

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)  
ENVIRONMENTAL FARMING ACT SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL

May 11, 2023  
9 AM to 12:30 PM

MEETING MINUTES

**Panel Member in Attendance**

Keali'i Bright, DOC (Member, Absent)  
Michelle Buffington, Ph.D., CalEPA, California Air Resources Board (Member, In Attendance)  
Don Cameron, Terranova Ranch (Member, In Attendance)  
Scott Couch, CalEPA, State Water Resources Control Board, (Member, In Attendance)  
Vicky Dawley, Tehama RCD (Member and Vice Chair, In Attendance)  
Leonard Diggs, Pie Ranch (Member, In Attendance)  
Jeff Dlott, LandScan (Member and Chair, In Attendance)  
Amanda Hansen, California Natural Resources Agency (Member, In Attendance)  
Greg Norris, USDA NRCS (Subject Matter Expert, In Attendance)  
Judith Redmond, Full Belly Farm (Member, In Attendance)

**State Agency Staff and Presenters**

Patricia Bohls, CDFA  
Dr. Guihua (Grace) Chen, CDFA  
Carolyn Cook, CDFA  
Virginia Jameson, CDFA  
Dr. Tawny Mata, CDFA  
Josh Staab, CDFA  
Dr. Michael Wolff, CDFA

**AGENDA ITEM 1 – EFA SAP Call to Order**

The public meeting of the Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel was called to order at 9 a.m. by Chair Dlott. Staff from CDFA and the Panel members introduced themselves.

**AGENDA ITEM 2 – Roll Call**

Chair Dlott led the roll call. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was present.

**AGENDA ITEM 3 – Approval of the Minutes**

Chair Dlott moved to pass the March 9, 2023, minutes. Moved by Member Cameron and seconded by Vice Chair Dawley. The minutes were presented and so duly passed unanimously.

**AGENDA ITEM 4 – Healthy Soils Program Demo Update**

Dr. Grace Chen, senior environmental scientist from the Healthy Soils Program within the Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation at CDFA provided an overview of the HSP block grant pilot program 2023 solicitation. The objective was to facilitate financial assistance to CA ag

operations through regional block grants. The program aims to collect data and showcase conservation management practices that mitigate GHG emission and increase soil health. It will also create a platform promoting widespread adoption of conservation management practices throughout the state.

Dr. Chen provided summaries of the project types within the HSP Demonstration Program, including updates. Chen is proposing maximum funding amount per project increases.

The other proposed changes include eligible practice, new data collection practices and standards, and new references for data collection and/or analysis.

The program is also proposing changes to outreach requirements, including new reporting requirement adjustments as well.

Member Diggs asked for details surrounding the number of members who would be aiding affect the changes the HSP updates proposed. Dr. Chen clarified there will be a technical assistance committee will be available to help grantees. Dr. Chen added there will be \$17M available to recipients, roughly 40% going through the pilot.

Member Diggs asked how many people will be able to plan administer block grants. Dr. Chen did not have those numbers as the application process began in mid-April and she was not sure how recipients would be provided awards as the process was still ongoing. Dr. Chen did note there were more than 20 applications at the time of the meeting.

Members Redmond and Diggs requested the presentations be made available online prior to the meeting. OEFI Director Tawny Mata noted she would discuss this request with her staff to accommodate the request, stressing a hesitation to do so without presenters providing detailed context during their presentations.

Vice Chair Dawley wondered if the number of people provided to manage the pilot program would be an adequate number. Dr. Chen noted the program encourages recipients to attend regional conferences and workshops to reach out and network with other growers to get the help they need.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5 – Public Comment Summary for Organic Transition Pilot**

Dr. Michael Wolff, senior environmental scientist from the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program within the Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation at CDFA provided a summary of the office's new Organic Transition Pilot Program and its inception.

Dr. Wolff provided an overview of the program objectives, which include selecting farmers and ranchers to carry out an outreach and selection process of commercial farmers and ranchers to receive assistance in organic transition. Additionally, organic transition training and support to provide on-farm, one on one technical assistance and outreach to farmers or ranchers who have acres that are under transition to organic but not yet certified organic. The objectives would also include organic business planning to coordinate or provide business planning assistance to farmers or ranchers who have acres that have not

yet complete three years under certification. Disbursement financial assistance would also be an objective.

Dr. Wolff provided an overview of the eligible block grant recipients, who include non-profit organizations, CA Native American tribal governments, resource conservation districts, university of CA, CA community colleges or CA state universities, and county agricultural departments and commissioners.

Selection requirements include applicant organizations to the OTP to develop a proposal for how farmers and ranchers will be selected for direct financial assistance. Work plans must include applications to discuss their plan for conducting outreach, as well as how organizations will reach SDFRs.

Member Cameron asked if there would be any standardization of application. Dr. Wolff clarified there would be a standardization for the applicant to apply, but there would not be for the selection of those farmers and ranchers. The grant application would be standardized, but working with the farmers and ranchers will vary from organization to organization. Member Cameron wondered if there would be any confusion present for those ranchers/farmers. Dr. Wolff noted they will do what they can to diffuse any confusion due to the small number of applicants who would be awarded.

Selection requirements would include applicants to develop a proposal for how farmers and ranchers would be selected for financial assistance. The selection criteria must be specified, and applicant organizations must propose a method for review and transparency in this process. Workplans must include applicants to discuss their plan for conducting outreach and how organizations will reach SDFRs.

Beneficiary requirements were also summarized.

Member Diggs asked Dr. Wolff about the time period allotted for the requirements of the pilot program, with concern for the implementation of the systems as each system will likely be different from farm to farm and the intent the farmers and ranchers have. Dr. Wolff noted the allotted time provided at this time was three years. Member Cameron supported Member Diggs' concern as well, noting the desire to have the program in place by the time of the transition deadline.

Member Couch asked for better clarity of the pilot's ultimate goals, noting that farming isn't necessarily an exact science. Is the intent to bring the industry along in a certification process in terms of expertise, asked Chair Dlott. Dr. Wolff clarified the intent was to help farmers to transition to organic farming. Member Diggs noted the environmental climate impact would be improved by transitioning to organic farming. Member Diggs acknowledged a confluence of issues, but also there were a collection of benefits for the implantation and transition to organic farming.

Member Buffington wondered if there would be a tie-in between the pilot and other certification programs, like the scoping plan.

Dr. Wolff provided an overview of the proposed pilot's funding structure which is typical of other block grant formats within OEFI's other programs, including the HSP, SWEEP and PHP.

The funding structure for the farmers and ranchers would include two areas of reimbursement: \$30,000 available for applicable costs, OR \$1,000 per acre available for soil building or land preparation, up to 30 acres, a total potential award of up to \$60,000 per farmer or rancher. Member Diggs asked how many farmers and ranchers the pilot would reach to which Mr. Wolff answered approximately 100. The

maximum amount would be reached over a three-year period, not an up-front check in so far as the block grant may provide enhancements.

Reporting requirements were provided by Dr. Wolff, including essential data and training materials; farming systems assisted and certified; accounts that allow the total cost of each individual project to be readily determined; technical assistance records; links or files for training materials.

Dr. Wolff provided an overview of responses to public comments from a previous RGA, including “Are labor or rent allowable costs?” “Can the \$30,000 be spent on an allowable cost for the whole farm?” and “To meet this high bar of providing resources to farmers of color and women farmers,” asking for further clarification on those terms. Other comments included changing the scoring criteria to give 30 points to “Statement of Need and Service to SDFRs,” “Recommended that CDFA allow technical assistance expenses including demonstration supplies and trials,” and “recommend that CDFA allow technical assistance expenses including ... purchase of tools, equipment, or infrastructure for sharing in a lending program.”

#### **AGENDA ITEM 6 – Summary of Awards for the Pollinator Habitat Program**

Patricia Bohls, a senior environmental scientist with the PHP in OEFI, provided a summary of awards for the PHP. Ms. Bohls provided a summary of the history of funding appropriation for the PHPP, as well as an overview of the award term and maximum grant. Ms. Bohls provided an overview of the eligibility for recipients, which include RCDs, UCs, CSUs, CA community colleges, nonprofits, and federally- and California-recognized American natives.

Ms. Bohls provided an overview of program activities, followed by a summary of award executions and implementation timelines. Fourteen applicants applied for a total of \$19.9 million.

Summary of awards included 10 projects, totaling \$12.25 million, which can be found at the CDFA PHP website. Ms. Bohls noted the great diversity of awardees.

Ms. Bohls provided an overview of deliverables from PHP, which include outreach to partner farmers and ranchers, plans and implementation of installation of conservation management practices, and technical assistance.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7 – Regenerative Framework – Letter to the State Board of Food and Agriculture**

Deputy Secretary Virginia Jameson provided an overview of the letter to the CA State Board of Food and Ag regarding a framework for regenerative agriculture. Ms. Jameson behooved the panel to provide questions and comments, changes and additions to the letter.

Member Diggs thought the letter was excellent, thanking Ms. Jameson for writing it. He noted one hesitation regarding the letter’s last sentence regarding an all-encompassing definition based on the elements noted in the letter before.

Member Couch echoed Member Diggs’ praise. He noted a simple typo in recommendation 5.

**AGENDA ITEM 8 – Public Comment**

No public comments were given.

**AGENDA ITEM 9 – Meeting Adjournment**

Chair Dlott motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:05 a.m. PT, which was seconded by Member Couch and Member Buffington. The motion was then approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Josh Staab, Public Information Officer, California Department of Food and Agriculture