

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

February 9, 2023
1 PM to 4 PM

MEETING MINUTES

Panel Member in Attendance

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

State Agency Staff and Presenters

Virginia Jameson, CDFA
Carolyn Cook, CDFA
Qiuhan Wang, CDFA
Tawny Mata, CDFA
Scott Weeks, CDFA

AGENDA ITEM 1 – EFA SAP and CDFA Introductions

The public meeting of the Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Chair Dlott. Staff from CDFA and the Panel members introduced themselves.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Minutes from Previous Meeting

Chair Dlott proposed the delay of approving the minutes from the December 13, 2022, EFA SAP meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Budget Update

CDFA Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation Manager Tawny Mata provided an update for the office budget. The Sustainable Cannabis Program sustained a major change, with its program funding paused. Funding could be restored if the financial outlook changes. The Pollinator Habitat Program funding for 2022-2023 funding has also been delayed. The 2021-2022 funding for the program will be dispersed. GHG reduction funding has also been reduced.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Block Grant Update

Virginia Jameson, CDFA Deputy Secretary, provided a brief review of the public comments that were submitted from the Block Grant update provided in the EFA SAP meeting from December 2022.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Regenerative Agriculture Definition Update

Deputy Secretary Jameson provided background and purpose for the definition of regenerative agriculture. Jameson noted that a literature review and framework definition be provided by February 2023. Jameson recalled the December 13 panel discussion on the topic of defining regenerative agriculture, noting the focus of the discussion was on structures supporting agricultural systems including soil health.

CDFA environmental scientist Dana Brady Yount provided an overview of the literature review attempting to define regenerative ag. Definitions were based on activities and objectives. Specifically, activities were defined by operations and implementation. Objectives were defined by the ability to capture a desire to reach a certain goal. Regenerative ag including the soil is the base's divergent themes, including regenerating the system, improving human health, and improving economic prosperity.

Deputy Jameson proposed a draft framework for discussing regenerative ag, including positive impacts on environmental, social, and economic goals, including climate goals. Measurable and verifiable outcomes would also need to be considered. The framework would need to be context-specific and be considerate of soil health.

Chair Dlott opened the discussion up to questions.

Member Dawley posed the question about the impacts and how those impacts would be quantified, verified and recorded. Deputy Secretary Jameson agreed and believed there will be a means by which to measure those elements. Jameson does expect more public process will occur to run public meetings. Additional language and detail could be included as a result of those public meetings to supplement the conversations going on during these EFA SAP meetings.

Chair Dlott believes a process could be synthesized from the conversations and eventual development of a framework for the definition for regenerative ag. Dlott also proposed acknowledging whether the structure for the definition is even the correct one, which would also need to be approved by the State Board for the CDFA.

Member Cameron acknowledged there will be a formal recognition by the board to acknowledge the development of the framework for the definition of regenerative ag.

Member Diggs posed the question of what is being regulated in a regen ag system, considering the process of eco systems. Member Diggs agreed with acknowledging the "positive impact" that will be required by the definition, but also the word "enhance," and what those enhancements might be.

Member Redmond believes the framework for the definition covers a lot. She wondered if the provisional definition of regen ag seemed to have many of the words Member Diggs had just mentioned, so the provisional definition should somehow be in that conversation.

Expert Norris posited the positive impacts coming into conflict with one another. Norris wanted to consider the recognition the difficulty of every positive impact to be achieved without any of them coming into conflict with one another. He to consider an optimization of each impact versus a blanket positive definition for each impact.

Member Hansen acknowledged and appreciated the work done to bring forward the value of being as clear as possible, to make it as easy for people who may not be experts in regenerative ag to understand.

Deputy Jameson asked if further workshopping should be conducted in addition to listening to public comment be needed between this meeting and the next EFA SAP. Chair Dlott asked if the Deputy Secretary believes enough research has been done, but also recommended public comment be heard first.

Member Dawley proposed looking at the outline with consideration to the fact that positive impacts have not yet been defined. Member Redmond acknowledged that those definitions are vague, but wanted to mention that the framework linking all these definitions together would be helpful and could describe the social and economic goals not already listed in the framework. Chair Dlott does believe that proposal would be helpful, but fleshing out all definitions in detail may not be a realistic goal between this meeting and the next meeting, and perhaps noting them in brevity might be helpful, too.

Member Diggs clarified his “enhancement” remark to include social, but also the ecological and economic enhancements. Member Diggs recommended that the enhancements be included in brevity, and not necessarily in granular detail.

Dana Yount recommended that the goals be specifically for regenerative ag.

Deputy Secretary Jameson asked for clarity on Member Diggs’ motion. Member Diggs asked for clarity on incorporating feedback and language and defining words used for social/economic outcomes as a result of creating desired outcomes within the definition of regenerative ag. Chair Dlott explained that it wasn’t necessarily a motion, just something Member Diggs would like considered.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants

CDFA environmental scientist Qiuhan Wang presented a funding decision on the Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants program. Wang’s overview included the \$7M that will fund organic transition support for farmers and ranchers, another \$6M prioritized for plans that support organic transition, \$1M for partnerships between CDFA and the UC Organic Institute, and \$0.5M for grants to CA RCD to supplement CAPGP funded plans that cost over \$10K. CAPGP will

provide up to \$14.7M for the development of conservation agriculture plans and a maximum award for \$250K per applicant.

Wang provided CAPGP's program timeline, from the application period through the project term. Wang also provided a list of the funded plans that would be considered for the CAPGP, the process for the application review, the administrative review, and its minimum qualifications.

The application review summary showed approx. 85 percent of applications funded fully and seven percent funded with reduced budget, in total more than 90 percent of applications receiving funding in some form. Wang also provided an overview of the types of applicants, with 60 percent of applicants coming from farmers and ranchers. Only one applicant claimed to be of a tribe, and only one applicant claimed to be of a university. Approximately 42 percent of funding would go to farmers and ranchers, as a result, with 1 percent going to tribe and university applicants.

Member Redmond wanted to understand when RCDs get a grant, they're using it to work with ranchers and farmers in their region. She wondered if that was the same with farmers and ranchers, or if they were using the funds to do the research on their own farms and ranches. Wang clarified that recipients don't have to disclose the farm or ranch they are going to work with once they've been funded. Wang noted that Technical Assistance would also be available to those farmers and ranchers. Carolyn Cook clarified that farmers and ranchers who do apply would identify their farms and ranches that they would plan to work with.

Member Cameron asked about the nature of legislative letters. Cook clarified that those letters are sent to legislators about the awards in their districts to let them know. Those letters are typically timed to distribute at the time awards are announced.

Member Redmond's second question was about the \$1M partnership with UC Organic Institute and the desired goals. Cook clarified that the partnership would go toward funding technical assistance.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – SWEEP Southern Desert Recommendations

CDFA Senior environmental scientist Scott Weeks provided a historical overview of the genesis for the SWEEP Southern Desert Pilot program, going back to May 2020 with a stakeholder request to CDFA to form an advisory group to further evaluate SWEEP. Weeks provided an overview of the solicitation and review process, which begins with application submission all the way through the execution of approved projects. Weeks provided a breakdown of the technical review scoring, based on merit and feasibility, water savings, assurance of no GHG increases, the project's budget.

Weeks also provided the breakdown for the application process, noting 48 projects went to technical review and were complete projects CDFA carved out \$2M specifically for the purpose of funding the SDP, with an additional \$700K from SWEEP projects that declined funding. Funds

for these come from the same funding source. CDFA decided to expand available funds to the region to \$2.7M, due to the program being oversubscribed at 280%. Ultimately 17 projects were selected for an award, including 11 in Imperial County and 6 in Riverside County. Approx. 3,300 acres would be impacted, the smallest project at 8.5 acres, the largest at 890 acres. Approx. 4,800 acre-feet of water savings expected per year.

Approximately 30 percent of the projects ID as SDFR, 53 percent of the projects are still flood. Project crop types include alfalfa, citrus, grass, carrot, corn, dates, and potatoes.

Weeks noted pre-project consultations will happen next, helping recipients with processes, scoping work, executing the grants and reporting project outcomes once they're complete.

Member Redmond asked about the drought impacts on farmers and ranchers in the southern part of the state. Weeks explained the unique qualities of counties included in the SDP. It's very common to see flood irrigate throughout the area on a somewhat scheduled frequency.

Member Redmond asked about the insights into the amount of water being saved for the region. Weeks hopes to attain efficiency within the 10-year life of each project. Projected water saving potential is surprisingly high, in Weeks' opinion.

Member Bright wondered if the program could leverage resources from the irrigation districts or if it was an opportunity to pursue. Weeks speculated that alternative matching funds could use, but the application requirements do require to note GHG reductions, which may make that option difficult.

AGENDA ITEM 8 – WETA Update

CDFA senior environmental scientist Carolyn Cook provided an overview of the 2022-2023 appropriation of \$15M will be allocated for efficiency and nutrient management technical assistance. Cook provided an overview of the eligible organizations that must be in California with a physical business in the state. Cook provided an overview of the three program objectives, including on-farm, one-on-one technical assistance to evaluate irrigation system efficiency, and provide diagnostics, report and recommendations to growers; coordinate or provide pump efficiency; and provide training regarding water and nutrient management practices and technology.

Cook provided overviews of planned updates from the program's previous solicitation, noting the invitation of public comment for the draft RGA. Cook also outlined the program timeline and its next steps.

AGENDA ITEM 9 – Public Comment

No public comments were asked.

AGENDA ITEM 10 – Next Meeting

Deputy Secretary Jameson proposed the next meeting would take place from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on March 9, 2023. Members unanimously agreed.

Member Buffington introduced the motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was moved by Chair Dlott. The Panel unanimously voted to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 3:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

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