May 15, 2025
2:30-5:00pm

Panel Members in Attendance

Brianna Saint Pierre, CalEPA, State Water Resources Control Board
Vicky Dawley, Tehama RCD (Vice Chair)
Leonard Diggs, Pie Ranch
Dr. Jeff Dlott, PhD, LandScan (Chair)
Erik Porse, PhD, California Institute for Water Resources, Non-Voting Member
Shanna Atherton, California Department of Conservation, Member
Jonathan Wachter, California Natural Resources Agency, Member
Jon Gustafson, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA, Non-Voting Member

Not in Attendance
No Dr. Michelle Buffington, PhD, CalEPA, California Air Resources Board
Don Cameron, Terranova Ranch
Judith Redmond, Full Belly Farm

State Agency Staff and Presenters

2:30 – Welcome to New Members

- Jeff Dlott (Informational)
- Jeff welcomed new members
    - Jonathon Wachter and Shanna Atherton shared brief introductions and backgrounds
    - Quick established member introductions, Deputy Secretary Virginia Jameson, and Director Tawny Mata
    - Joined by Ashdeep Singh, Liaison to CDFA BIPOC Committee and grower in Fresno

2:40 – Approval of Meeting Minutes from February 2025

- Jeff Dlott (Decisional)
    - Minutes from February 13 meeting
    - Approved by Member Diggs
    - Second by Co-Chair Dawley
    - Approved by all voting members
- Public Comment
    - No public comment

Director Update (Tawny)

- Tawny shared that SWEEP and HSP may open solicitations in Fall with overview by panel at August meeting; working to revise block grant policies; HSP will soon open new practices and welcome public comment to bring to EFASAP in August; OPCA will have 2 funding opportunities (BIFS and Adaptive IPM program to open in July) and will include new pests and strategies
- Questions re update:
    - Chair Dlott: Is invasive species only around agriculture or does it include Urban/marine? TM to confirm with Kevi but believe it is only agriculture
- Public Comment:
    - Brian: New practices by August EFASAP, crop carbon dioxide enrichment technology, is there a process to propose a new practice? This has been practiced for decades and promoted by USDA.
        - TM: there was an open call for practices already, this happens every few years. Need to ensure quantification and utilize funding sources. Encouraged to apply to next.
        - Brian: What about the SWEEP Program? Would they consider opening a new practices solicitation?
        - Carolyn: SWEEP has not had as many opportunities, more holistic systems and custom applications. We do funding various technologies but need to be properly reviewed and fit into calculator tools. Aren't able to refine tools regularly.

2:45 – Review of Panel Bylaws

- Jeff Dlott (Informational)
    - Chair Dlott: Revisit of terms, responsibilities, AB 947 (Proposed bill potentially adding 2 new members with 4 being appointed by Secretary, 2 producers and 3-year terms with 2 term limits per member).
    - Ensure terms are staggered so not everyone turns over at the same time. Informational as of now until bill is passed.
    - TM: offer panelists an opportunity to review and provide feedback. Thoughts on terms, term limits or anything we can change that is not apart of the FAC
- Member Feedback:
    - Member Atherton:
        - Are term limits in statute or in bylaws? If only in bylaws what was idea behind it? What is the average tenure on the panel? Does a 3-year term make sense or longer?
    - TM:
        - There are no term limits, only bylaws on the chair. Would panel benefit from some turnover? Looking for public input
    - Member Dawley:
        - Torn between term limits. When you join an organization like this it takes a while to learn history and may not feel useful at first. Only a handful of meetings doesn't allow to get up to speed very quickly. Concern over 2x 3-year terms and feels it is too short, but turnover makes sense. Supports producers on the panel.
    - Chair Dlott:

        - Some may lose perspective, but turnover allows for fresh ideas. Supports Member Dawley's comments.
- Public Comment:
    - No public comment

3:15 – Review of Portfolio Balancing Policy

- Tawny Mata (Recommendation)
    - What has and hasn't worked with block grants – feedback generally is positive
    - Proposed policy of portfolio balancing
    - Challenge that there are many viable grant applications but lose out on funding by a few points by variation in reviewers, and could have contributed to specific priorities
    - Panel scores are a good foundation but don't want to use them as absolute
    - Portfolio balancing – not making grant decisions solely on an individual proposal's merit score – are we getting what we want from these programs?
    - Many benefits: diversity in grantee types, want to serve the state and capacity-building in underserved regions/constituents, meet environmental priorities
    - Review of CDFA grant regulations that provides authority for funding decisions and why this hasn't been done in past
    - Proposed policy included in meeting materials. Decision factors, such as past performance and program priorities, will be clear in program RGA's. Program lead to review scores and make recommendations and write justification with Secretary's final decision
- Panel Feedback:
    - Chair Dlott:
        - Informed new members about panel's role in providing guidance to OARS and brief background of block grants.
    - Member St. Pierre:
        - Weighing projects that have multiple benefits. Concerned over risk assessment framework, if looking to expand impacts to underserved communities that don't have funds go to them, they may have higher risk.
            - TM: Thought is similar to private grants. We can't have all high-risk grants, but we can fund a handful of under-resourced organizations and dedicate some of our time to assisting them. Not meant to cut them out but want to have capacity to support them.
    - Member Porse:
        - Other organizations may be founded for a particular charter that differs from public agency. If looking to expand impact, the evaluation criteria, as an example, could include addressing a geographic gap to be evaluated alongside the project merit. Have technical review panel with CDFA/OARS staff could be advantageous.
            - TM: Could be integrated into rubric/RGA. Tech review panels comprised of state agency folks, and external experts.
    - Member Atherton:

        - Tech review committee can help inform review of scores and recommendations. In their programs, after app reviewers come up with initial scores, they meet with technical folks to talk through scores. Consider additional factors so ultimate decision around recs isn't on program lead's shoulders.
            - TM: Will adjust policy/process at end for collaboration with technical review committee.
    - Singh:
        - What's the process to review grants? Geographic area missed that may be priority, but how do we find gaps? How to avoid new gaps?
            - TM: Need new mechanism to survey participating block grant farmers to identify gaps.
            - Chair Dlott: Average block grant amount ~$5 million.
            - TM: considering if that's the right number – some block grantees used all the monies and others did not. Evolving priorities based on legislation as well, specific targets set by state.
    - Member Wachter:
        - Is the proposal to identify these supplemental decision factors and lay them out or creating space for previously unidentified decision factors?
            - TM: Decision factors will be in front of the panel in August EFASAP – this is the setup
            - TM: Open ears to what gaps may be, call for public to reach out to CDFA
    - Member Gustafson:
        - More details on different components (ranking framework) may help. Limited funding in NRCS also looks at equity and fairness.
            - TM: will look at different areas in more details. Working on simplifying the rubrics. Don't want it to be cumbersome for applicants. On legislation and code, nothing/minimal that talks about criteria on grant programs. Opposed to doing this in legislation as it can be impractical.
    - Chair Dlott: Thinking about high priority geography right from the start to address these issues and identifying other priority areas.
    - Public Comment:
        - No public comment

4:00 – CSA Program Evaluation

- Dr. Nick Babin (NB), Cal Poly SLO (Informational)
    - Assessment of incentives programs – commissioned work and evaluation of past grants.
    - Brief introduction and overview of study and research questions
    - How can CDFA improve application and awardee process? What co-benefits are grantees experiencing? Questions based upon interview study of stakeholders.
    - Interview of 52 folks tasked with managing programs, NGO reps, farmers – devised survey sent to 1,350 OARS grantees across DDRDP, AMMP, HSP and SWEEP and some TAP then hosted a focus group
    - Interviewees stated that 2-3 years grants are not long enough for some growers. If funding continued for another 1-2 years most said they would persist.

    - Recommendations: Enable longer grant terms for cover crop and compost. Increase cover crop payment rates. Increase flexibility of the TA Program. Make applications process more friendly to small and medium scale farms. Support strategic approaches to collaborate (outreach, education, building TA and farmer networks)
    - Over half of recipients used TAP's during their project except AMMP and all found it very important, especially for SDFR's.
- Panel Feedback:
    - Singh:
        - Not getting feedback back from growers. How can CDFA imbed feedback loop in the process rather than later?
            - NB: Recommend stripping down survey about just their experience and make it required part of grant. How CDFA is doing, how's their experience and the impacts of the grant.
    - Member Porse:
        - What was timeframe you were asking about in regards to if they are talking to others about the practices?
            - NB: over the course of their grant, how many people did they talk to. Cutoff was 2020 and looked at ended projects.
    - Member Wachter:
        - Did you look at persistence and working with TA?
            - NB: There was no significant relationship between if a practice persisted and the farmer worked with a technical assistance provider versus the persistence of a practice for farmers who completed the work independently.
    - Chair Dlott:
        - Provided context on survey and funding of project. Challenge of how many dollars to practices vs dollars to evaluation of practices.
- Public Comment:
    - Anna Larson, CalCAN policy director: happy with results of continued practices and importance of TA, and SDFR utilization of TA. Would be great to see block grant impacts as program has changed so much.

General Public Comment:

- Brian Koldoji: Had a SWEEP grant. Concern over direct air capture to agriculture in CA. Asking to meet and discuss technology. Who from CARB would be appropriate contact?
    - TM: Advised to email directly

Meeting Adjourn -

Motion to adjourn by Member Porse, Second by Member Dawley. Meeting adjourned at 4:57.

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Respectfully submitted by: DY

Note takers, OARS Environmental Scientists, California Department of Food and Agriculture