

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

JUNE 11, 2025
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS

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

MEMBER ABSENT

Jake Evans

CDFA STAFF

Angelia Johnson
Brandi Alston
Brittnie Williams
Carla Sanchez
Daniel Rodriguez
Elizabeth Moseby
Elsa Poon
Emad Jahanzad
Evelyne Ndiaye
Jenna Leal
Karen Adler
Kelsey Dodd
Kris Gulliver
Leo Campos
Maria Tenorio Alfred
Mia Humphreys
Minal Patel
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 9:00 AM and self-introductions were made.

ROLL CALL – ESTABLISH QUORUM

Roll was taken and a quorum was established.

APPROVE FEBRUARY 26, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Chair Silveria requested the board review the minutes of the February 26, 2025 FIAB meeting.

MOTION: Greg Cunningham moved to approve the minutes as presented; Melissa McQueen seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 7 to 0. William Oglesby was not present at this time.

DEPARTMENT / DIVISION / BRANCH UPDATES

Jenna Leal, Branch Chief, stated the Department/Division continues to monitor the budget deficits. Leal announced Division Director Natalie Krout-Greenberg and Branch Chief Geetika Joshi, will attend the 2025 Center for Produce Safety Research Symposium in La Jolla, California and Secretary Karen Ross will provide opening remarks. Leal reported Branch updates, announcing Mark Cady, Senior Environmental Scientist (SES) (Supervisory) for the Fertilizer Research and Education Program (FREP), retired on May 31, 2025. The Branch anticipates backfilling the position in July. Leal will work with the incumbent in reviewing the budget and understanding program needs to determine if the Environmental Scientist (ES) vacancy requires backfill. The Feed Program has selected a candidate to backfill the SES (Supervisory) for Southern California. The new hire announcement is to be made soon.

William Oglesby arrived at 9:06 AM.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Nick Young, Environmental Program Manager I (EPM), introduced two recently hired ES registration staff for the Conventional Fertilizer Program led by Evelyn Ndiaye, SES (Supervisory); Roshani Shakya and Daniel Rodriguez.

Young reported as of July 1, 2024, the beginning balance of Commercial Fertilizer is \$7.2 million and organic input material (OIM) is \$3.1 million with a combined total of \$10.3 million. The ending adjusted balance as of March 31, 2025, is \$5.4 million for Commercial Fertilizer and \$2.6 million for OIM with a combined total of \$8.0 million.

The mill assessment trends for FY 2024/25 at 2.5 mill totaled \$5,789,135 million. Mill assessments are projected to fall between \$7.7 and \$8.1 million.

FREP has a beginning balance of \$8.9 million. Revenue was \$2.6 million; expenditures were \$2.4 million; and encumbrances for grants through June 30, 2025, totaled \$5.2 million. As of March 31, 2025, FREP's ending adjusted balance was \$5.6 million.

Melissa McQueen advised the program to continue watching trends for potential loss of acreage, resulting in less fertilizer and to see if ag land disappears.

Young mentioned at the last FIAB meeting that the Fertilizer Program's reserves went from \$14 million to \$8 million which might be a point of discussion if reserved funds continue to trend downward. Young stated Jake Evans had commented that it appeared the program is receiving the same amount of money based on mill assessment trends. Young presented a table illustrating Fertilizer and OIM Program's combined revenue and expenditures to address Evans comment. The goal of the board was to lower the

mill and gradually reduce it over time to maintain a 50% reserve of the program's operating budget. The table details the program's expenditures, revenue, and projections on a historical basis. Fertilizer and OIM revenue mill assessment FY 2021-22 started at \$9 million to FY 2024-25 projection of \$7.7 million. The fund condition reserve FY 2024-25 is projected to be \$8.4 million. Young noted the balance reflects the decrease which effectively lowers fund condition. Due to the 8% budget reduction, the program reduced the board approved budget. Young noted the accuracy of the fund condition reserve amounts. The program's fund condition FY 2021-22 was \$14 million, FY 2022-23 \$14.1 million, FY 2023-24 \$12 million and FY 2024-25 \$10.3 million and currently at \$8.4 million. Young noted about \$1.5 to \$2 million changes from prior year. This change will allow approximately two more years at the current mill assessment rate before program required changes. Providing this information to the board shows the board's intent to lower the program's fund condition without excess expenditures and operate in a positively evolved way with improvement of turnaround times and continued enforcement in the field.

McQueen asked if actual expenditure excludes FREP activities. Young responded, stating the expenditure does not include FREP.

Leal added, FREP's strategic planning includes a hold on personnel hiring to backfill the SES (Supervisory) and Environmental Scientist positions until numbers are looked at in detail.

Young reported the proposed rulemaking for the four-year registration cycle and beneficial substances labeling 45-day comment period ended on May 5, 2025. Only two public comments were received, and both were in favor of the proposed rulemaking. The final rulemaking was sent to the Office of Administrative Law on May 27, 2025, with the program's request that it become effective upon filing with the Secretary of State. The program, in the meantime, is currently transitioning to the four-year registration cycle. The next registration renewal group will have a limited, six-month registration cycle beginning July 1, 2025, with pro-rated fees of \$12.50 (conventional fertilizer) and \$125 (OIM).

The next Fertilizer Industry Workshop is anticipated for October 15-16, 2025, at the Hilton Arden West in Sacramento. FREP will speak about their program, research and resources.

The Biostimulants World Congress is December 2-4, 2025, in Barcelona, Spain. Young has been invited to speak and serve on a panel regarding plant biostimulant regulation. Young represents the Department and California on plant biostimulants and represents Association of American Plant Food Control Officials (AAPFCO) throughout the United States. AAPFCO covered Young's expenses in 2024 and then the Department covered the 2023 expenses. Program's request to the board is to co-fund travel expenses with AAPFCO. Even if approved, there is a possibility that Young will not be able to attend due to the Governor's Office restrictions on out-of-state and international travel.

Vice Chair Chris Gallo inquired about where California is in current global politics expressing importance of value for California to be represented in plant biostimulant discussion. Young stated the states are the drivers on this topic although the EU already have a lot more methodologies acknowledged. The European Biostimulants Industry Council, International Council, creates several proposals and determinations in the EU on what is recognized. They have similar challenges of uniformity between the EU members that the states do within the U.S. Young states the role as a California representative is advocating for our market, being a driving force for California agriculture, and setting scientifically recognized standards.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to approve co-funding travel expenses for Nick Young to attend the Biostimulants World Congress in December of up to \$1,750 with AAPFCO matching funds; Chris Gallo seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 8 to 0.

Renee Pinel, CEO of Western Plant Health Association, suggested increasing the fund amount. If AAPFCO declines sponsorship, the Department will sponsor in entirety.

Greg Cunningham also suggested funding the whole amount so as to not having to explain why the increase if the whole amount is not needed.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen amended the original motion mentioned above and moved to approve \$3,500 travel expenses for Nick Young to attend the Biostimulants World Congress in December; Chris Gallo seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 8 to 0.

The AAPFCO Summer Annual Conference is August 7-8, 2025, in Omaha, Nebraska. The two most significant topics to be discussed will be “essential nutrients” versus “beneficial nutrients” and soluble silicon. A working group has determined a suggested minimum guaranteed analysis and investigational allowance for soluble silicon. The other topic of discussion is California’s list of recognized microorganisms for consideration as plant biostimulants for all states. Microorganisms that are potential human pathogens may be removed from consideration from the list and “dual use” pesticidal microorganisms are up for continued discussion. Young noted that the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) has evaluated the list and identified microorganisms they classify as pesticidal.

Discussion ensued regarding mill assessments when considering the direction of the industry with biostimulants becoming more mainstream.

Evelyne Ndiaye, SES (Supervisory), reported that she and Yanhong Li, SES (Supervisory), attended the 2025 Biological Products Industry Alliance Annual meeting March 31 - April 3, 2025, in Sacramento. Both Ndiaye and Li were speakers during the Biostimulant Innovation Committee Meeting and the Post Conference Regulatory Workshop. AAPFCO updates on beneficial substances adoption, plant biostimulant adoption in the Food and Agricultural Code and label requirements in California were

presented. Several industry members, DPR and other industries were present at the workshop.

The fertilizer registration staff updated their review process by adding a date stamp for the “last status change” in the ExtraView database which has tremendously helped the program and industry to be able to view the date that the status was changed. Registration staff are tasked to add a status required on monthly reports that show the number of applications processed and approved, and how many applications are under or over a 90-day turnaround time. Ndiaye reported that between January 1, 2025 through April 30, 2025, the program received 467 new applications, 1,594 renewals, 134 updates, totaling 2,195 conventional fertilizer applications. Applications received were higher in February and March and renewal applications peaked in January. A total of three new applications were over 90 days, one re-submitted application was over 90 days, a total of 2,195 of applications were received and 1,785 were approved. Overall, applications with an over 90-day program response time are well under 1%. Renewal applications received between January and April are on provisional required status where program is waiting for a firm response.

Yanhong Li, SES (Supervisory), gave an OIM registration update. OIM created a fertilizer registration application status report to monitor the turnaround time for review. The report included the total days and the numbers of records in “pending review” and “resubmitted” status. The program can calculate the average review timeframe of pending review status, re-submitted records and renewals for OIM and conventional applications. The report identifies the amount pending review or the number of resubmitted records or renewals not reviewed within 30-60-90 days or more. Li presented a bar graph illustrating the number of applications received and applications approved from January to April 2025. Of the total of 805 OIM registrations received, 634 records were approved (80%). Li further presented a table displaying efficiency and turnaround times. As of April 30, 2025, one OIM record was not received within 90 days; 16 resubmitted records reviewed within 90 days. Compared to the applications received from January to April, the total percentage of over 90 days is 2.1%, which is historically low. Li announced the OIM registration staff consists of five employees; 4 SES (Specialist) and 1 ES who is currently undergoing training.

Nicole Smith, SES (Supervisory) for FMIP’s field staff, reported a total of 446 samples received as of May 12, 2025; 196 conventional fertilizer and 250 OIM. A total of 26 notices of proposed actions (NOPAs) were received in 2024: 20 paid, three pending payment(s), and three unpaid with a judgment filed. One of the judgment firms submitted payment. The total amount assessed is \$176,271.63 and as of May 12, 2025, the total collected \$131,430.42. Smith noted that the total assessed versus received will have some variation due to judgments and firm negotiation on a settlement plan with the Department’s Legal Office. A total of eight NOPAs received in 2025: two paid, two hearing pending (one reached settlement and one upcoming hearing), and four awaiting firm response. The total assessed is \$126,694.49 and total received \$8,220.75. Smith reported a total of 20 complaints in 2024: 18 closed and two pending. A total of 15

complaints were received in 2025: 12 closed and two pending further investigation. Smith noted the one pending case from 2023 is closed.

Emad Jahanzad, SES (Specialist) FREP, reported a request for proposal (RFPs) for research projects was released on November 5, 2024 and FREP received 59 concept proposals in December. The FREP Technical Advisory Subcommittee (TASC) reviewed the concept proposals and selected nine for full proposal phase then later recommended six proposals for funding.

- 1) Developing Tools and Information to Enhance Water-Nitrogen Use Efficiency and Sustainability of Avocado Production Systems by Ali Montazar, University California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) San Diego, Riverside and Imperial Counties
- 2) Advancing Irrigation and Nitrogen Management of Cantaloupe in Southern California Using Field Experiments and Remote Sensing by Amir Verdi, UC Riverside
- 3) Nitrogen Fate in Nursery Production Systems by Chris Shogren, UCCE Los Angeles County
- 4) Nutrient Management: A Collaborative Approach between Agriculture and Regulatory Programs in the San Diego Region by Valerie Mellano, San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group Science and Policy Advisor
- 5) Development of Diagnostic Tools to Support Site-Specific N Management Decisions in Organic Cropping Systems by Paul Zerbe, Soil Health Lab LLC
- 6) Reducing Orchard Nitrate Leaching to Groundwater with HFLC and AgMAR: Ground-Truthing and Guiding the ILRP Assessment Tool by Thomas Harter, UC Davis

The six projects totaling \$1,687,307, were recommended for funding upon the board's approval.

Jahanzad presented the three projects not recommended for funding.

Pinel confirmed FREP is in conversations with the California Air Resources Board on the nitrate emissions from fertilizer regarding the expert panel subcommittee release of recommendations. Pinel announced an upcoming hearing is scheduled and the importance of having FREP work with CARB on proposals of future research projects to avoid parallel paths and prevent conflicting research. This will help when soliciting research projects next year there is a clear focus on where FREP fits in those kinds of research projects. Karen Adler, SES (Specialist), responded stating FREP is in touch with CARB and that they received a draft copy of the recommendations. FREP's focus is to be aligned with their research priorities. FREP is tasked to monitor the literature review and data collection by the CARB expert panel committees.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to approve the six project proposals; William Oglesby seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 8 to 0.

Jahanzad announced Maria Tenorio Alfred, FREP Research Data Specialist III, has covered the FREP Grower Training Program, reporting statistics from April 2024 to March 2025. Jahanzad reported a total of 1,883 eligible growers, growers who previously examined and self-certified their own nitrogen and irrigation management plans. Eligibility is maintained for three years. A total of 211 newly eligible growers were self-certified, and 52 courses were offered online on FREP's webpage with 103.5 hours of continuing education (CE) credits and 772 growers participated in the self-study CE course.

Chair Silveria commented, stating the three hours in three-year requirement for the self-study program should be increased. Jahanzad responded, FREP has discussed the possibility of increasing the requirement, but more brainstorming is to come. Adler mentioned a FREP discussion on the comparison of grower requirements for pesticides and grower requirements for fertilizers. FREP incentivized the nitrogen and irrigation initiative (NII) on farm consultation as a new pathway for growers in Central Valley or Ventura County as an option for CE credit.

Adler gave a summary of the last FIAB Research and Education Subcommittee meeting. The annual NII progress report included in the meeting material packet is valuable information about FREP's progress and specific information of the budget and deliverables presented at the subcommittee meeting. The goal of the subcommittee meeting held in late March was to provide details on NII and gain feedback and address concerns from subcommittee members Gary Silveria, Melissa McQueen and Chris Gallo. The University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) representatives and five farm advisors were also in attendance to talk about their role in the NII program and answer questions. FREP acknowledged concerns about NII and recognized the need for details; therefore, this meeting was an opportunity for FREP to provide clarity on how FREP and partners view long term need with helping growers on the issue of high levels of nitrate in groundwater highlighting that it would take years to help targeted outreach.

FIAB is also interested in tracking the success of the program and value of NII to the fertilizer industry. Adler addressed the FIAB concern of duplication of effort with FREP outreach and NII. Outreach are based on local needs and priorities, limited to size and scope; however, NII focuses on scientifically proven best management practices where FREP's focus is to assist growers in the Central Coast and San Joaquin Valley with the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) requirements. The NII project was based on a needs assessment with FREP and their partners who work in a coordinated manner that differs from FREP's grant program. The key takeaway from the meeting was that it is an opportunity for FREP strategic planning with the FIAB moving forward. FREP proposes to utilize UCD on nitrogen irrigation and program evaluation focus on grower learning and adoption to help FREP identify improvements on impact. UCANR focuses on analysis of data from the Central Coast and Central Valley to better understand best management practices that are most efficient using IMP data to evaluate growers improvements. FREP and FIAB can look at the changes if they fit with existing

objectives and potentially new objectives and discuss future funding, reevaluating FREP priorities and structures.

FREP acknowledges the time spent developing NII to establish partnerships. Adler stated incorporating program feedback and evaluation and looking at metrics to ensure effective outreach in demonstrating the success of the program.

Adler asked if FIAB would be interested in another subcommittee meeting prior to the next FIAB meeting to provide recommendations from UCD and UCANR data analysis report and discuss the plan moving forward with the strategic plan.

Chair Silveria agreed to a subcommittee meeting prior to the next FIAB meeting.

Leal mentioned that discussion of the budget also ensued at the meeting for FIAB to better understand the budget commitments of NII. Budget discussion was a key piece for having FIAB acknowledge the funds encumbered with UCD and the contractors meeting the scope of work within the contract. Chair Silveria responded, stating a contract was written on the funding which must be honored so regardless of the timeframe, the work will continue beyond the three-year period. Clarification was received and that NII activities and future FREP activities are to be considered.

Leal further stated FREP continues to look for federal and external funding sources to help with the NII, but to be mindful as other priorities are becoming topics of conversation in the fertilizer industry emphasizing the importance of staying relevant with the work being done. Strategic planning will be presented at the next FIAB meeting for discussion.

Vice Chair Gallo commented, with the initiative with nitrogen and irrigation and RFP focused on nitrogen, asking if the board should be advocating FREP to do more RFPs for biological or beneficial substances. Vice Chair Gallo suggested strategic planning discussion to determine how much more research is needed on nitrogen versus education and if priorities dictate it is education what other priorities are needed from a research standpoint. McQueen agreed with Vice Chair Gallo stating it is imperative to look at the goals of FREP and what needs to be studied each year to be aligned prior to seeking the next research project.

Jahanzad stated TASC reviews RFP requirements and priorities weekly and if there is a need to include more research topics TASC will recommend. This year's proposals were focused mainly on nitrogen but other nutrients as well. FREP includes as many topics as advised. Jahanzad stated a CCA workgroup was formed years ago to learn more about grower needs. The need was to produce more and generate data related to microorganisms and biofertilizers.

William Oglesby asked if there was a request to get UC scientists to follow a certain parameter or protocol around data gathering that would be useful across the board. Adler stated that a special RFP specifically defines projects which can be narrowed to a

single topic. William Oglseby commented, stating it would help immensely taking the recently adopted regulations and some research to better define those parameters of how a company can take a plant biostimulant and bring it to the marketplace.

Vice Chair Gallo stated this topic may defer to the Biostimulant World Congress and identify what the EU has surrounding this. If its education on the parameters to be registered and to not have to go through research RFPs within FREP.

Young expressed the importance of education and collaboration with the EU. Although EU has accepted efficacy data there are no methods to quantify the substance.

Chair Silveria stated the subcommittee meeting answered a lot of questions and concerns that FIAB had.

CENTER FOR ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY (CAC) LAB UPDATE

Teresa Bowers, EPM I for CAC, presented a total of 3,597 assays completed between July 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, with an average of 11.6 days per sample. A total of 1,145 assays were completed between January 1, 2025 to March 31, 2025, with an average of 8 days per sample. A total of 711 samples were completed: 87.8% routine and 12.2% priority. CAC completed a total of 220 samples in the third quarter: 93.6% routine and 6.4% priority. From July 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025, CAC completed a total of 3,597 assays; 468 re-run with an average of 4.5 assays were completed per sample. From January 1, 2025 to March 31, 2025, CAC completed a total of 1,145 assays: 108 re-run with an average of 4.7 assays were completed per sample.

Bowers announced their Environmental Scientist attended the Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP) seminar hosted by Agilent Technology. CAC staff, Silen Patel and Marliiss Neal, hosted a science experiment during the Department's "Bring Your Child to Work Day" which became a fun interactive session for the children. Dr. Samreen Siddiqui is CAC's newly appointed Nucleus Team and Lab Business Operation Supervisor.

Young requested guidance and feedback from the board regarding cannabis on fertilizer labels. FMIP does not allow the term cannabis on labels. In 2005, the program identified first hydroponic products that were marketed towards cannabis. At that time, cannabis was not recreationally legal, so the program made a policy decision to not allow cannabis on labels. In 2017, the program requested a formal legal referral to the Department's Legal Office which concluded that although cannabis was legal in California, it was still federally illegal and that the program needed to maintain current stance and not allow the term cannabis on fertilizer labels. FMIP was approached this year by a company asking the program to revisit their stance because the company had a product with proven efficacy of the product increasing THC levels that was validated by program. Previously the alternative was to accept, for instance, directions for use of hemp, but not cannabis. The company's concern was if hemp is on the label, it could elevate THC levels past the point of being sellable as hemp, thereby resulting in possible issues of liability for the company and the program. FMIP sent another legal referral and the Department's Legal Office concluded it was a policy decision on the

program and the Department as a whole. Division Director Krout-Greenberg will converse with Secretary Ross about program direction. The program reached out to AAPFCO and other states and received 20 responses, all unanimously indicated that there was no opposition to the term cannabis on fertilizer labeling. Nineteen of the states already accept or would have no problem with cannabis on fertilizer labels and the last response was from Canada. Of the states that have no approved labels with cannabis, no state indicated they would prohibit and not allow it if they received a label for review.

Young stated that the program reached out to Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) due to potential conflict with cannabis on OIM labels because organic input materials adhere to federal USDA NOP standards. OMRI did not have an issue with the term cannabis because the scientific name of hemp is *Cannabis sativa*, so “cannabis” is scientifically accurate. The California Department of Pesticide Regulations (CDPR) has no issue with cannabis claims; however, all their labels are reviewed through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) first, and the EPA would most likely not approve them as a federal entity. Young asked for feedback or guidance from the board prior to Division Director Krout-Greenberg’s discussion with Secretary Ross.

Chair Silveria stated no issue with the name since *Cannabis sativa* is a recognized crop by CDPR and that it would be honest advertising, especially if other states are doing it for proven legal operations.

Oglesby agreed with allowing cannabis on fertilizer labels.

Pinel asked if there is an AAPFCO standard wording for states to prevent from being the only state soliciting cannabis on fertilizer labels. Young stated that AAPFCO has no standard, but would not have an issue within label areas, such as the directions for use. AAPFCO states have indicated that they would either allow it on the label or would allow it if they did not have any labels at present time.

Kris Gulliver, SES (Specialist) for OIM, gave an update on tonnage. Gulliver reported that the tonnage audit for 2024 is completed and should be available on the program’s webpage by the next FIAB meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Chair Silveria requested agenda items for the next meeting.

Subcommittee members will be asked to select a date in August or September prior to the next FIAB meeting. Chair Silveria mentioned a potential future joint meeting with FIAB and TASC. Leal stated it would be a great opportunity for the FIAB to engage in the TASC meeting who will be discussing research priorities for the upcoming RFP.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 14, 2025, at the Western Plant Health Association in Sacramento, California.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 AM.

MOTION: Melissa McQueen moved to adjourn the meeting; William Oglesby seconded. The motion passed unanimously by all board members present with a vote of 8 to 0.

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY NICK YOUNG

Nick Young
Environmental Program Manager I
Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program

06/11/2025

Date