

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (Department)  
FERTILIZER INSPECTION ADVISORY BOARD (FIAB)  
THE DOUBLETREE BY HILTON FRESNO CONVENTION CENTER  
2233 CESAR CHAVEZ BLVD, FRESNO, CA 93721 / HYBRID**

**FEBRUARY 25, 2026  
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Andrew Larson\*  
Chris Gallo, Vice Chair  
David McEuen  
Gary Silveria, Chair\*  
Greg Cunningham\*  
Jake Evans\*  
Melissa McQueen  
Tucker Salles  
Tracy Starich

**CDFA STAFF**

Amanda Staudinger  
Angelia Johnson\*  
Ashley James  
Brandi Alston\*  
Elsa Poon\*  
Evelyne Ndiaye  
Jenna Leal  
Karen Adler\*  
Kris Gulliver\*  
Maria Tenorio Alfred  
Minal Patel\*  
Natalie Jacuzzi\*  
Nick Young  
Nicole Smith  
Teresa Bowers  
Yanhong Li

**INTERESTED PARTIES**

Andrew Godfrey  
Renee Pinel  
Tom Bottoms\*

\*Attended remotely

**INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Gary Silveria, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM and self-introductions were made. Nick Young thanked Maria Tenorio Alfred, Amanda Staudinger, and Ashley James for all the preparation to ensure the board meeting goes smoothly.

**ROLL CALL – ESTABLISH QUORUM**

Roll was taken and a quorum was established.

**APPROVE OCTOBER 14, 2025, AND NOVEMBER 5, 2025, MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Silveria requested the board review the minutes of October 14, 2025, and November 5, 2025, meeting minutes.

**MOTION:** Gregory Cunningham moved to approve the October 14, 2025, minutes as presented; Tucker Salles seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 9 to 0.

**MOTION:** Melissa McQueen moved to approve the November 5, 2025, Special Meeting minutes as presented; Tucker Salles seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 9 to 0.

### **DEPARTMENT / DIVISION / BRANCH UPDATES**

Jenna Leal, Branch Chief, gave the Division and Branch updates. Leal highlighted that several efforts are being finalized and the Department is looking to the future with the upcoming Administration transition. Leal discussed the Climate Resiliency Strategy, which will serve as a legacy document for all programs within the Department. During the document's comment period, hundreds of comments were received related to the Office of Agricultural Resilience (OARS), Produce Safety Program (PSP), and the Branch's Commercial Feed Regulatory Program (CFRP) and the Fertilizer Research and Education Program (FREP). The Climate Resiliency Strategy (CRS) is currently at the Governor's Office with an expected release date at the end of March 2026. In addition to the CRS document, it is also anticipated that the Regulatory Alignment Study also referred to as the Crowe report will be released soon. Crowe is the name of the independent group that was awarded to develop the report with CDFA in collaboration with the Water Board.

In the Department's Executive Branch, the Deputy Secretary of Legislation, Rachel O'Brien, left the agency. It is legislation season, so it is a busy time in that area.

Leal informed FIAB that the Branch is closely monitoring Assembly Bill (AB) 2447 that prescribes an extraordinarily short timeline for growers to comply with strict standards for water and would develop a "Safer Fertilizer Task Force" which would collaborate with FIAB's Technical Advisory Subcommittee (TASC).

Renee Pinel, President/Chief Executive Officer for Western Plant Health Association (WPHA), gave an overview of the bill from industries perspective. Pinel stated that the agricultural lobbyists will be meeting this week to further discuss the bill.

Leal stated the Division is also monitoring AB 1812 and Senate Bill (SB) 1031, which are spot bills involving compost.

Leal provided FIAB with personnel updates. The Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program (FMIP) has one vacancy, and the program is exploring the best use of that position. The initial thought is to have that position be used to hire someone for efficacy data review, as that review process can be cumbersome and can delay labels being approved in a timely manner. Leal highlighted there are currently two vacant field staff positions (Sacramento and Fresno) in the CFRP that will be filled soon. Leal further stated that CFRP will be releasing two positions to another division program as CFRP did not have funding or the workload to support those positions. The only other vacancy within the branch is a support staff position (0.5 PY - Analyst I) which the Branch does not have plans to fill.

Melissa McQueen asked if any further budget adjustments need to be reviewed that came out of the Governor's Budget. Leal explained that the Branch anticipated eight percent cuts across the board and that is exactly what occurred; no further cuts are needed.

### **PROGRAM UPDATES**

Young presented the fund conditions, reporting FMIP starting Fiscal Year (FY) 2025/26 with a beginning balance of \$6.6 million and the Organic Input Material (OIM) Program had a beginning balance of \$3.3 million, for a combined balance of \$9,904,060. Combined revenue was \$3,732,050; expenditures were \$4,299,587; encumbrances were \$584,078; for a total ending combined balance as of December 31, 2025, of \$8,752,445.

Young explained that over the last six years, the program has systematically reduced the overall balance from \$14 million and that the reduction has been intentionally implemented with positive results. The goal is to have at least 50% of the annual budget in reserve.

FREP had a beginning balance of \$8,731,839; revenue was \$1,755,793; expenditures were \$1,676,537; encumbrances through the FY were \$3,477,813; for a total ending balance as of December 31, 2025, of \$5,333,282.

Young went over mill assessment trends, highlighting that the numbers for the first half of the FY look good, at \$4.7 million for the first half of the FY, and total mill assessment revenue for the FY is projected at \$7.8 million, which is slightly higher than last year. From the mill assessment revenue, one mill will be transferred to FREP, as is required by law for that program to operate.

Young explained to FIAB that even though revenue is steady, the OIM Program needs to draft a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) to increase the spending authority, as the program has been spending more than its authority. The BCP will not increase any fees, it will simply allow the program to spend its own funds, as required to appropriately operate the program. Leal explained that the FMIP is Continuously Appropriated, but when the OIM Program was established, it was established as an Budget Act Agricultural Funded program, which gives the legislature the authority to set the spending limit of the program. The OIM annual spending authority is \$2.3 million, but the budget requires \$2.5 million. The overage is due to the lab costs, which were not included in the initial projections at the inception of the program in 2010.

Discussion ensued about the process of getting a BCP approved.

Leal reviewed the presentation provided by Arima Kozina, the Department's Deputy Secretary, from the November 5, 2025, Special Meeting, regarding moving the Branch's external bank accounts into the State Treasury to reduce the Department's Administrative Services Branch's workload to manage those accounts.

Discussion ensued regarding the pros and cons of moving the funds into the State Treasury account, leaving the funds in the Bank of America account, or moving the funds into another external account where they may be able to gain additional interest. FIAB was concerned that the funds could more easily be swept if they were in the State Treasury account.

Melissa McQueen stated she would like to keep the funds at Bank of America at this time, and suggests challenging the administrative costs as presented and request specific data detailing the costs as they seem excessively high from the general estimate provided. Chris Gallo agreed with McQueen and does not think that there is a need to move the Bank of America funds into the State Treasury account. The board supported ways to lower internal administrative costs or other fees, but strongly encouraged maintaining an external account.

**MOTION:** David McEuen moved to keep the funds for FMIP, and FREP in the external Bank of America account and explore interest rates at other external banking institutions with lower administrative costs for FIAB to review at the summer meeting. Tucker Salles seconded; the motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 9 to 0.

Young provided an update regarding the most recent rulemaking, which changed the registration cycle from two years to four years and reorganized beneficial substance labeling format. The labeling format has now been adopted through about half of the states throughout the United States (U.S.), and the other half have pledged to change their law to establish standardized labeling across the U.S. The Office of Administrative Law (OAL) approved the changes on November 14, 2025, and the new regulations became effective upon the filing.

FMIP will be proposing a new rulemaking this spring. FIAB's Regulatory Subcommittee includes Jake Evans and Greg Cunningham, but a replacement is needed since Bill Oglesby is no longer on the board. Vice Chair, Gallo, volunteered to be on the Rulemaking Subcommittee.

Young informed FIAB that the annual FMIP Workshop will be held March 17 – 18, 2026, in Sacramento, and the program anticipates about 100 registrants.

Young provided updates regarding the American Association of Plant and Food Control Officials (AAPFCO) Winter Meeting. Topics discussed include the list of Microorganisms being close to being officially recognized as "plant biostimulants;" an introduction of a prospective public plant biostimulant online database; Soluble Silicon being close to being recognized as a plant nutrient, along with a minimum guarantee (0.1%) and investigational allowance of 0.005 unit + 10% of guarantee; and the definition for secondary and micronutrients evolving to include beneficial (not just essential) nutrients.

Young provided updates from the Biostimulants World Congress. Topics discussed include the differing interpretations between academic versus industry when it comes to

biostimulant properties and declarations. AAPFCO has officially recognized the most critical plant biostimulants; however, novel or niche ingredients remain unrecognized. CDFA received praise for its “simplicity” of regulating claims.

McQueen thanked Young for representing California and all states at these meetings.

Evelyne Ndiaye, FMIP Registration Supervisor, provided conventional fertilizer registration updates. Ndiaye stated that Group 4 (J-Q firms), began their registration cycle on January 1, 2026, and there were 1,766 renewals. Group 1 (R-Z firms) began their one-year transition on January 1, 2026, and there were 2,002 renewals, which will be automatically approved if there are no changes. For the 2025 calendar year, there were 1,331 new applications, 1,680 renewals, and 400 updates, for a total of 3,411. Ndiaye showed a breakdown of applications received by type by month, highlighting that there is less than 0.5% of applications that are over 90 days. Ndiaye thanked the conventional registration team for their hard work in ensuring registrations are processed promptly.

Yanhong Li, OIM Registration Supervisor, provided OIM registration updates. Li stated that Group 4 (J-Q firms), began their registration cycle on January 1, 2026, and Group 1 (R-Z firms) began their one-year transition on January 1, 2026. As of February 2, 2026, 540 OIM applications have been received; all renewals except 22 are from Group 4. Li showed a breakdown of applications received by type by month, highlighting that there is 0% of applications that are over 90 days. Li thanked the OIM registration team for their hard work in ensuring registrations are processed promptly.

Kris Gulliver, Senior Environmental Scientist (SES) (Specialist), provided updates regarding the 2024 Tonnage Report. The tonnage data that was published shows the 2020-2024 trends of different nutrients, including Total Nitrogen, Available Phosphoric Acid, Soluble Potash, Sewage Sludge, and Gypsum. Gulliver stated Total Nitrogen was down in 2024 but is in the same ballpark as previous years. Available Phosphoric Acid has decreased slightly in 2024 but is again in the same ballpark as previous years. Soluble Potash had a bit of a spike in 2023, but has gone back down in 2024, and has overall held steady over the last five years. The program keeps track of Sewage Sludge because of issues with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), specifically in Maine. Gypsum was high in 2020, went down in 2023, and then started to climb again in 2024. Gulliver stated that he is starting the audit of July – December 2025 data will provide a report for that at a future meeting.

Nicole Smith, Field Supervisor, provided updates regarding sampling. Smith stated in the 2025 calendar year, 1,272 samples were taken (812 conventional and 460 OIM). Of the samples taken, 178 samples (14%) were adulterated (not meeting the minimum guarantee); 154 registration violations (12%); and 100 samples misbranded labeling (8%). As of February 2, 2026, 39 samples have been taken (33 conventional and 6 OIM).

In the 2025 calendar year, 29 complaints were received (15 conventional and 14 OIM). Of those, 22 have been closed and seven are pending further investigation. As of February 2, 2026, one complaint has been received and closed.

Smith reviewed Notice of Proposed Actions (NOPA) issued in 2025. There were 22 in total (18 paid, 4 unpaid, and 2 pending). Revenue assessed was \$225,896.19 and \$127,084.74 was received.

Smith informed FIAB that part of the recently approved regulatory package includes language that allows the program to deny license and registration renewal if a firm owes outstanding penalties.

Discussion ensued regarding the \$2 million judgement against Agro Research International and Agro Gold WS.

In 2026, there have been five NOPAs issued, for a total assessment of \$17,815.94. As of February 2, 2026, \$0 has been received.

Natalie Jacuzzi, FREP Supervisor, provided program updates. Jacuzzi stated that the Ag Expert Panel released draft recommendations and there is a 30-day minimum comment period. After the comment period, there will be revisions and public meetings, and the final draft is expected to be released in Summer 2026. Jacuzzi also briefly reviewed the Climate Resilience Strategy for California Agriculture.

Jacuzzi shared that a new Environmental Scientist (ES) will be starting on March 2, 2026 with FREP. FREP has applied for two Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) (AgMAR and Central Coast outreach and support). The Central Coast project is aligned with a lot of the work that is being done in the Nitrogen Irrigation Initiative (NII) space.

The FREP Technical Advisory Sub-Committee (TASC) held a meeting on February 13, 2026, and recommended funding a NOx emissions project in the amount of \$600,000. This grant coincides with the California Air Resources Control Board's (CARB) Request for Proposal (RFP) that was released on February 23, 2026, although CARB's is more atmospherically focused. There is good synergy between the Department and CARB, and these grants should address industry's concerns regarding NOx emissions that Pinel discussed at the prior FIAB meeting.

For the FREP-funded NOx project, TASC suggested approach was to have FREP work with researchers and experts to develop a robust proposal that would address the Subject Matter Expert Review Panel (SMERP) report. The NOx project will be incorporated into FREP's regular RFP, which is expected to be released in March 2026. The regular RFP will be ~\$900,000, in addition to the ~\$600,000 allocated for NOx, for a total RFP of \$1.5 million.

Leal stated it is a priority of the Secretary to get these projects funded by the end of the calendar year.

Jacuzzi provided updates on FREP's Nitrogen and Irrigation Initiative (NII), stating grower surveys and outreach events are being conducted to ensure NII gets the growers perspective on nitrogen and water savings. The goal is to track data from water meters and fertilizer tank measurements and highlight grower stories about NII, specifically what has and has not worked for them while working with NII.

Maria Tenorio Alfred, FREP Research Data Specialist III, provided an update on three large grants. SCBG was a federal grant received for \$750,000. That grant closed on June 30, 2025, and the funds were expended. The Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) is another federal grant received for \$2 million. This grant ends on March 31, 2027, and has two subawards to University of California (UC) Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR) and UC Davis (UCD). Remaining funds include \$1,037,000 for UCANR and \$78,000 for UCD. The final grant is FREP-funded to UCANR in the amount of \$3,004,859. This grant ends on December 31, 2026, and there is \$1,400,000 remaining.

### **CENTER FOR ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY (CAC) LAB UPDATE**

Teresa Bowers, Environmental Program Manager I, provided updates regarding sample numbers and turn-around times for assays being run at the CAC. From July 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, there were 2,924 assays completed from 545 samples, of which 534 were routine and 63 were rushed.

Elsa Poon, SES (Supervisory), provided FIAB with CAC staff updates, highlighting that in November 2025 an ES retired after 25 years of service with CAC and an Agricultural Biological Technician (ABT) received a promotion within another CAC program, so the team that works on Fertilizer samples were down by two staff. In March 2026, a new ES will start and a new ABT has also been hired.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Pinel expressed her gratitude for the progress being made in the fertilizer space and is very impressed with the clarity and direction the FMIP is heading. Pinel further stated the meeting ran smoothly and was clear and direct and staff are very knowledgeable.

### **AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Provide FIAB with external bank account options with higher interest yields and explore the high administrative costs of managing the accounts

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next routine meeting will be held on June 3, 2026, in Sacramento, California.

**MOTION:** Melissa McQueen moved to adjourn the meeting; Tucker Salles seconded. The motion passed unanimously with all board members 9 to 0.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:42 PM.

**ORIGINAL SIGNED BY NICK YOUNG**

Nick Young  
Environmental Program Manager I  
Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program

02/25/2026

**Date**