



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Ag Development & Resource Conservation



Bryan P. Hurlburt
Commissioner

860-713-2501
CTGrown.gov

**Connecticut Department of Agriculture Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group Access to
Education and Training**

Regular Meeting Agenda
Wednesday, November 17, 2021
11:00AM-12:30PM
Held Virtually via WebEx Platform

Members Present: Lauren Little, Robert Peck, Azeem Zakir Kareem, Ana Legrand, James Dombroski, Shuresh Ghimire, Héctor Gerardo, Erica Fearn, Kimberly Acosta

Members Absent: Luis Vega, Xochitl Ahtziri, Tamika McPhail

DoAg Staff: Cyrena Thibodeau, Alissa Dragan, Allison Hughes

Public Present: None

1. **Welcome and Call to Order-** Meeting was called to order by Lauren Little at 11:05 AM. Lauren discussed the meeting agenda: member check-in, summarize the group's discussions so far, condense and edit recommendations into 5-10 key ideas, create a list of groups, resources, and institutions by area in the state, and create homework for continued conversations between meetings.
2. **Group Check in-** Lauren Little had group members discuss their preparations for the upcoming winter. Cyrena made the group members aware of the CT Grown for Kids grant program
3. **Old Business-** Lauren briefly reviewed the community agreements, and briefly discussed how the meetings have already connected members with resources they had not previously known about. The group's idea of a central hub for contacts, resources, and training should also include land access for farming, and stress and mental health support. There is also a need to be clear about what things the group does not want to see included and create a means of accountability.
4. **New Business-** Lauren asked the group if they had any additional thoughts or ideas to add to the group recommendations and concerns.
 - A meeting between resource providers (UCONN, USDA, FSA, etc.) and the various BIPOC and underserved community organizations to see how receptive and able the providers are to

making changes was suggested. Are there next steps to making changes that can be identified this way?

- There needs to be a mindset shift. If groups can pool their knowledge and expertise, they can create resources rather than looking to outside organizations for support. Those outside organizations should be looking to the BIPOC community for resources. This group should pool resources, share them through a central hub, gather and share that information and feedback by state and region being the key component.
- How can equity be built into provider funding? What funding requirements should be instated to increase accountability? Can equity be embedded into DoAg funding and distribution of funds? There is a need to reduce barriers to apply for funding, including language limitations. There is also a need for providing information in multiple formats (video, etc.)
- How do we keep the next generation of farmers in state & in their communities? Current programs do not bring agriculture into communities. There is a need for resource providers to go into communities rather than making communities go to them. For instance, UCONN does not offer Agricultural education at the Hartford campus. There is a lack of connections & the school may not be aware of groups & potential students. UCONN has a new USDA grant funded agricultural initiative to recruit tribal students from southern New England and provide courses, mentorship, and internship opportunities. UCONN also has a new DEI workgroup and is developing a web page for resources. A meeting between Administrators at UCONN & the group was suggested.
- Alternative routes to higher agricultural education need to be created. Those interested in advancing their knowledge may not have the necessary traditional educational background, degree, or GPA to gain admission to a university. How can the power of a 4 year degree become accessible for this group?
- A BIPOC network of resources & knowledge could help prevent gatekeeping to resources and attaining a higher level of education. Many resources already exist within the community and people are already doing the work. Identifying and supporting them is a key to creating broader educational access.
- There is a need for a community-based body that continues beyond this project to create & maintain community, accountability, access to experts, develop educators, and provide equitable compensation for the work. The New Connecticut Farmer Alliance was mentioned as a potential venue for a longer-term forum.
- The group decided to create a list of the various groups and organizations members of the group are aware of. A discussion of how to organize the list by the type of organization (community, Institution), the work they do, and which groups need help or improvement in their efforts. An initial spreadsheet was created and the group discussed asking the main working group for additional organizations that might have been missed.

Lauren asked the group if there were any other points of discussion.

When does the group want to send recommendations to the main working group? For instance, the group agrees there is need for an informational hub. Would it be beneficial to submit this recommendation now, rather than at the end of the process? The group agreed to finalize some of the recommendations before the next meeting. Three key recommendations to finalize are an Information Hub, language equity, and creating a long-term group to continue the work.

5. **Public Comment-** No public comments
6. **Next Steps-** The group will begin to draft the recommendations to be edited and added as a starting point for the next meeting. Members will add to the group and organization spreadsheet that was started. The group will meet the third Wednesday of each month.
7. **Adjourn-** Meeting was adjourned at 12:18 PM by Lauren Little

Respectfully submitted by Alissa Dragan, Environmental Analyst III, November 22, 2021