

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

March 9, 2023
1 PM to 2:30 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
Dana Yount, 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 1:05 p.m. PT by Chair Dlott. Staff from CDFA and the Panel members introduced themselves.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Minutes from Previous Meeting

Chair Dlott moved to pass the December 13, 2022 minutes. The minutes were presented and so duly passed unanimously. Chair Dlott then motioned to pass the February 9, 2023 minutes. Those minutes were also passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – Framework for a Definition of Regenerative Agriculture

CDFA Deputy Secretary Virginia Jameson and CDFA Environmental Scientist Dana Yount provided an overview of a framework for defining regenerative agriculture. In October 2022, a letter was sent from the California State Board of Food and Ag, in which it was asked that a literature review and framework for regenerative agriculture be developed by February 2023. Expert panels were tasked with discussing the framework in December 2022. The discussion focused on structures supporting ag systems including soil health, emphasizing soil biota and biodiversity.

A literature review from the NRDC was reviewed for definitions, practices, and outcomes. It was determined that regenerative ag without acknowledging that it is driven and defined by the intangible benefits experienced by farmers that practice it, such as improved relationships among farming communities, and surrounding neighbors.

RA was determined as a solution towards sustainable food systems. A definition that allows for variability in location, cropping livestock system, environment and farmer innovation.

The review analyzed convergent themes, including enhancing and improving soil health, optimizing resource management, among others. The review also identified certain vague descriptions as well as criteria that could better emphasized

Recommended concepts for the definition included applicable relevant and useful for CA Ag. According to the recommendations the definition should lead to positive impacts on CA environment.

Chair Dlott opened the discussion to questions.

Several inter-dependent connected issues were acknowledged by Member Couch, including available science, practicality, valuable outcomes, etc.

The meeting was opened up to public comment.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Public Comment

Attendee Devin Clarke, a CCA and almond farmer, presented a public comment must address outcomes that are practical and verifiable. Mr. Clarke provided an overview of his farming and quantified his regenerative agricultural efforts. Mr. Clarke provided his concerns for the elements he hopes are included in the definition of regenerative agriculture.

Attendee Nathanael Siemens, another CCA and almond farmer, presented public comment on the definition as well. He suggested to include organic as a baseline in the definition. He brought up contextual background. Mr. Siemens suggested bringing everything into the fold as part of a democratic process.

Attendee Daniel Rath posed a written question, asking “Can you share more why elements of human health and wellbeing are not more upfront? The authors of the Schreefel et.al paper you referenced in the presentation said that they would have tried to better include cultural diversity and human health in their sensitivity analysis (Section 4.i). When Schreefel actually creates a framework to implement their findings in later papers, they explicitly include “improve economic prosperity” and “improve human health”. Can you share more what your justification was to not center human health more prominently in your proposed framework?”

Chair Dlott addressed Mr. Rath’s question, addressing the relative expertise and breadth of knowledge will need to fall within the realm of food and ag, but the details will be important.

Member Dawley asked about farmworker health, addressing a question Member Redmond posed, noting how a more social and democratic consideration be added to the definition as well.

Chair Dlott added that the guiding principles be right up front, and allowing those to be the guiding lines and then work down through the climate-focused measurable and verifiable goals that follow those guiding principles will be important to the framework.

Member Diggs asked about the question of human health and added that to the framework. Chair Dlott responded by putting it to the panel to approve whether to add it to the framework or if there were concerns to do so. A consensus was reached on the matter considered to be a key element to the definition. Jameson offered to add that language to the framework in real-time.

Chair Dlott asked the panel if it should provide any guidance and baselines for the framework of the definition, including contextual background. Member Redmond supported the motion. Member Cameron seconded Member Redmond's support, emphasizing how incremental improvements need to be quantified.

Member Diggs addressed an inconsistency in certifiable results. If there is an assurance is being created to give to the consumer, he would be concerned with that, because that seems to be the arch of this rush to create the framework is bending. From a science standpoint, a value add is more the direction he would want to take agencies, so he believes there needs to be clarity in the participation in the social/environmental/health benefits, and not necessarily where the marketplace goes with this.

Chari Dlott agreed with Member Diggs, adding that it needs to be indicated that the SAP doesn't want greenwashing into the marketplace. It would be a failure if those elements weren't noted in the framework, and making clear those efforts were made to include those benefits. He wants to make sure there are not unintended consequences.

DS Jameson noted the need to better define the term "inclusivity" within the draft framework, and that it should be withheld until it can be better addressed.

Member Dawley moved to move along with the framework to be approved by the State Board of Ag. It was seconded by Member Diggs. It was passed unanimously by the panel.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Next Meeting

DS Jameson recommended a regular schedule for the rest of the year be determined by the SAP, in accordance with Bagley Keene public meeting laws. Chair Dlott recommended that quarterly meetings be scheduled, and shorter meetings in between be appropriately scheduled ad hoc when necessary.

Dates were recorded, noting the second Thursday of each quarter, February, May, August, and November would work well for all, by DS Jameson and would be coordinated with PIO Josh Staab.

Chair Dlott motioned to adjourn the meeting at 2:22 p.m. PT, which was seconded by Member Cameron. The motion was then approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

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