

ENVIRONMENTAL FARMING ACT SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL (EFA SAP)

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES for February 13, 2025

EFASAP Call to Order

In Attendance: Jeff Dlott, Don Cameron, Brianna St. Pierre, Vicky Dawley, Leonard Diggs, Erik Porse, Judith Redmond, Jon Gustafson

Minutes from Previous Meeting

- The panel members present unanimously approved the September 2024 meeting minutes.

OEFI Director's Update

- OEFI received \$65M in HSP, \$40M in SWEEP, and \$15M in Regional Equipment Sharing Program (new program) through the Proposition 4 Bond. HSP and SWEEP funding will likely be released in Fall 2025, and the Regional Equipment Sharing Program funding will likely be released the following summer.
- Governor's Budget contains \$7M in GGRF funding from AMMP and DDRDP in the 25-26 budget.
- State Board forwarded a recommendation to the Secretary for a final definition for "Regenerative Agriculture" to be used in CDFA programs.
- CDFA Climate Strategy is under interagency review and undergoing public comment.

Introduction to Office of Pesticide Consultation and Analysis

Presentation

- The Office of Pesticide Consultation and Analysis receives pesticide mill funding as well as general fund dollars to perform its mission.

- OPCA has three major functions:
 - OPCA works closely with DPR to analyze the economic and pest management impact of proposed pesticide regulations on production agriculture.
 - OPCA runs six grant programs: Biologically Integrated Farming Systems; Proactive Integrated Pest Management Solutions; IR-4 Support; Sustainable Pest Management Pilots; Pollinator Habitat Program; Organic Transition Pilot Program
 - OPCA provides pest management policy expertise to internal and external stakeholders

Panel Comment/Discussion

- Member Redmond asked why OPCA and NASS's organic acreage numbers are so different. Dr. Mace said the reason for the differences are not clear and they are working with the Organic Ag Institute to resolve it. Some differences may come from crop rotations within a year, for example.
- Member Redmond asked whether OPCA analyzes environmental and health impacts. Dr. Mace clarified that is the Department of Pesticide Regulation's Jurisdiction.
- Chair Dlott commented that studies that predict pesticide use changes based on regulations would be useful and asked whether this is common. Dr. Mace said this is probably the most detailed analysis of this kind to date.
- Member Porse asked how much latitude OPCA has to identify the costs and benefits in their economic analyses. Dr. Mace said that they focus narrowly on pest management impacts. Member Porse asked about averted costs and Dr. Mace said that some analyses identify averted costs.
- Member St. Pierre asked about PFAS detections in Intrepid 2F. Wants to know how to distinguish incidental PFAS from PFAS added to the formulation. Dr. Mace clarified that OPCA didn't do the testing for PFAS on the ground- was using existing data.
- Member Redmond asked about outcomes of BIFS and specifically how outreach is done. Dr. Mace says PCA's are heavily involved and that some grantees do incentives to get growers to try something new.
- Chair Dlott asked about invasive species predictions and whether there has been interaction between OPCA and companies working on biologicals. Dr. Mace says that it is possible to incorporate biologicals in some of OPCA's programs.
- Dr. Redmond asked how to get out of silos. For example, HSP can help reduce pesticides indirectly. How does OPCA's work relate to other sustainability grant

programs? Dr. Mace says HSP is an important touchpoint. Chair Dlott said it would make sense to understand how pest management affects biodiversity above and below ground.

- Member Diggs asked Dr. Mace to summarize OPCA's impact. Also wants to know what the Panel can do to be supportive. Dr. Mace said the benefit is to provide information on economic impacts of pest management and to do that based on data and to combine that info with DPR's analyses on human health and the environment. Dr. Mace said that EFASAP can extend the reach of their information to the public. Dr. Mata said that OEFI could think about how data and information from OPCA could inform priorities within programs like HSP to achieve multiple benefits.

Public Comment/Discussion

- Question of why there were no citrus numbers. Dr. Mace is unsure.

Panel Discussion: Lessons learned from SWEEP and HSP Block Grant Pilot Program

Sacha Lozano, Santa Cruz RCD

- Regional collaboration with 3 RCD's, serving 4 counties
- Funded 32 projects, half to SDFRs
- Generally, a positive experience- allowed more control, autonomy and flexibility to run an iterative process with farmers
- Reimbursement process takes too long
- Took a long time to get projects approved and contracted
- Changes to individual projects can also be challenging
- 5% cap on TA is low, especially for SDFRs
- Admin funding is generally adequate
- Would like to be able to apply indirect costs to admin and TA, including contractor invoices; recommend that grantees can recover indirect costs on contractors

Rita Martin, Glenn County RCD

- 51 awardees for HSP and 29 for SWEEP block grants
- Glenn County has a climate smart ag standing committee
- Invested in grant management software for full grant lifecycle
- Used in-house TA as well as UCANR Community Education Specialists
- There can be a disconnect between CDFA and growers in the direct-to-producer incentive programs. They were able to do 1:1 meetings with all SWEEP applicants.

- They were able to directly negotiate with vendors
- Would like to share resources between the block grant recipients
- Some issues with missed communications- important information during office hours that everyone can't always attend
- Sometimes vendors were over-involved and potentially inappropriately profiting
- Oversubscribed by about \$1M
- Suggestion to increase TA funding to cover larger geographic area; 5% was enough for their limited geography with assistance from UCANR
- Suggest transferring more project verification responsibility to block grantees from CDFA
- Suggestion for baseline funding model for TAPs to allow them to keep outreach going

Lisa Shipley, Solano County Farm Bureau

- Covered 8 counties with SWEEP and 5 with HSP
- 66 HSP grant recipients and 36 SWEEP recipients
- Used partnerships with Farm Bureaus and RCD's for outreach and TA, as well as a private TA contractor
- Hired a full-time administrative assistant for grants
- Total ask of \$15.5M for HSP and \$6.8M for SWEEP
- Large response from SDFRs, well beyond 25% requirement
- Program guidelines and messaging were not always consistent, example of differences in allowable grant size for producers; as well as whether producers could apply to multiple block grants
- Suggest more training for BGRs before the grantmaking process is underway
- Document access is a challenge- Sharepoint is challenging
- Advanced Payment procedure- time constraints and spending rules were a hindrance; consider extending AP timeline beyond 3 months for these longer grants
- Consideration should be given to reporting requirements that go beyond the grant term; need more details about how it will be handled
- Overall, a positive experience and they see the value in the regional approach

Jamie Whiteford, Ventura County RCD

- Had both HSP and SWEEP block grants

- Joined by Emily Nye, project manager.
- Only SWEEP BGR is southern half of CA; broadened acceptance of applications to cover more of the state after SWEEP direct-to-producer cancelled; had about \$12M in requests.
- Did 1:1 meetings with each applicant.
- 30 SWEEP projects; able to broaden service area because of UCANR CESs and other CDFA-funded TA organizations.
- Advanced Payments are very critical.
- Slower solicitation for HSP block grants, likely because of direct-to-producer application option.
- One-on-one, local assistance has been important to making sure projects are successful .
- Block grants have a high invoicing burden; recommend that future recipients have staff dedicated to invoicing.
- There were some details being fleshed out by CDFA mid-grant, making regular BGR meetings critical.
- Block grant style brought a lot of money and opportunity to the region.
- Farmers seemed happy with having BGR do the CDFA paperwork, making funding more accessible to SDFRs and small farmers.
- Strengthened partnership in the region.
- Recommend selecting future recipients based on diverse geography and ensuring the recipients serve diverse commodities.
- CDFA grant programs keep RCD technical assistance programs alive.
- Suggest future BGRs leverage existing TA partnerships, identifying a main organization with accounting capacity and supporting organizations that administer TA.

Panel Questions/Comments

- Don Cameron commends Glenn County's block grant structure. Asked whether there is information on project completion to compare to direct solicitations. Rita said that few projects are completed at this point to do the comparison, and HSP is slower than SWEEP. Mentioned issues with PG&E getting SWEEP projects started.
- Member Daley asked if there is a way to share existing documents and processes with future block grantees. Lisa suggested CDFA gather templates and have a library for others to access.

- Member Dawley asked if costs were reimbursed- was anything not allowed that was frustrating? Sacha said the one cost that wasn't allowed was a portion of the indirect cost on contracts. Rita mentioned it is frustrating not to be able to reimburse food. Jamie mentioned that a Notice to Proceed could have allowed hours prior to execution to be billable.
- Chair Dlott asked if there was a consensus about wanting templates. Jamie said yes to add to previous comments. Jamie also mentioned that they used regional issues as part of the vetting process for projects and it could be useful for future BGRs to get ideas.
- Jamie suggested having a salary range worked into the budget so that changes don't trigger project modifications as RCD's swap out staff.
- Chair Dlott asked if we can pull together grantees to make an ask of a private foundation to keep the momentum.
- Chair Dlott asked about grant management software. Carolyn Cook responded that the Department is pursuing a Department-wide grant management software solution.

Public

- Anna Larson from CalCAN asked about BGRs experience supporting farmers employing multiple practices, especially first-time applicants. Rita emphasized importance of stacking practices and said they prioritized projects with multiple, balanced practices. Lisa Shipley said they did something similar. Emily said most of their applicants had multiple practices.
- Arshdeep Singh from from PAGG
 - Supportive of block grant model
 - Some counties missed the SWEEP program in Central Valley
 - Asked for more details on selection process within BGRs
 - Cited long delays in signing contracts in HSP and misalignment with growing season
 - Asks if there is a process for CDFA to rank/assess BGR performance
 - Cited issue with vendors raising prices when grant money is on the table; growers need help assessing prices
 - Cited issue with big difference between quotes and the final cost of the project when executed; asked if there is a way to allow project design changes to cut costs when necessary

- Suggestion that maybe in the future the service area boundaries for block grantees should not be set in stone, especially not for the second round of applications if there is one
- Suggest that CDFA should dictate the standard processes, including things like scoring criteria
- Director Mata pointed out that counties left out in Block Grants were historically heavily served; also said that CDFA didn't get strong applications from every geography
- Emily Winfield, Director of North Coast Soil Hub
 - Partnered with Zero Foodprint
 - 5% cap on TA is not sufficient, particularly to SDFRs
 - Said practice rates are not keeping up with costs
 - Suggested more trust in the TAP verification process; oversight from CDFA has been heavy handed at times; redundant layers of project approval and projects declined for small infractions
 - Lags in payments
 - Suggested county-specific targets for SDFRs based on demographics and farm size
- Kevin Greer
 - Would like to see more communication between block grant holders
 - Suggested a closeout sharing session among current block grantees to share lessons learned
- Anonymous written comment: Block grants have been good for technical assistance but limited geographic coverage
- Written Comment from Amy King from Solano RCD: requested increasing the TA cap
- Carolyn Cook expressed gratitude to Block Grantees for their patience
- Siskiyou County resident also said regional cost differences require flexibility in reimbursement for practices
- Member Porse said CDFA should evaluate effectiveness and impacts with surveys and semi-structured interviews to focus on customer service

Relevant Acronyms:

BGR= Block Grant Recipient

RCD= Resource Conservation District

TAP= Technical Assistance Provider