

Defining Regenerative Agriculture

For State Policies and Programs

Environmental Farming Act, Science Advisory Panel

February 8, 2024



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FOOD & AGRICULTURE

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Motivation:

- Roots in *Ag Vision for the Next Decade* that started in 2021
 - Foster Climate-Smart, Resilient and Regenerative Food Systems
- Interest in “Regenerative Agriculture” continues to grow
 - legislation, funding focus in government programs, and policies
- A need for a science-based criterion to help inform a designation or recognition of the term regenerative
- State Board of Food and Agriculture is best positioned as an advisory body to the Governor and Secretary to complete a public process for a definition for state policies and programs

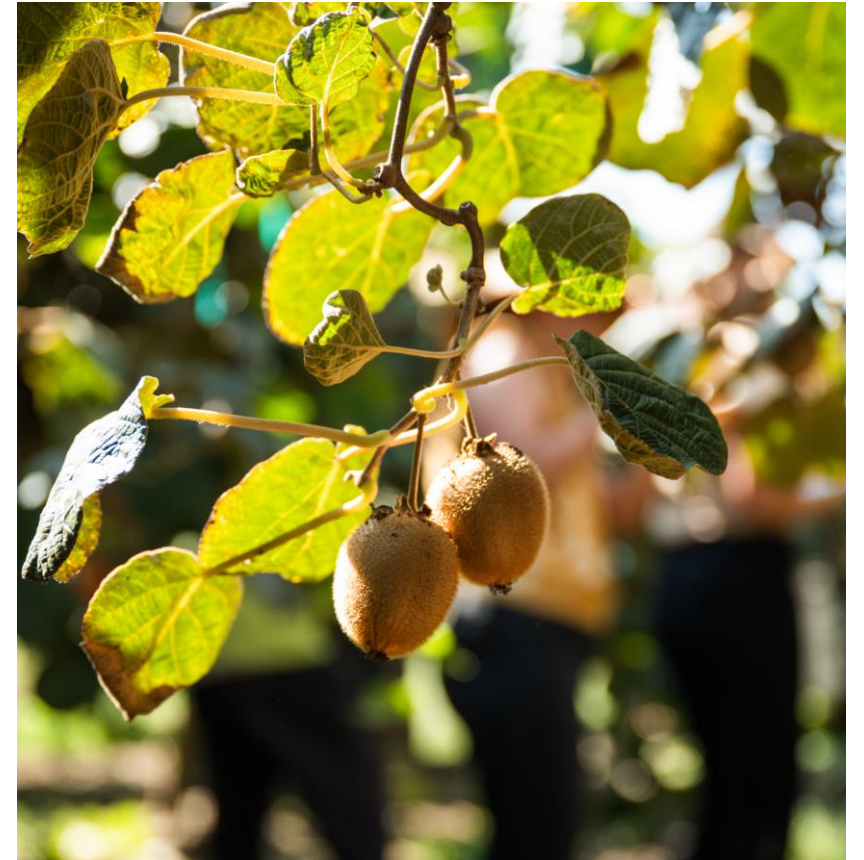


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Approach:

- Understanding of the diversity of opinions, the evolving marketplace and the priority of equity and inclusion – focusing on public input, transparency and engagement.
- Five Public Listening Sessions (Virtual)
- Establishment of a Regenerative Agriculture Work Group to consider public input, the Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel (EFA SAP) Framework and make a draft recommendation to the State Board for consideration.



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WORK GROUP MEMBERS

- Doria Robinson, State Board of Food and Agriculture (member)
- Bryce Lundberg, State Board of Food and Agriculture (member) and certified regenerative organic farmer
- Derek Azevedo, Bowles Farm
- Dr. Daniel Rath, Natural Resources Defense Council
- Dr. Cynthia Daley, Director, Chico State University Center for Regenerative Agriculture
- Elizabeth Whitlow, Regenerative Organic Alliance
- Dr. Jeff Dlott, Chair, CDFA Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel
- Dr. Qi Zhou- California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
- Matt Byrne, Byrne Cattle
- Blake Alexandre, Alexandre Family Farms
- Eric Morgan, Braga Fresh

- Krystal Acierto, Deputy Secretary for Public Policy, California Environmental Protection Agency
- Virginia Jameson, Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands, CDFA

STAFF

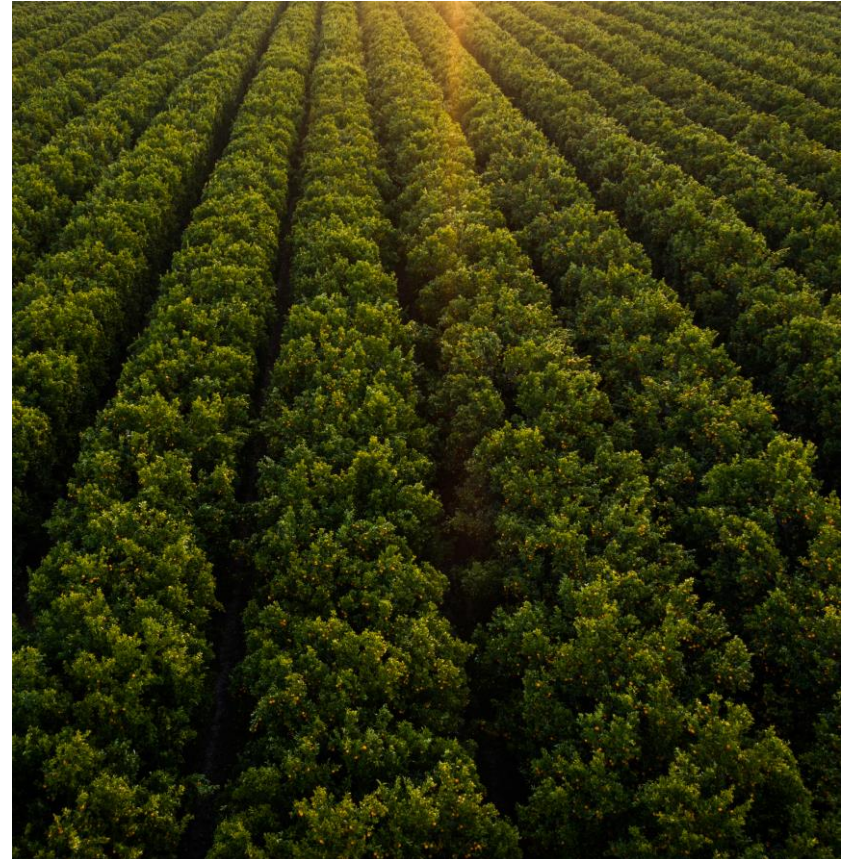
- Josh Eddy, Executive Director, California State Board of Food and Agriculture
- Margaret Phipps, CDFA
- Sam Magill, Senior Facilitator/Mediator, Sacramento State University

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Timeline:

- EFA SAP Framework Recommendation (Completed 2023)
- Public Listening Sessions (Dec 2023 – May 2024) – 5 Sessions
- Work Group Meetings (Feb – June 2024) – 3 Meetings
- Board Recommendation to CDFA (June/July 2024)



Recap of December 6th Public Listening Session Input

- First of **five** public listening sessions
- 303 unique participants!
- Key themes from comments:
 - Developing a “broader” vs “narrower” definition of regenerative agriculture.
 - Defining the “starting point”: existing organic standards vs. conventional as baseline. Multiple comments supporting both starting points.
 - Providing a definition that highlights the challenges of transitioning from conventional agriculture to regenerative is important. Conventional growers need to be “brought along.”
 - Greenwashing must be avoided!

Recap of December 6th Listening Session (cont)

- Other comments:
 - Human health for farmworkers, DACs in agricultural regions, and other potentially disadvantaged populations should be included in the definition.
 - Indigenous voices should be included in the definition.
 - Conventional growers may be hesitant to adopt organic standards as a baseline for regenerative agriculture.
 - The cost to growers to transition to regenerative may be substantial. Transitioning to regenerative may require BOTH financial incentives and regulatory compliance.
 - Education to show some regenerative practices (reduced tillage, etc.) can actually reduce cost will be useful.

Recap of January 11th Public Listening Session Input

- Second of **five** public listening sessions
- 130 unique participants!
- Common Comments/Themes
 - Differing opinions on using organic as a baseline for regenerative agriculture definition.
 - Several commenters believe Regenerative Organic Agriculture for the definition is a starting point; others felt organic as a requirement could dissuade conventional growers from joining OR that a definition using organic could “dilute” existing organic certification requirements.
 - Several individuals felt the definition should explicitly recognize the importance of building soil health and biodiversity

Recap of January 11th Listening Session (cont)

- Several commenters stressed the importance of a certification to accompany the definition, and suggested no certification would result in greenwashing.
- One individual said any certification must be scientifically justifiable.
- Multiple participants supported the concept of a “tiered” certification system for regenerative agriculture products.
- Multiple participants stressed the need for an inclusionary “big tent” definition to encourage participation (including BiPOC, indigenous voices, disadvantaged communities, and conventional growers among others).
- One commenter warned that too narrow of a definition could stifle agricultural innovation in the future.

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Public Comment & Information (Updates)

- Public Comment Email: RegenerativeAg@cdfa.ca.gov
- Website: www.cdfa.ca.gov/RegenerativeAg/

