

California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)
Minutes
of the Meeting/Video Conferencing
of the California Fruit Tree, Nut Tree, and Grapevine
Improvement Advisory Board (IAB)
Held on Friday, November 7, 2025
501 Hopkins Road
Davis, CA 95616

IMPROVEMENT ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Members Present: Cliff Beumel, Richard Bostock, Isaac Duarte, Jay Jensen, Dan Martinez, Denise Moore, Nicholas Podsakoff, Reid Robinson

Members Absent: Jeremy Bahne, Eckhard Kaesekamp

OTHER ATTENDEES*

Maher Al Rwahnih, Kyle Beucke, Morgan Burke, Brent Burky, Joseph Damians, Tanya Goodson, Kristi Harrer, Dustin Hooper, Benjamin Kaesekamp, Matt Kaiser, Brenda Lanini, Phuong Lao, Minh Le, Heather Martin, Jasmine Minhas, Kelley Paugh, Lauren Port, Hanna Upton, Becky Westerdahl, YunPing Zhang

*As self-reported in the Zoom application or sign-in sheet

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Reid Robinson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03 am and welcomed everyone. Robinson reviewed the topics of discussion and conducted roll call. A quorum was present for the Board.

REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES FROM JUNE 5, 2025, BOARD MEETING

Robinson directed the Board to review the draft minutes prepared by program staff for the June 5, 2025, meeting. A copy of the draft minutes had been distributed to the Board members and posted on the Department's website prior to the meeting (attachment H11). Robinson opened the floor for any changes or corrections. The Board reviewed the minutes, and no changes or corrections were made.

Board Motion #1

The Board approved the minutes from the June 5, 2025, meeting.

Motion: Cliff Beumel
Second: Dan Martinez

In Favor: Cliff Beumel, Richard Bostock, Jay Jensen, Dan Martinez, Denise Moore, Nicholas Podsakoff, Reid Robinson

Against: None

Absent: Jeremy Bahne, Isaac Duarte, Eckhard Kaesekamp

Abstain: None

HOT WATER TREATMENT FOR FRUIT AND NUT TREE ROOTSTOCKS BY DR. BECKY WESTERDAHL (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS)

Dr. Becky Westerdahl, University of California, Davis, presented research expanding hot water treatment to kill nematodes in fruit and nut tree nursery stock (attachment H12). They investigated whether this treatment could be expanded to fruit and nut tree rootstocks, without causing damage to rootstocks, in case of soil treatment failure or as an alternative to fumigants. In a replicated trial across three years, hot water treatments at five temperatures and five lengths of time were tested in peach, prune, and walnut rootstocks. Hot water treatment at 120°F for 5 minutes was most effective for killing nematodes without significantly harming trees. Hotter temperatures were more effective for killing nematodes but reduced tree survival and circumference, whereas cooler temperatures were ineffective on nematodes, but did not harm trees. The Board commented that they were interested in this treatment as an alternative but would like to have it tested on current varieties and against secondary diseases (e.g., crown gall). The Board also expressed concern about the feasibility of scaling up hot water treatment for fruit and nut tree rootstocks because of their large size.

CDFA PROGRAM UPDATES

Kelley Paugh, CDFA, updated the Board on the current status of the draft Deciduous Fruit and Nut Tree (DFN) Registration and Certification (R&C) Program regulations. The new regulations were in internal routing, and program staff were working to address internal comments. An attendee asked if a meeting of the DFN R&C Program Regulations Working Group would be held for reviewing regulations prior to public comment. Paugh responded that there were no current plans to hold a working group meeting.

Paugh announced that a Grapevine R&C Program Regulations Scoping Meeting was scheduled at Foundation Plant Services on December 10, 2025. The purpose of this meeting was to review and make recommendations to amend the Grapevine R&C Program regulations. In addition, the fee increase amendment for the Grapevine R&C Program had recently completed review by the Department of Finance. It was anticipated that the fee increase would go into effect by the 2026 application period.

Paugh updated the Board that a USDA study showed that phosphine treatment was effective against vine mealybug on dormant grapevines. CDFA could potentially approve phosphine as a treatment option for vine mealybug when the study report was finalized and published.

Paugh stated that a new environmental scientist, Samuel Morales, was hired as a replacement for Joseph Rovito (retired) to perform registration and certification program duties in the Northern District.

The Board requested an update about approval of the anaerobic soil disinfestation (ASD) protocol for Nursery Stock Nematode Certification. Paugh responded that a briefing of the ASD treatment protocol that was presented by Dr. Andreas Westphal at the Nursery Stock Nematode Certification Forum was being routed to Secretary

Ross. Paugh explained that CDFA review of the ASD protocol as an approved treatment hinged on its publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The Board discussed concerns about the high cost of the proposed ASD treatment and whether lower cost ASD protocols could be shown as similarly effective against nematodes. Paugh stated that it could be financially undesirable to devote State resources to approving a protocol that was economically impractical for producers. The Board conceded that it could still be worthwhile having approval of the ASD protocol, especially in case of methyl bromide phase out. An attendee asked whether hot water treatment of nursery stock was also explored as an option for Nematode Certification, without requiring fumigation or laboratory testing. The Board discussed the practicality of relying solely on hot water treatment to maintain nematode-free nursery stock. The Board also asked if phosphine was effective against nematodes. Paugh replied that phosphine was not known to be effective against nematodes.

FOUNDATION PLANT SERVICES UPDATE

Maher Al Rwahnih, Foundation Plant Services (FPS), provided an update on FPS activities (attachment H13). In the Classic Foundation Vineyard, one vine tested positive for GLRaV-3 and one vine tested positive for GRBV, highlighting the importance of FPS regularly testing its grapevines. CDFA was notified of this virus detection and removal, and customers who received material were also notified. The Board asked whether high throughput sequencing could detect latent GRBV infections, and if latent infections posed a risk for GRBV rapidly spreading in the Classic Vineyard. Al Rwahnih explained a sampling and testing protocol that increased their chance of detecting the virus. Al Rwahnih also announced that the Foundation Screenhouse was expected to be completed in April 2026 and would provide additional protection for grapevine selections. FPS also procured 60 additional grapevine selections via NCPN funding.

Al Rwahnih reported that FPS had increased fruit tree PCR testing to over 30,000 trees annually. A total of 19 pome trees were positive for *Candidatus Phytoplasma pyri*; therefore, all pear trees were removed from Russell Ranch. Two *Prunus* trees tested positive for *Phytoplasma*, and six Mahaleb seed trees tested positive for PDV – all infected trees were removed. Overall, FPS was investing more resources into maintaining a clean fruit tree collection, with no tolerance for false negatives.

With the expected reduction of IAB funding, FPS was actively looking for alternative funding sources. The main priorities were keeping the core FPS team intact and minimizing layoffs by offering berry import & quarantine services, applying for research funding from different sources, increasing requests from NCPN, as well as increasing UCB#1 sales internationally. Al Rwahnih showed a list of current research funding and PPA7721 research suggestions that were submitted. FPS also increased their fees for introduction services, diagnostics, and plant materials. Cherry user fees would start in 2026. UCB#1 sales were growing in the Middle East and North Africa for reforestation, pistachio orchards, and ornamental purposes.

In reference to all testing performed by FPS, the Board asked whether each plant sample consisted of an individual plant or as a composite of multiple plants. Al Rwahnih replied that each plant was sampled and tested individually, including those being sold.

SPOTTED LANTERNFLY UPDATE

Kyle Beucke, CDFA, presented information on spotted lanternfly (SLF) (attachment H14). SLF was first detected in the United States in Pennsylvania in 2014. SLF causes death or dieback in tree of heaven, walnut, and grape, with grape being the only known crop significantly impacted by this pest in the eastern US. SLF feeding produces an abundance of honeydew that leads to sooty molds which decrease photosynthesis and reduce yield. Even if SLF juveniles are controlled in a planting, adult SLF may fly in from a surrounding area during harvest. A greenhouse study suggested that SLF could potentially vector *Xylella fastidiosa*. SLF can get collected during mechanical grape harvest of untreated vines, leading to excesses in the amount of foreign material allowed. SLF has been occasionally intercepted in California at border stations and during Japanese beetle inspections in cargo aircraft. Hitchhiking of nymphs and adults are probably important for short distance movement, but egg masses on objects are the highest risk for long distance movement. There were three interceptions of egg masses at California border stations in 2024-2025. Research by US Forest Services indicated that SLF could live in Lodi and Napa. To prevent SLF from establishing in California, CDFA has been devoting resources to annual surveys, developing an action plan, and supporting research. Outreach has included working with Master Gardeners on the Sentinel program, training county regulatory staff, development of a toolkit by PD/GWSS, and the "Report a Pest" hotline. The Board asked if CDFA had engaged with NPDN for outreach. Beucke responded that he was unaware of NPDN involvement.

PEACH ROOT-KNOT NEMATODE UPDATE

Heather Martin, CDFA, presented on the peach root-knot nematode (*Meloidogyne floridensis*; PRKN) life cycle (attachment H15). Nematode feeding causes large knots in roots which impede water and nutrient uptake from the soil and creates wounds where secondary pathogens can enter and further damage roots. PRKN is a problem for peach production in Florida, where it infects current preferred rootstocks. In a 2019 study in Florida, 6 out of 7 peach trees sold as nursery stock were infected. PRKN was first reported in nematode-resistant almond rootstock in Merced and Kern Counties in California in 2018. As a result of these two detections, CDFA assigned it an "A" pest rating. PRKN has not been detected in California since these initial findings, even after the 2023/2024 guava root knot nematode (GRKN) survey. UC research indicates that PRKN can also infect grape, walnut, and several vegetable crops. The Board asked how this nematode arrived in California. Martin replied that it was unknown. The Board asked for more information about the GRKN survey. Martin explained that this survey was conducted by several counties and funded by unclaimed gas tax funds. Other *Meloidogyne* spp. were detected in surveys but not GRKN or PRKN. The Board asked about PRKN risk for movement of sweet potato to

California from North Carolina. Martin replied that North Carolina was now required to show that sweet potato was free of nematodes.

FUND CONDITION, PROGRAM BUDGET, & ASSESSMENT COLLECTION UPDATE FOR FY 24-25

Paugh presented historical funding for IAB from 2021-2025 (attachment H01). CDFA expenditure and FPS support (with the exception of greenhouse funding) had remained mostly stable, with the exception of the drop in approved funds for FPS support in 2025. IAB research funds had slowly decreased over the years, with no contracts awarded in 2025. A Board member asked whether the Board was obligated to fund research. Paugh replied that IAB funding of FPS support may fulfill this need.

Paugh reviewed an itemized list for IAB nursery laboratory supply expenses for fruit and nut tree and grapevine testing (attachment H02). Costs were increasing for laboratory supplies. An attendee asked if per sample cost for the IAB lab had been compared to private lab testing. Paugh reminded attendees that private labs may conduct testing cheaper but lacked accreditation. Brenda Lanini, CDFA, added that there was presently no path to lab accreditation. Paugh stated that no cost comparison had been performed, but per sample costs would be presumably higher for the IAB lab in order to maintain baseline staffing levels. There were two full-time permanent staff members at the IAB lab. The Board suggested that testing costs of commercial labs could function as a cost goal for the IAB lab.

Jasmine Minhas, CDFA, reviewed assessment revenue history from 2007 to 2024 (attachment H03). The total 2024 assessment revenue was \$2.5 million. CDFA staff were recouping as much revenue as possible, including collection of unpaid and delinquent assessments. The Board asked why there were five years in a row of unpaid assessment fees indicated for 2020 to 2025. Minhas responded that these were delinquent assessments due in previous years that were collected this year. The Board asked if these unpaid assessments were discovered through the grapevine assessment audits. Paugh explained that these unpaid amounts were uncovered during internal audits. The Board discussed including fruit and nut tree nurseries in IAB assessment audits. Paugh said that she would ask whether the Marketing Branch could accommodate fruit and nut tree nurseries. The Board proposed having a separate committee to look into expanding the IAB assessment audits, with Cliff Beumel and Nicholas Podsakoff volunteering to represent fruit and nut trees and grapevines, respectively. The Board asked how CDFA enforced payment of IAB assessments and whether it was being enforced. Paugh and Lanini explained that delinquency would result in nonrenewal of the nursery license, and that nursery license renewal had been canceled in the past due to nonpayment. The Board concluded that assessment revenue was getting lower over time.

Minhas presented encumbrances for IAB research contracts (attachment H04). For FY 2023/2024, a balance in the amount of \$97,840 would be transferred to Dr. Philippe Rolshausen's contract in FY 2024/2025. Encumbrances were still pending for FY 2025/2026.

Minhas showed a budget sheet with expenditure details (attachment H05). FY 2023/2024 was closed, whereas FY 2024/2025 was still open and not yet finalized. Actual temporary salaries were higher than the approved expenditure because of payouts for staff member retirements. A direct recovery from citrus program had been provided to IAB. This is because citrus testing was performed by the IAB lab during winter. The total personnel services and operating expenses was projected to be \$2.5 million. The Board asked why R&C program charges were \$150,000 in projected versus \$300,000 in actual. Minhas explained that her staff was making projections closer to actual staff salaries that were being recovered by Nursery Services for IAB-related work.

Phuong Lao, CDFA, presented the IAB balance sheet (attachment H06). For FY 2024/2025, cash balance and revenues totaled \$6,545,497. Lao explained that the cash balance, revenues, and expenditures were not final. For FY 2024/2025, the total fund balance was \$3,462,551. For FY 2025/2026, IAB was projected to receive a lower assessment revenue of \$1,900,000, with the total fund balance, with expenditures subtracted, currently projected to be \$2,862,551. The Board asked about the change in Agricultural Trust Fund between fiscal years. Lao clarified that the Agricultural Trust Fund is cash reserved for economic uncertainty.

FAC 6981 ASSESSMENT FEE DISCUSSION

Paugh introduced this agenda item as relating back to a previous IAB meeting discussion about increasing the assessment fee from 1% to 2%. The Board acknowledged that IAB could run out of funds unless expenditure was drastically reduced. Paugh explained that amending FAC 6981 to increase the assessment fee would require legislative change. The Board discussed whether to have a discretionary range for the assessment rate, where the Board can vote to increase it to a maximum amount, rather than a set rate. The Board requested CDFA to provide a longer history (> 4 years) of the fund condition at the next meeting. The Board agreed that it was a problem that assessment revenue was too low to fund research specific to the fruit tree, nut tree, and grapevine industries. Lanini explained that industry could lobby their legislators as stakeholders to pursue legislation.

FAC 6986 ASSESSMENT DELINQUENT FEE DISCUSSION

Paugh explained that FAC 6986 stipulated that all delinquent and unpaid assessments shall be charged an additional 20% on the amount due. An attendee provided additional context to this discussion. The attendee said that their nursery did not receive the assessment fee letter and only received a reminder from CDFA about the assessment on its due date. The check was mailed overnight but not received until after the due date – therefore, the nursery was charged the 20% delinquent fee, with no leeway for waiving the fee. The attendee asked if the Board could request CDFA to have appropriate contacts at nurseries for assessment notification and to provide structured communication ahead of penalties. The attendee also asked the Board to rally to change the law to allow for more flexibility in late payment. Board members discussed whether Board involvement in assessment collections was appropriate and

if there should be a pathway for advocating relief from a delinquent fee. The board discussed adding a sliding scale for the penalty rate. The Board also requested CDFA staff improve their attempts to contact nurseries about late assessments. Paugh replied that CDFA staff would improve communication with nurseries about upcoming assessment due dates. Otherwise, the assessment was always due March 10 and late on April 9 every year, and CDFA was not obligated by law to notify nurseries of upcoming due dates. Paugh also asked that nurseries assist CDFA by providing appropriate, updated contact information and mailing addresses to improve communication. An attendee asked how many times this delinquent penalty was charged. Paugh responded that it had been charged to a few nurseries.

REVIEW OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FY 2026-2027

The Board reviewed attachments H07 and H08 and decided not to post the Request for Proposals due to budget constraints.

Board Motion #2

The Board recommended that CDFA not post a Request for Proposals for Fiscal Year 2026/2027 due to budget constraints.

Motion: Dan Martinez
Second: Reid Robinson

In Favor: Cliff Beumel, Richard Bostock, Isaac Duarte, Jay Jensen, Dan Martinez, Denise Moore, Nicholas Podsakoff, Reid Robinson

Against: None
Absent: Jeremy Bahne, Eckhard Kaesekamp
Abstain: None

BOARD MEMBER NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Paugh reviewed the list of current Board members (attachment H10). Applications were still pending for Board vacancies, so the Board could not make nominations yet. The Board discussed the application and nomination process. Paugh clarified that Kristi Harrer had been nominated but would not start her term until 2026. Board members discussed procedures for filling vacancies and choosing members to elect to Chair and Vice Chair positions.

Board Motion #3

The Board elected Jay Jensen as the Chair and Jeremy Bahne as the Vice Chair of the Fruit Tree, Nut Tree, and Grapevine Improvement Advisory Board.

Motion: Reid Robinson
Second: Nicholas Podsakoff

In Favor: Cliff Beumel, Richard Bostock, Isaac Duarte, Jay Jensen, Dan Martinez, Denise Moore, Nicholas Podsakoff, Reid Robinson

Against: None

Absent: Jeremy Bahne, Eckhard Kaesekamp
Abstain: None

REVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT EXEMPTIONS (3 CCR 3070)

The Board discussed the list of assessment exemptions (attachment H09). Isaac Duarte, who was leading efforts to explore removal of pistachio, stated that he had no updates and still needed to reach out to the pistachio industry. The Board discussed the process for amending the assessment exemption list, and past reasons for exempting certain nursery crops. Paugh clarified that CDFA needed sufficient evidence of industry support to remove a crop from this list via regulation amendment. The Board discussed removal of pistachio from the exemption list. It was decided that the pistachio industry should be made aware of the limited IAB research funds. The Board did not make a motion to change the assessment exemption list.

NEXT MEETING/AGENDA ITEMS

The spring IAB meeting was tentatively scheduled for May 2026. An upcoming meeting for nominating IAB members would be scheduled as soon as the vacancy announcement was posted and before terms ended in January.

ADJOURNMENT

Robinson adjourned the meeting at 2:05PM.

Respectfully submitted by:
Kelley Paugh, Senior Environmental Scientist
Nursery Services Program
California Department of Food & Agriculture

ATTACHMENTS

H01 IAB Historical Funding ADA
H02 IAB Nursery Laboratory Supply Expenses ADA
H03 Revenue History 2025 ADA
H04 Encumbrance Sheet 2025 ADA
H05 Budget Sheet 2025 ADA
H06 IAB Balance Sheet 2025 ADA
H07 IAB_RFP_Coverletter2026_ADA
H08 RFP Instructions FY26-27 ADA
H09 ccr_3070_iab_exemptions ADA
H10 2025 Board Member List 20251022 ADA
H11 06.5.25 IAB Draft Minutes ADA
H12 Hot Water Treatment IAB ADA 11.07.25
H13 FPS Update for IAB ADA 11.07.25

H14 Spotted lanternfly clean ADA 11.07.25
H15 Peach RKN ADA 11.07.25

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