

**California Department of Food and Agriculture  
2021 Healthy Soils Program  
Responses to Public Comments Received Between September 9 - 23, 2021**

Program Type (HSP Incentives Program or HSP Demonstration Projects)	Comment	CDFA Response
Both	Allow cannabis farmers to apply for HSP funding.	Cannabis systems may be different from agricultural food production systems. CDFA recently received research funds to evaluate how cannabis operations can be included in CDFA's Climate Smart Agriculture programs. Following this research, CDFA will re-evaluate the inclusion of cannabis systems in its Climate Smart Agriculture Programs.
Both	CDFA's Compost White Paper lists "conservation lands" are ineligible for rangeland compost application. Since the program requires evaluation for this practice, conservation lands should be eligible for the Healthy Soils Program.	Such lands were made ineligible because of the potential for invasive species in response to additional nutrient content provided by compost. Native grasslands are naturally nutrient poor and native species are adapted to those conditions.
Both	Do tree crops include non-timber forest products such as acorns that are on Tribal land?	Tree crops are related to agriculture food production trees that are harvested for a crop. Forest products do not fall under CDFA authority. CDFA will require further guidance to determine if the acorns are used as a harvestable food crop.
Both	Allow new producers to apply for HSP, where they may not have three years' baseline data.	Application requires at least past one year information to allow technical reviewers and CDFA staff to determine that the practice was not implemented previously. If this information is not available, applicants are allowed to provide best estimates from previous ownership.
Both	Request clarification on time-frame for "previously implemented practice".	If it has been at least one year since the practice was last implemented on a field, it may be eligible for funding through the HSP.
Both	Include wildlife grazing land (such as wild deer and elk) under "Grazing Lands" for Tribes.	Thank you for this comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further for future rounds.
Both	Is a ranch being converted to orchard or vegetable farm eligible, or vice versa?	This is eligible as long as practices being proposed have not been implemented previously.
Both	Propose a 15% set-aside for Tribes.	CDFA will set a side 25% of funding for Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Ranchers (SDFRs). The definition of SDFRs includes Native Americans.
Both	Clarify if NRCS EQIP funds can be used as match.	NRCS EQIP funds are allowed as match for HSP funded projects.
Both	Prioritize funding for small and mid-sized farms, BIPOC farmers and women farmers by dedicating 50% funds to serve disadvantaged farming populations.	Thank you for the comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further, including an analysis of spending allocations over the history of the program.

Both	Xerces recommended a practice "Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for Pollinators" to "incentivize producers to maintain existing high quality habitat and to adopt and maintain management practices that decrease negative impacts to pollinators and other wildlife (e.g. pesticide risk reduction)." In many areas it is likely hard to find "existing high quality habitat". Whether existing or enhanced habitat is to be proposed for special management, the highest value is for beneficial predators and parasitoids because they may be the organism that best prevents a pest problem. In areas where there is drift from toxic chemical pesticides, the protection of parasitoid wasps and flies, especially ecto larval parasitoids, probably ensures the safety of pollinators and other wildlife.	The practice "Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for Pollinators" (CPS 645) is currently not eligible under the HSP.
Both	HSP should allow for expanded range of products beyond compost, as long as the product is CDFA-registered or licensed bulk fertilizer not produced from chemical or synthetic based feedstocks.	Healthy Soils Initiative was developed to address creating demand for compost and align with SB 1383 (2016, Lara) in addition to established quantifiable carbon sequestration benefits. Bulk fertilizers not produced from chemical or synthetic based feedstocks do not have quantifiable greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions. Further, CDFA does not have requirements/application rate guidelines for specific products to support the estimation of GHG reductions from such products. Specific non-proprietary carbon sequestration products may be suggested in the next round of new practices evaluation process to be evaluated by subject matter experts.
Both	Include prescribed/cultural burns among eligible practices.	Estimation of GHG reduction is not available for this practice. This practice may be suggested in the next round of new practices evaluation process to be evaluated by subject matter experts.
Both	Add that indirect costs rates that exceed what is allowed can be cost-share.	Matching funds are not required; grant recipients can use cost-share to cover any costs necessary for the project, including indirect costs.
Both	CARB should recognize bioenergy conversion technologies such as production of biogenic green fertilizer from biogas, biochar from gasification, and others, with LCFS carbon credit certification.	Estimation of GHG reduction is not available for this practice. This practice may be suggested in the next round of new practices evaluation process to be evaluated by subject matter experts.
Both	Conduct a comprehensive program evaluation in 2021, collaborating with skilled and qualified researchers and institutions in California, to assess the impact of HSP incentives and demonstration projects on attitudes and knowledge about healthy soils practices, barriers to practice adoption, and long-term implementation of healthy soils practices.	Thank you for the comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further in future.
Both	Do not support HSP investments as wildfires are the largest source of GHG emissions.	Thank you for the comment.

Both	Allow materials used for mulching to be produced on-site.	<p>CDFA is unable to allow use of on-site produced mulching materials due the following reasons:</p> <p>Potential of use of cover crop residue as mulch and double counting of GHG reductions already estimated under cover crop practice.</p> <p>For on-site crop types, it can be challenge to verify the quality and quantity of mulch being used consistent with program requirements; for purchased material, this is evaluation through receipts or other purchase related documentation.</p> <p>On-site tree crops can only be used as mulch once and would not meet program requirement for 3 years' application.</p>
Both	Make an explicit suggestion to have native species as a default for cover and hedgerow practices.	USDA NRCS allows a large variety of species, including non-natives. CDFA works to align its incentivized management practices with USDA NRCS. Recipients are encouraged to plant native species wherever possible.
Both	Follow compost application recommendations in the Compost Application White Paper that only application on priority, i.e., degraded sites be allowed until a clear evaluation process for other areas is delineated.	This recommendation in the Compost Application White Paper was specifically for rangelands. Compost application is currently allowed on rangelands at approved rates.
Both	Prioritize disadvantaged farmers.	25% of available funds are dedicated to SDFR projects.
Both	HSP should disallow toxic inputs: pesticides and excess artificial nitrogen fertilizer; and award extra points for applicants who are or transitioning to certified organic, biodynamic or regenerative agriculture.	Quantification methodology to estimate GHG reduction is currently not available for reduction in pesticides use. HSP incentivizes the practice of reduction of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer use by 15%.
Both	Make it a requirement to plant native species under woody cover practices.	USDA NRCS allows a large variety of species, including non-natives. CDFA works to align its incentivized management practices with USDA NRCS. Recipients are encouraged to plant native species wherever possible.
Both	Clarify that planting invasive species is not allowable.	Current language in RGA as well as USDA NRCS CPS documentation state that invasive species should not be planted.
Both	Are compost application rates outlined in the HSP guidelines of compost per acre for funding or are they a limit? Will additional application quantities be ineligible for funding?	Compost application rates in the white paper and RGA represent a limit. Any additional application has to be covered by farmer on their own.
Both	In the Compost White Paper, the section titled "Comparing nitrogen (N) from compost to recommended plant nitrogen requirements" describes how compost application at the rates used in the HSP will represent less than 15% of crop N needs. Is the additional N expected to come from additional compost use which is not funded or another source of N other than compost such as synthetic fertilizer? If so, we recommend utilization of the biosolids regulatory model to allow for application of compost, biosolids, and other organic sources of N up to the needs of the crop to be grown, taking all sources of nitrogen and mineralization into account. What was the reasoning for limiting application rates to less than 15% of the crop nitrogen?	Farmer is free to use any other resources to fulfil additional N needs on top of what is incentivized by CDFA. CDFA limits the amount of compost incentivized to ensure wide spread of funds across farms; funding full needs of farm would limit the number of projects funded.

Both	It appears that anaerobic digestate, including biosolids, is not eligible in the Demonstration Projects document when applied to rangeland. If an anaerobic digestate product was made which had a C/N >11, would this be considered for Demonstration Projects. What information would CDFA request in order to consider this? A recent study ( <a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/jeq2.20270">https://doi.org/10.1002/jeq2.20270</a> ) demonstrating the carbon sequestration benefits of anaerobic digestate on rangeland soils highlights the opportunities in this area.	CDFA only evaluated this practice for croplands, as proposed in the original public process. Additional evaluation may be needed to approve this practice for rangelands, including but not limited to C:N ratio/high nitrogen content and heavy metals or other compounds depending on feedstock. This practice may be suggested in the next round of new practices evaluation process to be evaluated by subject matter experts.
Both	Clarify if requirements to maintain temperature in compost piles are for consecutive days.	This information is available on page 11 of the HSP Incentives Program Request for Grant Applications (RGA) and page 13 of the HSP Demonstration Projects RGA.
Both	Convene with interagency staff to reduce reporting requirements and make program requirements more flexible.	Thank you for the comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further.
Both	Translate program materials into other languages.	Thank you for this comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further.
Both	Fit regional variation in costs.	This would result in the HSP deviating from USDA-NRCS EQIP. CDFA works to align the HSP with NRCS-EQIP.
Both	Invest in state technical support to farmers and ranchers.	Up to \$5 million from the funds allocated to HSP are allocated for technical assistance.
Both	Give additional consideration for climates/conditions needed for the production of culturally appropriate and indigenous foods.	Thank you for this comment. CDFA will be evaluating this request further for future rounds.
Incentives Program	Allow fixed application period instead of first-come-first-served to avoid rushed applications with fewer practices, potential disadvantage to smaller/underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers, and to maintain the value of a Conservation Plan. Suggested duration of 12 weeks for application period.	CDFA will be implementing a rolling application process in order to administratively manage the grants over a longer period of time with the high level of funds that the program has received. A four month rolling application process has been established to distribute the workload over time and allow farmers and ranchers the flexibility they need to apply for the program.
Incentives Program	Allow TAPs 6 weeks before application submission period opens after training workshop.	The requested time period is not feasible under the timelines established for the current solicitation. It may be considered in future solicitations.
Incentives Program	Since first-come-first-served process will be followed, allow an early opportunity to apply to 2020 applicants whose applicants were not funded since program ran out of funding.	New funding requires a new application process along with a new set of applications. Previous applicants can access their old applications in the electronic application platform with previous log-in information.
Incentives Program	There should be an initial deadline for applications after which a rolling deadline could be maintained if the initial round selections don't expend available grant funds. This could result in more workload for CDFA, but it would be more equitable for grant applicants, and consistent with state goals for supporting disadvantaged producers.	A first-come first-serve process over four months is required to manage administrative workload at CDFA. Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers will be prioritized for funding, with a minimum of 25% of the total available funds reserved for such projects. A longer application period of four months or until funds are encumbered also provides more flexibility on application submission.
Incentives Program	CDFA should allow farmers with one-year leases to participate in the program and apply for practices that are implemented annually without having to document landowner approval. CDFA can then add guidelines to the program that allow CDFA or the farmer to terminate a grant agreement if the farmer loses control of the land.	If considered for all practices, this would result in an overestimate of funds encumbered, followed by unused funds if projects are terminated. CDFA aims to have all projects implemented over a three year period to ensure consistency with the quantification methodology for estimation of GHG reductions.

Incentives Program	Use 20-year Global Warming Potential (GWP) of methane to estimate GHG benefits from the application of manure compost and enteric methane associated with making the compost.	Methane emissions from manure management and enteric fermentation are not included in the quantification methodology for estimation of GHG reductions for compost application.
Incentives Program	Remove the requirement to document project changes and allow farmers the flexibility they need to change the details of their practice implementation so long as they are following the CPS for it and then allow them to report on those changes after the fact.	CDFA needs to ensure all grant contract obligations as specified in the application are met. Any changes to the terms of the agreement require a request change since the change impacts the funds allocated, timeframe to complete the project and workplan. In case changes reported at a later time do not meet program requirements, the grant recipient could risk not being reimbursed for any costs incurred.
Incentives Program	Add NRCS CPS 595 Standard Pest Management Conservation System to HSP.	Estimation of GHG reduction is not available for this practice. This practice may be suggested in the next round of new practices evaluation process to be evaluated by subject matter experts.
Incentives Program	Allow adequate funding for recipients to obtain quality compost as nearer locations may provide contaminated compost.	The standard payment rate for compost application is based on a comprehensive evaluation of compost costs in HSP projects by the HSP team. CDFA will evaluate the potential to perform a future analysis on cost of compost.
Incentives Program	Microbial diversity in soil is positively impacted by slight speeding up of carbon sequestration with eight or more plant species in the mix. Payments should be increased for such projects.	Payments are consistent with USDA-NRCS EQIP. CDFA does not have an analysis to propose different costs based on number of species.
Incentives Program	Early adopters of HSP practices should be paid retroactively.	This is not possible as inconsistent with State grant and contracting laws where payments can only be made for services rendered during grant term. Additionally, if practices are already being implemented, it does not represent GHG reduction from baseline conditions.
Incentives Program	Continue to use NRCS EQIP rates as the foundation for the program and incorporate an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on existing payment rates and practice standards whenever CDFA solicits proposals for new practices. For payment rates that stakeholders flag as too low, CDFA could repeat the process it has used to update compost payment rates by collecting cost data from a subset of funded HSP projects to re-evaluate specific payment rates.	CDFA works closely to align with USDA NRCS EQIP practice standard rates. USDA NRCS EQIP estimates to cover 50% of the total cost of practice implementation. CDFA has doubled this payment rate with the expectation to cover the full cost of practice implementation.
Incentives Program	Payment rates are too low. Include a payment of \$800 per day for rental equipment. Also increase other payment rates for regional cost differences. Allow non-certified compost providers to supply compost and provide funding for C:N ratio testing.	CDFA works closely to align with USDA NRCS EQIP practice standard rates. USDA NRCS EQIP estimates to cover 50% of the total cost of practice implementation. CDFA has doubled this payment rate with the expectation to cover the full cost of practice implementation. The standard payment rate for compost application is based on a comprehensive evaluation of compost costs in HSP projects by the HSP team. CDFA will evaluate the potential to perform a future analysis on cost of compost.
Incentives Program	Require farmers to consult with a technical assistance provider to determine the best species to plant in the case of milkweed requirements for Conservation Cover projects. Xerces Society does not recommend planting native milkweed within 5-10 miles of overwintering sites on the coast in Central and Northern California and there are other beneficial pollinator and monarch species that can be planted.	CDFA funds technical assistance at the UCCE and through non-profit organizations to provide such consultations. CDFA will continue to highlight the importance of technical assistance providers for farmers and ranchers.

Incentives Program	Allow practices to be moved to different parts of the farm as this is consistent with farming practices of small diversified farms.	CDFA will maintain this requirement as it is an integral part of the modeling used to estimate GHG reductions; practices must be conducted in the same field over three years to build the carbon pool and provide carbon sequestration benefits and GHG reductions.
Incentives Program	Clarify the purpose of soil sampling in HSP Incentives Program	Soil sampling is needed to further validate the increase in soil carbon beyond the estimated GHG calculations. Analysis of the data in future years will lead to conclusions if this data is helpful or not from a scientific perspective.
Incentives Program	We would like to work with the HSP to identify California seed companies who have current HSP appropriate seed stock inventories and to work on ways to develop and sustain a California grown supply of native, pollinator friendly and California state wide and regionally appropriate seed stocks focused on catalyzing HSP applications and broader adoption of the HSP planting practices like conservation cover, contour buffer strips, cover crops, field border, filter strip, range planting and vegetative barrier.	CDFA is unable to work with specific private seed companies and/or promote proprietary products. Companies are encouraged to contact TAPs and UCCE CES's to facilitate connections with interested growers.
Incentives Program	Award extra points to "systems-based" proposals and projects proposing to implement more than one practice.	CDFA awards up to 10 additional points to projects that provide a conservation plan.
Demonstration Projects	Simplify application as some sections are more applicable to universities than non-profits.	All sections are needed for projects that involve data collection.
Demonstration Projects	Allow Tribes to renew applications in future without re-entering the competitive process if their first grant was completed successfully.	HSP is a competitive program, which would make it challenging to accept applications without review. Each project must be evaluated for its individual merit and potential to achieve GHG reductions and provide additional benefits.
Demonstration Projects	A total budget for estimating GHG balance for methane, carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide should be included in requirements; rather than requiring only GHG field emissions and SOM storage measurements, C and N from fertilizer/soil amendments, measurements of soil N, plant removal of C and N should be included.	Collection of GHG emission data is a minimum requirement. Applicants are encouraged to go beyond minimum requirements and include total GHG budgets or other approaches such as life cycle analyses.
Demonstration Projects	Clarify if each year is a replicate or if each treatment needs a separate control each year.	This is specified on page 17-18 of the RGA. Each treatment must have its own control.
Demonstration Projects	Clarify that limit of two grant awards is for same lead applicant.	This is clarified on page 4 of the HSP Demonstration Projects RGA.
Demonstration Projects	Longer term for grants (3-4 years with HSP Funding and one year with matching funds) would allow soil related changes and outreach outcomes to be achieved.	CDFA will fund projects with a 3 year grant agreement term. Matching funds are not required to enable a wide range of farmers and ranchers to enter the program.
Demonstration Projects	Allow biochar application in orchards and vineyards.	This is noted on pages 7-8 of the HSP Demonstration Projects RGA.
Demonstration Projects	Allow cover crop projects under Type A due to the potential for cover cropping to achieve co-benefits as detailed in the RGA.	Due to existing adequate research on cover crops to allow estimation of GHG reductions, it is already included in the CDFA HSP COMET-Planner Tool. Under Type A, CDFA will fund practices that are not included in CDFA HSP COMET-Planner.
Demonstration Projects	CDFA should pay entities what it costs them to do the project. In the case of agencies with a NICRA, they have already negotiated for a rate that reflects what it costs to do the work, so CDFA should pay that rate. We see that universities can claim an established indirect rate that is above the 20%, so fairness would dictate that all entities have access to a rate that more closely reflects actual costs.	Any indirect rate discussion beyond the established rates will need to be discussed at the Agency level. Determination cannot be made individually at the Program level.
Demonstration Projects	20% is insufficient indirect rate for Tribes. CDFA should allow federally negotiated indirect rates.	Any indirect rate discussion beyond the established rates will need to be discussed at the Agency level. Determination cannot be made individually at the Program level.

Demonstration Projects	Make a separate category of funding to support collection of baseline data.	Collection of baseline data is already an eligible cost for projects as it is a requirement.
Demonstration Projects	Requirements for outreach are not clear, including minimum number of field days and if remote attending farmer/rancher participants can fulfill these requirements.	Farmers/ranchers attending remotely can fulfill outreach requirements provided they are clearly identified and documented.
Demonstration Projects	CDFA must clearly inform current grantees when they have failed to meet the requirements in any of the areas listed under Past Performance (7.1-7.6) to help ensure points subtracted are not based misunderstanding or misinterpretation and also to make sure there are no surprises for the grant applicant.	CDFA has been informing all grant recipients of any deficiencies being noticed in reports with warning regarding future funding opportunities.
Demonstration Projects	COVID has caused interruptions to field work and data collection. Points should not be subtracted from the evaluation for past projects that could not complete requirements due to COVID.	COVID-19 delays are being accommodated with extensions. All recipients experiencing COVID-19 delays that contacted CDFA HSP team regarding delays were provided alternative work plans and/or extensions. Fulfilling an approved work plan would be considered completed. However, incomplete requirements at the time of project close-out that were not previously discussed with CDFA will be considered incomplete.
Demonstration Projects	Clarify whether these points will be deducted only for projects that have been completed, after the end of the grant period. Some projects may be able to make up for poor past performance in some of these categories by accomplishing more the last year of the project.	This is clarified on page 35 of the HSP Demonstration Projects RGA.
Demonstration Projects	Suggest as CDFA is subtracting points for poor performance, adding points for positive performance, such as exceeding the number of outreach events and attendees would provide positive incentive.	Positive performance is expected, as it implies completing the terms and conditions of the grant agreement. No additional points would be given for meeting grant agreement terms and conditions.
Demonstration Projects	Some of the past performance evaluation criteria are out of the control of the lead applicant /grant management organization e.g. Criteria 7.2 & 7.3 on page 31 on the draft RGA. It is unfair to judge a new HSP Demo Grant Application based on previous grants that could have had different staff managing the project and/or different partners implementing data collection and practice implementation components. If organizations are ineligible for HSP Demo Project Grants based on past performance they should be notified in a timely manner, prior to taking time to submit an application.	Past performance may be evaluated on the basis of the Principal Investigator (PI) and Co-PIs (if any) rather than organization.
Demonstration Projects	Allow field work costs to be reimbursed.	Field work/labor costs are already allowable.
Demonstration Projects	Support change to Type A Demonstration Projects. Require data collection on agronomic benefits, economics and operational requirements of HSP practices.	For data collection practices, data on GHG emissions, developing and/or standardizing methodology for practice implementation, and crop yield are mandatory. Applicants are encouraged to collect data on any additional benefits and/or cost analysis.

Demonstration Projects	Expand outreach audience to other people than farmers or ranchers especially for urban agriculture projects.	<p>The purpose of the HSP Demonstration Projects is to improve soil health, sequester carbon and reduce atmospheric GHGs by funding on-farm demonstration projects that collect data and/or showcase conservation management practices that mitigate GHG emissions and increase soil health, and creating a platform promoting widespread adoption of conservation management practices throughout the state. With one of the goals being future achievement of widespread adoption of healthy soils practices driven by behavioral change through peer-to-peer learning among farmers, the primary audience for these outreach activities are farmers and ranchers.</p> <p>Farmers and ranchers may include landowners and/or primary individuals involved with crop cultivation/food production and decision making of day to day farming activities on the agricultural operation.</p>
Demonstration Projects	Reduce reporting requirements to no more than once per year and CDFA should work with extension professionals to streamline reporting.	CDFA cannot reduce reporting frequency in order to track project progress (semi-annually) consistent with reimbursements issued (any time during the grant term). Less frequent status reports could present a financial risk for CDFA where findings of project delays or deficiencies may occur after issue of reimbursements.
Demonstration Projects	Make the process to request and approve changes easier and faster with less paperwork.	Current process needs to be maintained to allow proper documenting of project changes in the event of potential audits.
Demonstration Projects	Allow exemption to outreach requirements due to COVID-19.	Requirements can be met through remote events. COVID-19 impacts can be communicated to CDFA HSP and the program has provided solutions to meeting the requirements.
Demonstration Projects	Attendees who have influence over farmers and ranchers, such as NRCS, RCDs, CCAs, UCCE Researchers, BLM, park management and land owners should be included toward outreach requirements.	<p>The purpose of the HSP Demonstration Projects is to improve soil health, sequester carbon and reduce atmospheric GHGs by funding on-farm demonstration projects that collect data and/or showcase conservation management practices that mitigate GHG emissions and increase soil health, and creating a platform promoting widespread adoption of conservation management practices throughout the state. With one of the goals being future achievement of widespread adoption of healthy soils practices driven by behavioral change through peer-to-peer learning among farmers, the primary audience for these outreach activities are farmers and ranchers.</p> <p>Farmers and ranchers may include landowners and/or primary individuals involved with crop cultivation/food production and decision making of day to day farming activities on the agricultural operation.</p>