



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



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Commissioner

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Connecticut Department of Agriculture Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group

Access to Education and Training

Regular Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

10:30-12:00PM

Held Virtually via WebEx Platform

Members Present: Luis Vega, Lauren Little, Xochitl Ahtziri, Robert Peck, Azeem Zakir Kareem, Tamika McPhail, Ana Legrand, Shuresh Ghimire, Héctor Gerardo, Kimberly Acosta

Members Absent: James Dombroski, Erica Fearn

DoAg Staff: Cyrena Thibodeau, Alissa Dragan

Public Present: None

1. **Welcome and Call to Order-** Meeting was called to order by Cyrena Thibodeau at 12:40 PM. Discussed the switch to using Dropbox for recorded meeting storage and viewing.
2. **Group Check in-** Lauren Little had group members introduce themselves, pick a word to describe how they were feeling and share their favorite snack. Cyrena briefly discussed the agenda.
3. **Old Business-** Cyrena discussed using Google drive as a collaborative workspace for group members to contact one another and share documents and information. The space is for workgroup members to collaborate and use as they wish. Legislative Liaison, Kayleigh Royston, is available to speak to the group about the legislative process and any legislation that the workgroup might be interested in.
4. **New Business-** A brief discussion of the agenda was followed by asking what this meetings focus would be. Cyrena passed the meeting off to Lauren Little to lead the discussion. Lauren asked the group what they thought was the most important issue around access to education. Some of the key issues brought up were:
 - a. Available resources that group members might not be aware of, such as the free agricultural resources provided by UCONN scientists (soil and pest management, etc.). The Department of Agriculture Weekly Agricultural Report was mentioned as a great resource for growers. However, the Report is not available in multiple languages which creates a barrier for those who do not speak and read English fluently. Videos are a good way to reach folks from diverse backgrounds.
 - b. Land Access, financing, and retention. Leasing land is an option that many people are unaware of. There are major hurdles to borrowing startup funds and for long term financing to maintain land. Many of the available financing options are out of reach for someone with limited access to capital, and terms of the loans are often short. There are not great funding options for beginning farmers from USDA, or other resources. This funding is only available from private sources where credit for financing is a barrier to access.
 - c. Farmer to farmer trainings are very effective, utilizing BIPOC farmers would be more effective in reaching the appropriate audience. Incentivizing farmers for their time and expertise to help create content would be a necessary component. The creation of a Facebook group or YouTube channel was mentioned. Creating a central and localized hubs for learning different aspects of the business, marketing, trainings, networking, etc. led by and for the BIPOC community.
 - d. Gaps identified: Disseminating information to undocumented workers who may not be fluent in English. There is a lack of educational resources for these workers to advance to owning or renting their own land. In addition to many resources not being accessible to non-English speaking farm workers, there are limited resources for those with learning or physical disabilities. Resources should be in multiple formats to cover these gaps. There are limited in state resources available, and they might not reach the right people. How can existing programs be utilized, modified, and disseminated to reach the BIPOC community? There is a lack of BIPOC representation

in educators. Those doing the work of education, outreach, and organization need to be paid a reasonable wage for their work.

It was suggested that part of the group output should be a current state of affairs including suggestions on how to address the key issues.

Lauren asked the group what they do not want to see happen as part of, or resulting from, the workgroups suggestions. What mistakes have been made elsewhere that the group should be mindful of not repeating? Responses were:

- a. Predatory practices those that are involved need to be vetted to protect the community. Lack of accountability for those who engage in predatory practices is an issue.
 - b. Avoid farming practices that exacerbate climate change or are detrimental to the environment.
 - c. BIPOC farms being used against the community as a vehicle for gentrification.
 - d. Avoiding a top-down approach. The work should be community based and lead from the ground up.
 - e. Lack of an organizational component. Community and/or union organizing is needed to get funds into communities and directly educate. People need to be paid for outreach and implementation. Implementation must have community input.
5. **Public Comment-** No public comments
6. **Next Steps-** The group decided to establish a regular monthly meeting. Cyrena will propose some dates and time for the next meeting.
7. **Adjourn-** Meeting was adjourned at 12:05 PM by Cyrena Thibodeau

Respectfully submitted by Alissa Dragan, Environmental Analyst III, September 28, 2021