MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)
ENVIRONMENTAL FARMING ACT SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL (EFA SAP)
(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

Location: California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street, Main Auditorium
Sacramento, CA 95814

Contact: Josh Staab, PIO I
Office: (916) 508-4633

MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

Item No.

(1) CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order on Friday, September 9, 2022, at approximately 9:15 a.m., Chair Dr. Jeff Dlott presiding.

(2) ROLL CALL

Roll call taken by Josh Staab, Public Information Officer.

Present: Judith Redmond
Greg Norris Kealii Bright
Jeff Dlott Vicky Dawley
Amanda Hansen
Michelle Buffington (via Zoom)
Don Cameron (via Zoom)
Scott Couch
Leonard Diggs

Others Present: Carolyn Cook
Kate Scow Virginia Jameson
(3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Board chair Dr. Jeff Dlott moved to approve the minutes of Sept. 9, 2022, EFA SAP meeting. Board member Scott Couch seconded the motion and a vote of (9-0-0) carried the motion.

(4) PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: Below Ground Biodiversity Committee Update

An overview of the intersectionality of belowground soil biodiversity and ecosystem functions, indicators, metrics, and recommendations were provided by Dr. Kate Scow of the University of California, Davis.

Speaker:

- Dr. Kate Scow, Distinguished Professor of Soil Science and Microbial Ecology at the University of California, Davis

Dr. Scow provided an update to the board. The update included an overview of how belowground soil biodiversity drives agroecosystem functions, breaks down wastes, makes compost, and supports plants and animals via mutualism, among other functions. Dr. Scow presented a draft report outline on Soil Biodiversity, including Ecosystem Services, Specific Indicators, potential metrics, recommendations for a CA Ag Soil Biodiversity Framework, and Related Indicators. The hope is the report will be finished by February 2023.

Dr. Scow provided an overview of the establishment of listening sessions and subcommittees for the 30x30 liaisons. Dr. Scow’s team is currently working on
drafting frameworks, a 30x30 liaison subcommittee launch, a CDFA liaison subcommittee launch, and a BBAC meeting scheduled for Sept. 30, 2022.

EFA SAP member Hansen posed the idea to link microbes with their kinetic state. Dr. Scow agreed the idea could pose benefits and asked for contacts to begin that research.

EFA SAP member Couch wondered about field tests and simulations in the first phase of development. Scow pointed out that the first phase would require more data gathering before field tests and simulations.

EFA SAP member Redmond wondered if there would be enough time to conduct the necessary research and receive the desired results the teams were looking for.

EFA SAP member Cameron is looking forward to seeing the results.

Member Hansen mentioned potential partnerships for the future and pairing with organizations mutually invested, including efforts on the 5th Climate Assessment being led by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research.

Chair Dlott noted additional opportunities that could be undertaken by the below ground biodiversity committee, and how the panel and CDFA could provide guidance on expanding its inquiry. An example included soil biodiversity’s role in mitigating climate change and sequestering carbon.

No public comments were provided.

\(5\) PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program (CAPGP)
The Board heard an update from CDFA Supervising Environmental Scientist Carolyn Cook on the opening of the application period for Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program.

Carolyn provided updates on the Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program and the Pollinator Habitat Program. Both programs are currently accepting grant applications for the first time. CAPGP appropriated $17M for plans. $15M is available for those plans right now. Max awards are $250,000 for each applicant. Farmers can apply for funding on their own. PHP funding was appropriated during 2021’s budget to set aside $15M for the program. Maximum awards are set to $2M, of which 18% of the total award can be used for Technical Assistance and administrative tasks. Both program application periods are expected to be competitive.

Member Bright wondered if there is money being dedicated to PHP through the federal government.

Member Couch requested clarification about groundwater sustainable agency eligibility. Cook confirms and explains that the program has made agencies eligible so they can support farmers with water irrigation planning.

Member Redmond noted the money being dispersed for Technical Assistance for Organic Transition. Redmond questioned what kind of coordination will take place between the CDFA and the USDA related to Organic Transition and the opportunities available there. Those specifics are being discussed, Deputy Secretary Jameson said. UC Organic Institute will work with CDFA to provide Technical Assistance related to Organic Transition.

No public comments were received.

PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: State Water Efficiency Enhancement Program Update
The Board heard a presentation from CDFA Environmental Scientist Scott Weeks of the State Water Efficiency Enhancement Program (SWEEP) in the Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation (OEFI).

The presentation provided an overview of the SWEEP application period. In the most recent application solicitation, 593 projects were submitted from throughout the state. 410 were sent to administrative review, 337 were sent to technical review, and 283 projects were awarded. Oversubscribed by about double. $43M was awarded. Weeks provided summaries on technical review and technical assistance providers. Weeks also gave an overview of the project review time period. An update on the SWEEP Pilot Program for the Southern Desert Region was also provided by Weeks.

Member Dawley was curious about the rolling application period and asked about the frustrations the process may create for applicants. Weeks noted there were comments received voicing frustration with the application process, though many applicants appreciated the TA feedback, but acknowledged there were positives and negatives related to the process. Dawley also wondered if there were other opportunities to roll out location-specific programs in other parts of California. Weeks discussed the specific challenges that are present in the Southern California Desert region, prompting the need for a focused program in the area.

Member Bright asked about the most successful strategies for getting people into the program. Weeks noted the effectiveness of the TA provided in the application process to provide the grower with resources and a network of providers who can better assist them. Bright questioned the subsequent processes of their projects.

Member Buffington wondered how many projects are currently underway and how many are closed, and what published results and metrics are currently available. Weeks mentioned the list of project statuses on the main CDFA website.

Member Hansen questioned the level of funding growth for solar panels and solar energy. Less than half the projects involve some implementation of solar energy. Hansen was curious if there is a growing trend toward using solar energy.
Public Comments were provided by Brian Shobe. Shobe asked about a summary of technical assistance providers and the types of needs applicants voiced or were faced with. Weeks noted the number of options available, and the variety of issues encountered. Shobe was curious to learn more about the roaming application period and how that could continue.

Public Comments were heard from Hannah Tikalsky noted the many shapes of TA providers and how it is in applicants' interest to take advantage of these providers, using a limited amount of funding as a motivator. If applicants knew of the litany of TA providers in their area, perhaps there could be follow up with those applicants to let them know of the providers in their area.

No other public comments were received.

(7) PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: Healthy Soils Program Update

CDFA Environmental Scientist Nina Bingham of the Healthy Soils Program (HSP) within OEFI provided the board with an update on the programs 2021 solicitation funding and duration, and sources.

Dr. Bingham provided an overview of the solicitation window from November 1, 2021, through February 25, 2022. Dr. Bingham provided an overview of the 2021 HSP Incentives Solicitation and resubmission analyses of that process. Incentives Solicitation locations were also discussed. Dr. Bingham provided an overview of the timeline of HSP Incentives improvements for the solicitation processes and online tools and clarifying stakeholder feedback. HSP next steps were also discussed, including ongoing and future activities.

Member Redmond stated that she was pleased by the next steps prioritized by the program, emphasizing the analysis of the different submission rates for DAC/LIC and SDFR resubmissions. She asked for clarification surrounding resubmission rates, raising the question of whether there was a problem with the way the department organized the resubmission periods. Member Redmond asked for clarification on the communication between program providers, and grantees and how application resubmissions are handled. Member Redmond asked about patterns or common
errors found in submissions. Dr. Bingham provided specifics related to those errors, including how applicants could better answer specific application requirements.

Member Diggs asked the program for its interpretation and takeaways from the data reviewed. Dr. Bingham mentioned streamlining the submission process could improve administrative review and the communication between admins and applicants. Member Diggs about where fairness can be provided and the fairness of the first-come-first-served nature of the application process, and whether any of it works. Member Diggs also asked the panel how the panel can provide equality to all applicants, balancing providing the opportunity to all applicants. Panel Chair Dlott provided some ideas, posing the question of the efficacy of the application portal. Dr. Bingham mentioned the portal is being reviewed and is likely to be improved, noting the learning curve challenge for the applicants, but also acknowledging the challenge to migrate old applications into a new portal.

Member Cameron asked if a submission has minor flaws, could a timestamp be used to hold those applications a time-specific window to resubmit while not losing their spot “in line.”

Member Buffington asked if asking SDFR to self-identify is an effective means to group applicants. She was also curious about the time-sensitive nature of waiting for submissions and why. Dr. Bingham noted that applicants are encouraged to reach out to program admins. Buffinton encouraged the program to solicit resubmissions earlier in the process to reach more audiences. Member Buffington also asked if TA providers provide the same assistance to other programs within the OEFI. Ms. Cook acknowledged that there is some overlap in terms of expertise TA providers can provide to applicants from one program to another.

Member Hansen noted the effort to make best practices for TA into standard practices by CDFA Secretary Ross and CNRA Secretary Crowfoot. Member Hansen noted another path available for applications not granted funding in a current round through an opt-in registry process that is being built. The registry will be up and running by July 2023.
Member Dawley asked for understanding about the applications and whether the SDFRs and DACs and any discrepancies that might present themselves further down the road, based on the graph projections provided by the program.

Member Diggs wondered if the panel was really trying to support the TA from staff and whether it’s front-loaded by making the support coming from staff come before the deadline or if it should be backloaded by allowing staff to provide TA support after the deadline closes. Mr. Diggs emphasized his point that the services are what is important, not necessarily the timeliness of the application. Dr. Bingham noted the challenge of collecting data from applicants, noting that data is easiest shared through a shared spreadsheet as platforms continue to evolve and change and how we can create access to archived data from past submissions. Dr. Behla noted the number of programs and how they’ve changed rapidly to meet state requirements and how data is stored and transferred from one system to another. Dr. Behla acknowledged it may fall to department leadership to streamline that system switch and how that can be standardized and continue to be improved. Member Diggs posed the question about outreach, noting how those who aren’t aware of specific information and/or resources and how those people can be reached. Chair Dlott recommended further research into how information can be better curated through traditional means.

Public Comment was heard by Anna Larson who posed a question to the panel during the public comment period.

No further public comments were received.

(8) BREAK

(9) PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: Whole Orchard Recycling Practice Review

- The Board heard from CDFA AB 32 Environmental Scientist Michael Wolff on the Healthy Soils Program’s Whole Orchard Recycling Practice Review.
Dr. Wolff provided an overview of the characteristics of whole orchard recycling, through chipping which is then incorporated into the soil to at least 6 inches. Services have evolved in recent years and adaptation is now in tens of thousands of acres. Currently, it is being used in almond and walnut orchards throughout California.

Dr. Wolff also provided an overview of WOR considerations and revisions, noting the growing request from stakeholder feedback that annual cropping is allowed. Dr. Wolff elaborated on the pros and cons of such a request.

Dr. Wolff provided an overview of WOR DNDC modeling of annual cropping. WOR modeled GHG emissions show that carbon sequestration occurs in all the cases researched, showing a total GHG emission reduction. In DNDC simulations, corn planting after WOR shows substantial benefit to orchards.

Member Diggs wondered what an organic farmer might expect from WOR versus other alternatives, and what other application study results could reveal before WOR and after.

Member Norris requested clarification regarding annual crops and whether they could be included in WOR. Dr. Wolff believes annual crops can be included. Member Norris posited a real-world scenario and whether WOR would be able to provide annual resources for those annual crops.

Member Bright was curious how the findings in the real world could compare to the alternative, given requirements from biomass coming from the orchards, asking if there were any emission avoidance calculations and benefits to WOR versus what farmers might do otherwise. Per acre burn costs in the area versus costs of WOR could be more expensive, but the HSP provides funding to offset the cost of WOR. Dr. Wolff noted there is a price difference, but the benefits may be better for WOR in the long run versus the continued requirement of burn costs.

Member Cameron echoed his support for the WOR benefits, noting moisture does a better job in his opinion of breaking down solids in the long run.
Member Couch was interested to know what is happening below the wood chips should WOR continue, asking if it could be something the program continues to monitor. Dr. Wolff noted the water collecting below the soil and the chips where researchers found carbon breaking down and mixing with the organic soil. Member Couch asked what would happen to organisms breaking down carbon in the soil. Dr. Wolff hypothesized there would likely be an uptick in the microbial biomass present after organism breakdown.

Public Comment was heard from Anna Larson. She took part in the public comment period to thank the program for its efforts.

No other public comments were received.

(10) PANEL DISCUSSION:

Block Grants

- The panel heard a presentation from CDFA Deputy Secretary for Climate and Working Lands Virginia Jameson and CDFA Grants Coordinator Sam Blacklock on Black Grant proposals.

Mr. Blacklock brought the proposal for the Block Grant project to the panel. Mr. Blacklock researched program caps and funding to determine what solutions were available to improve grant agreement processes. Mr. Blacklock is researching ways with which to ease the application process and navigate program requirements from one region to another, improve equity, and create a central entity where these processes can be accessed.

Deputy Secretary Jameson provided an overview of potential eligible beneficiaries and potential requirements. Deputy Secretary Jameson also considered the potential evaluation criteria, qualifications, and partnerships, among others. The Deputy Secretary would like to see certain potential reporting requirements, too, noting ongoing communication, etc.
Member Dawley voiced her support for the proposal. Member Dawley requested there be clear standards be set forward for the proposal, voicing concern for potential large workloads for limited administrators.

(11) PANEL DISCUSSION:

Visioning Session

The Board held a panel discussion with representatives from California State University, Sacramento State Consensus and Collaboration Program (CCP) to discuss today’s operating environment, the Environmental Farming Act and EFA SAP Authorization.

Speakers included:

- CCP Managing Senior Mediator David Ceppos

Mr. Ceppos proposed to talk about the overview and summary of:

- SAP and CDFA roles perform to date
- SAP Decision-making processes
- Block Grant Program proposal as an example for collaborative visioning

Chair Dlott provided context for the need of the overview:

- Urgency is greater – climate and equity impacts
- Significantly more resources
- Lessons have and are being learned
- Opportunity to extend CDFA’s Climate Smart Ag National and International Leadership
- Equity of regional distribution (what defines equity when it comes to regional distribution?)

Member Redmond recommended additional materials be provided. Member Redmond considered there may be program bias for the action items that may prioritize discussions and decisions.
Member Buffington also asked that timeframes and transparency be considered to accommodate all steps necessary to consider in this decision-making process. Member Buffington also proposed providing onboarding and background material prior to discussing proposals and synching up SAP meetings with the timing of legislative deadlines.

Member Dawley voiced the need to consider how we provide transparency, according to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, into the decision-making process, including priorities set forth program by program.

Member Couch echoed Member Dawley’s point, noting his experience with these types of decision-making processes within his department.

Member Cameron advised that additions to the proposal be made, including budget processes and additional shorter, more frequent meetings to discuss.

Member Diggs shared his experience as a relatively new member not necessarily seeing the strategy, but rather acting more in a reactive state versus having the ability to plan and be proactive. Member Diggs raised a concern about mitigating cronyism as projects are developed in collaboration with other organizers and their organizations.

Member Bright suggested prioritizing the processes prior to the decision-making processes to improve time management.

Mr. Ceppos transitioned to speaking on the collaborative decision-making process. Discussion items included:

- “Consensus” -- commonly used, interpreted differently and the challenges that can present.
- “Consensus with Accountability” -- requiring participants to reach unanimous consensus by achieving expressed interests, and their self-interests as well.
- Mr. Ceppos recommended the book “Getting to Yes” (Fisher and Ury)
Member Hansen wondered what rules were set by a bylaw mandating how the SAP collaborates and finds consensus. Hansen wondered if it was necessary to litigate a decision-making process. Mr. Ceppos noted the institutionalization of a decision-making method, by majority/minority consensus. Member Hansen considered the usefulness of coordination and knowledge sharing from one region of the state to the next. Member Hansen noted there is not a tool available to determine communities most in need of equitable distribution of resources. Who is in the greatest need of equitable distribution?

Member Bright discusses his experience regarding the investments made in block granting but emphasized the need for partnership in order to accomplish goals that impact more than one organization and stakeholders. Mr. Ceppos considered through the investments made in collaboration, higher capacity, and increased resources can become available to meet local needs. Mr. Bright defined the significance of need dictating the equity of funding.

Member Diggs raised a concern of training organizations to do a good job to distribute funds for a block grant, but if it’s designed in such a way that doesn’t work for the staff being served, it doesn’t do an effective job. Deputy Secretary Jameson noted the hard work program scientists can complete time and time again.

Mr. Ceppos recommended hearing from staff about what they’re hearing from the field. Ms. Cook noted the need to review government processes with her grantees. Ms. Cook does see an opportunity to build stronger relationships with recipients and the work they must do on projects. Ms. Cook believes more follow-up following project completion could be beneficial. Dr. Behla supported Ms. Cook’s position. Dr. Behla noted the drastic differences in marked improvements being made year over year, but he is open to trying new things and making stronger connections. Mr. Weeks supported these ideas, however, voiced his concerns related to building up the local resources and how those will vary region by region, and how those can change year over year.

Ms. Dawley expressed the need for keeping information online and accessible there in an intuitive way.
The panel discussion concluded with

(12) **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Hannah Tikalsky offered public comment about the funding meeting the objectives of the project laid out by the department. Tikalsky offered partnership in the thought process.

Anna Larson California Climate Network expressed support for a block grant approach to CDFA programs. Larson offered examples of successful block grant models within other California agencies. Larson encouraged ongoing public input and transparency for this process.

No further public comments were received.

(13) **CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

Next steps included scheduling of the Q4 EFA SAP for October.

Mr. Diggs proposed the Q4 EFA SAP be made via Zoom.

Mr. Cameron offered his availability for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4 p.m.