Discussion ensued as to what is a healthy reserve. Leal informed FIAB that the goal is to maintain 50% of annual expenses in the reserve, yet there is a 25% minimum requirement. However, if the reserve drops below 25%, the program must justify its solvency and may lose spending authority.

Young reported for the fiscal year (FY) that ended June 30, 2025, the FREP account had a beginning balance of \$8,955,614. Revenue was \$3,168,578; expenditures were \$3,392,352; and encumbrances through June 30, 2025, were \$2,867,031. The ending balance was \$5,864,808.

Young reported for FY 2025/26, as of August 31, 2025, the FREP account had beginning balance of \$8,731,839. Revenue was \$647,765; expenditures were \$628,513; and encumbrances through June 30, 2026, were \$4,149,041. The ending balance was \$4,602,051.

Young reviewed the proposed budget for FY 2026/27 for FMIP and OIM. Anticipated total combined program costs are \$8,914,845. Young reiterated that there was a mandatory 8% reduction across the board for all state agencies, and FFLDRS did a great job meeting that mandate. In the proposed budget, salaries and benefits are projected at \$4,811,136 and total operating expenses are projected at \$1,139,874. Personnel costs have increased by ~\$160,000 from the previous FY; however, the overall budget only increased by ~\$190,000.

Young informed FIAB that the in-state travel increased, which is due to the American Association of Plant and Food Control Officials (AAPFCO) holding its meeting in San Diego, California in 2026, which is an opportunity for more staff to attend for education, outreach, and training purposes. Most years only Young and Kris Gulliver attend since they both sit on panels. Young also stated that the EcoCert contract for out-of-state and out-of-country OIM inspections increased, but funds that are not spent will remain with the Department, as the contract is a fee-for-service.

Leal explained that there is also \$72,000 allocated for an electric vehicle, since there is a California mandate that only allows state agencies to purchase electric vehicles versus hybrid or vehicles that take fuel. FFLDRS does not plan to purchase vehicles this year due to that mandate. However, FFLDRS submitted a case study that went to the

Governor's Office, which may allow for an exemption to purchase a vehicle that takes regular fuel or a hybrid vehicle, which is what is needed for inspection staff traveling to rural areas.

Leal also informed FIAB that in the OIM budget, during the program's initial inception, laboratory costs were not budgeted for and FMIP has been paying most of the lab expenses. Therefore, FFLDRS will need to complete a Budget Change Proposal to request an increase in authority for the OIM Program. This will be a big undertaking but is needed.

Discussion ensued regarding the budget and encumbrances.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to approve the FMIP and OIM FY 2026/27 budgets as presented; Chris Gallo seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

Young reviewed the proposed FREP budget for FY 2026/27, which is projected to be \$4,118,270. Total salaries and benefits are projected at \$1,179,629 and operating expenses are projected at \$2,769,500. The budget increased by ~\$180,000 this FY.

Leal explained that the Research Contract/Grant line items have several years of encumbrances showing up due to many grants receiving No Cost Extensions (NCE). FREP grants have funds encumbered from FY 2023/24 through FY 2028/29. FREP will now only be allowing two NCEs per project.

MOTION: Chris Gallo moved to approve the FREP FY 2026/27 budget as presented; Melissa McQueen seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

Young provided a rulemaking update. The regulation package being reviewed included changing the registration cycle from two years to four years, and beneficial substance labeling. The Office of Administrative Law (OAL) had required the program to revise its Initial Statement of Reasons and allow for a 15-day comment period due to the fee change for the registration cycle. The registration cycle fee change is revenue neutral, but the fee increases simply because the registration period is moving from two years to four. Young hopes the regulation will become effective upon filing prior to January 1, 2026.

Leal clarified that SB 1522 gave the program the authority to make the registration cycle change, and the regulations will clarify the law.

Young provided a draft list of microorganisms that are allowed in plant biostimulants from AAPFCO, which will be adopted by reference in regulation. If microorganisms from this list are claimed as a plant biostimulant, efficacy data will not be required during the registration process, unless the registrant makes additional claims that are not recognized by AAPFCO.

Greg Cunningham asked if FMIP had collaborated with the Department of Pesticide Regulations (CDPR) regarding the approved list of microorganisms. Young stated collaboration did occur and dual-use microorganisms are not included in the list so there will be no issues. Young further noted that CDPR will be presenting and participating in a roundtable discussing with fertilizer regulators at the AAPFCO Administrators Seminar at the end of October with the goal of a better understanding of what labeling claims may trigger CDPR oversight.

Discussion ensued regarding the transition from a two-year cycle to a four-year cycle will affect the regulated industry. Young explained firms will have ~four years to use their old labels, and some firms will have more, depending on which cycle they are on.

Young informed FIAB that FMIP usually holds an annual workshop in November; however, the workshop has been postponed to March 2026 due to hotel contract issues.

CDFA attended the AAPFCO Summer Annual Meeting August 7-8, 2025, in Omaha, Nebraska and will attend the Winter Annual Meeting is scheduled for February 16-17, 2026, in Fort Worth, Texas.

Young will be speaking about biostimulant regulatory evolution in California and throughout the US, at the Biostimulants World Congress December 2-4, 2025, in Barcelona, Spain. Due to California travel limitations, AAPFCO will be funding all travel expenses. Young stated the Biostimulants World Congress will be held at the Convention Center in Sacramento in December 2026 with Secretary Ross serving as an opening keynote speaker.

Evelyne Ndiaye reported on the Conventional Fertilizer registration numbers between January 1 and August 31, 2025, which includes 916 new applicants, 1,674 renewals, and 278 updates to labels. The total number of applications received is 2,868, and the total number of approved applications is 7,165. Ndiaye thanked her staff for the improved review turnaround time and being open to feedback. Ndiaye also thanked Suzanne Turcotte for training new staff on registration processes and procedures.

Yanhong Li reported on the OIM registration numbers, highlighting that as of August 31, 2025, there were 1,193 approved applications and only 0.79% of registrations are over the 90-day review goal. Li also thanked her staff for improving review turnaround time and informed FIAB that Liam Erskine completed his OIM training; Turcotte is now working 25% on OIMs; and Daniel Rodriguez has started training on the OIM registration review process.

Nicole Smith provided fertilizer field updates. Smith stated as of September 18, 2025, 596 conventional samples were obtained and 349 OIM samples were obtained.

Smith stated as of September 18, 2025, there were 17 Notice of Proposed Actions (NOPA) issued. Of those, 14 were paid, two are in the period of waiting for a response

from the firm, and one payment plan was reached. However, the firm that agreed to a payment plan defaulted on that plan so a judgement will be issued. The total assessed monetary value was \$182,928.72, and \$111,491.74 has been received.

Smith stated as of September 18, 2025, 24 complaints were received. Of those, 17 have been closed, and seven are pending further investigation.

Leal provided FREP updates. She highlighted that the annual Nutrient Management Conference will be held at the Doubletree by Hilton Fresno Convention Center on October 29-30, 2025. Leal thanked Renee Pinel for being a wonderful partner and collaborating on the conference.

Leal provided FIAB Research and Education Subcommittee updates. The Subcommittee reviewed the scope of funded FREP projects and discussed avenues to increase outreach and education for growers and practitioners, relevant to current challenges. During the next Subcommittee meeting, FREP will bring specific options with emphasis on implementation, impact and measurable outcomes. FREP will continue strategic planning efforts.

Leal reviewed FREP's Request for Proposal (RFP), which includes Improving Nutrient and Irrigation Management and Evaluating Nutrient Loss Pathways. Leal stated that Tom Bottoms, Chair of the FIAB's Technical Advisory Subcommittee (TASC) attended the Research and Education Subcommittee meeting and it was extremely helpful in bringing communication and collaboration between FIAB and its TASC.

FIAB discussed the applications received for the FIAB TASC for the two upcoming vacancies. TASC has recommended two members be appointed, but also submitted an alternate name for FIAB to consider.

Discussion ensued regarding adding a third member to the TASC.

MOTION: Tucker Salles moved to recommend Dr. Mike Almasri, Gina Colfer, and Devin Clarke for appointment by the Secretary; Chris Gallo seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

Leal stated that Jacuzzi will present at the State Water Resources Control Board Agriculture Expert Panel, along with the Office of Agricultural Resiliency and Sustainability (OARS). Jacuzzi's presentation will focus on FREP-funded research and outreach and education on the following topics: Crop fertilization guidelines, technical research on relevant management practices, Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) training; grower training, and technical training and workshops.

Leal explains that the Expert Panel will also be discussing quantitative limits on fertilizer applications based on crops, crop season, and location. Emad Jahanzad informed the board of the names and positions of former FREP grantees that are on the Expert

Panel. Jahanzad further discussed the purpose of the Expert Panel and what the group is trying to achieve.

Renee Pinel stated that the California Air Resources Board (CARB) is seeking more data on NOx related to fertilizer. She further stated that there are groups who are not accepting outstanding and valid research on NOx because it is 25 years old, and regulations should not be based on old science. There is a newer study out, but it is causing a lot of issues as far as the need for more restrictive regulations on NOx emissions and CARB is seeking longer-term research.

Jahanzad demonstrated that FREP has NOx included in its RFP but have not received many proposals in that area. Therefore, a special RFP may be needed to draw out more researchers. Jahanzad also mentioned that this type of research is expensive and FREP's award ceiling for its regular RFP is \$300,000.

Discussion ensued regarding including a Special RFP Cycle on the agenda for the November 5, 2025 meeting.

Karen Adler added that CARB convened a subject matter expert to review NOx and FREP listened in on that. Furthermore, FREP is in contact with CARB in this space, and they have been corresponding and looking at the report they put out to identify gaps and needs for research.

BOARD VACANCIES

FIAB discussed the applications received for the FIAB for the three upcoming vacancies. Discussion ensued about reappointing David McEuen and Chris Gallo. After consideration of all applicants, further discussion occurred about appointing either Heidi Sieber or Tracy Starich, based on board needs.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to recommend David McEuen, Chris Gallo, and Tracy Starich for appointment by the Secretary; Tucker Salles seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

CENTER FOR ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY (CAC) LAB UPDATE

Elsa Poon provided sample updates. Poon stated the CAC reviewed assays completed for samples received from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. The total number of assays was 5,480, with an average turnaround time of 10.9 days, and an average of 4.3 assays completed per sample. CAC analyzed 1,194 samples; of those, 1,069 were routine and 125 were priority.

Teresa Bowers provided CAC updates, highlighting that the average turnaround time for samples decreased from 14 days (FY 2023/24) to 11 days (FY 2024/25). Bowers informed FIAB that a new Total Nitrogen Analyzer was installed and validation is in progress. Bowers shared pictures from a Professional Development day, which allowed staff to shadow an inspection with FMIP staff.

Bowers explained that in FY 2024/25, expenses were ~\$1,900,000. However, in the proposed FY 2026/27 budget, expenses are projected at ~\$2,000,000. This is due to a moderate increase to staff salaries. CAC was able to save costs by obtaining discounts on supplies and completing their own preventative maintenance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Andrew Godfrey stated that for biological additives and biological testing, there is affordable Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) testing available. Young stated that is only a presence/absence test, and would not show colony forming unit levels, which is what FMIP and OIM require. Young further stated that they are always evaluating options, but biologicals present a unique challenge as it is not analysis that a chemistry lab can easily engage in. Young further added that no state fertilizer program regularly analyzes microorganisms and only Oregon performs it sparingly.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Agenda items for the November 5, 2025, meeting include outside bank accounts and a FREP special RFP. For the meeting scheduled for January 27, 2026, information on the 2024 tonnage report should be included.

NEXT MEETING

There will be a special meeting held in Sacramento on November 5, 2025. The next routine meeting will be held on January 27, 2026 in Fresno, California.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to adjourn the meeting; William Oglesby seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a roll call vote of 7 to 0.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:07 PM.

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY NICK YOUNG

Nick Young
Environmental Program Manager I
Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program

10/14/2025
Date