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Commissioner

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



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CTGrown.gov

Access to Resources and Capital Meeting Minutes

Friday December 10, 2021 11am -12:30pm

Webex - <https://ctdoag.webex.com/ctdoag/j.php?MTID=m6cfa2111f3bb3a1b6e1a28dbd12caae1>

Facilitators: Elizabeth Guerra, Dishaun Harris, and Shawn Joseph

1. Welcome and Call to Order - 11:00am

- a. Attendance - Kimberly Norman-Rosedam, MacKenzie White, Dishaun Harris, Cyrena Thibodeau, AliRose Grabarz, Tym Anderson, Scott Kemp, Christine Kim, Elizabeth Guerra, Robert Chang, Matt DiSciacca, Jiff Martin, and Harold Blackwell.
- b. Sharing and reflection on 2021 and looking forward to 2022.

2. Old Business

- a. Quick Recap of last meeting on November 12th (Liz & Dishaun)
- b. CT DoAg Grant Programs Continued (AliRose Grabarz)
 - i. Transition grant - Is open to CT Farmers and agricultural cooperatives. AliRose shared an infographic. Discussed Microgrant (up to \$5,000, 25% match). Many farmers usually apply for infrastructure investment. Funds can be used for infrastructure or research and development. For the match DoAg gives you a certain amount, for the match you can use salary or fringe benefits. Example: if you were going to pay 2 employees to install a hydroponics system, you can match a certain amount of their salary. Awarded \$20k, can match \$5,000. For the match requirement on microgrant, a \$5,000 award will need to be matched at 25%, so \$1,250 will need to be contributed by awardee for a total project cost of \$6,250.

1. Comments

- a. Seems inaccessible, worried that farmers can't afford the match. The cash match portion is a deterrent. The threshold should be lowered for the match.
- b. Let's make a recommendation on the match portion of this
- c. Changing these matching/reimbursement ratios, reimbursement ration with USDA grants are 90% of the project for BIPOC or beginning farmers. Like how these grants within the agency are broken up so they are not competing with each other. Think about how we administer these programs, making them fair and

thinking about racial justice going forward. If the department could determine how much of each grant has been awarded to BIPOC farms in the past and we determine/recommend a new number/ percentage based on that historic number. If CT population is 40% people of color, then 40% of the agency's funding should go to producers/farmers of color. We recommend the agency doing a better job explaining the reimbursement/ matching portion. Recommend to them doing what USDA does in terms of matching/reimbursement.

- d. Add a 90% reimbursement rate, suggest adjusting the payment/payout since it is a burden with the 50% upfront and then 50% at the grant closeout. Address historic inequity. We can recommend adjusting these existing programs, but it might not be enough and a new program needs to come into existence.
- e. Making a grid that is easier to follow. Everything seems like you need to be established. Getting started is the hardest part.
- f. Creating specific grant for aspiring farmers, may not have a year of being established but have experience farming
- g. Have the department set some goals on how they are spending the funding, instead of trying to be a little bit better, that they instead make a significant commitment to being fair
 - i. Meet BIPOC farmers where they are
 - ii. 25% of the total funding to the grant program where a majority of BIPOC farmers apply
 - iii. Historically it used to be one pot of money, we would like to see how the budget is allocated and see how many BIPOC farmers have received funding in the past.
- h. USDA puts all socially disadvantaged farmers in a pool together, so maybe adding a checkbox?
- i. We need to think about if we say allocate 20% to BIPOC farmers, however what if 20% is not awarded because DoAG did not get enough applicants - then what? That's not an excuse, hence why a new program may be needed. Maybe carry the funds over into next year's pool and improve on outreach and marketing?
- j. What do we need as farmers? And how do we get what we need? Ex: tractor?
- k. No access to computers? ADA compliant? Not able to read or write?
- l. Between the four different categories - All the applicants were reviewed against one another in the category and given a score. Getting the numbers from last year from the agency would be super helpful. Maybe we could get those numbers by

next meeting This is last year's transition guidance. The application itself begins on page 9 https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOAG/ADaRC/Transition_guidance_revised_3_18_2021.pdf

3. Rough idea recommendations (start documenting to boil down to final recommendations)

a. Matching

- i. Changing the matching/reimbursement ratio
- ii. Mirror it to USDA's 90% reimbursement
- iii. Easier to understand
- iv. Making it fair - Have the department set some goals on how they are spending the funding, instead of trying to be a little bit better, that they instead make a significant commitment to being fair

b. Creating specific grant for aspiring farmers, may not have a year of being established but have experience farming

c. What about the folks that do not have access to computers? What about the applicants that cannot read or write? ADA compliant?

4. New Business

5. Public Comment

6. Next steps

- a. Year End Wrap Up - Strong conversation points from the past meetings
 - i. Cyrena will be typing up synopsis of all of the meetings for each working group thus far and she will share amongst all groups so we are aware of what each group is working on.
- b. Next Meeting - January 14th, 2022?
 - i. One of our meetings - have someone from the agency talk about government land that is rented out? The point that Robert made regarding farmland preservation funding serving as a capital investment in farm businesses is 100% correct
 - ii. Half the meeting talking about details, programs, concurrently update what exists already and half the meeting learning about what is available
 - iii. Collecting data and numbers from the agency in regards to how many BIPOC farmers have applied to these grants in the past and how many or how much was awarded to BIPOC farmers

7. Adjourn

Respectfully Submitted by Mackenzie White, AMIR 1, December 10, 2021.