



Bryan P. Hurlburt
Commissioner

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Commissioner**



**Connecticut Department of Agriculture Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group
Access to Resources and Capital**

Regular Meeting Minutes- Held Virtually
Friday November 12, 2021
11am -12:30pm

Members Present: Elizabeth Guerra, Dishaun Harris, Lisa Griffin, Kristen Cooksey Stowers, Matt DiSciacca, Kimberly Norman, Scott Kemp, Jiff Martin, Tym Anderson, Robert Chang, Harold Blackwell, Deborah Caviness

Members Absent: Shawn Joseph, Kwaku Griffiths, Christine Kim

DoAg Staff: Cyrena Thibedeau, MacKenzie White, Alison Grabarez, Jaime Smith

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

2. Old Business

- a. Recap of Meeting 2 - Liz

3. New Business

A. Presentation from Agency (Alison Grabarez) on Capital Resources within the Agency 20 minutes

- i. [Farm Viability Grant](#) - Launching soon, fund projects that directly impact or foster agriculture viability municipalities, groups of municipalities, regional councils of government, and agricultural non profits, must answer 1 of 4 questions of focus, 1. Improve diversity, equity and inclusion, 2. Expand support and resources for urban agriculture, 3. Food supply chain - increase kitchen/ processing facility accessibility, 4 improve farmland accessibility for new farmers.
- ii. [Farm Transition Grant](#) - Launching around December due date in February. Eligible applicants include ag producers and ag cooperatives. Main goal is to improve farm production and operation. Five categories 1. New Farmer microgrants (1-3 years of production max award \$5,000, 25% match) 2. Infrastructure and investment (at least 3 years of production) installing new fencing, remodeling a barn, purchasing equipment, Max award \$20,000. 3. Research and Development. Fund farms to conduct research. Max award \$25,000 cash match 40% of project costs. Uses include consultant fees, pilot program, other expenses related to project development. 4. Innovation/ Diversification - implementation of that new product after the research and development phase has been completed. Max award \$49,999 with a 50% cash match. Example uses of funds Fund new equipment, software, or consultant fees. 5. Situational grant/ emergency funds.

Suggestions

- 1. Can improve how they are marketing within communities of color

- a. May be aware of the programs, but do not always think that they are eligible or could apply
 - b. Matching is a financial burden, outreach done in concert with FSA (borrow money through microloan, that helps cover for the match)
- 2. Rather than doing a survey. Straight out ask race and ethnicity within the application process and percentage of applicants awarded and successfully complete the project. Include on application materials
- 3. Use a third party evaluator
- 4. Instead of survey since we get surveys all day long, maybe make a phone call instead
- 5. Data driven conversations, short phone call on perceptions that a survey cannot pick up
- 6. Set some goals for the department for spending - allocate 5 or 10% budget to socially disadvantaged or farmers of color. We could use race/ethnicity baseline data to determine the % increase for BIPOC grant participation we'd like to see over the next few years.
- 7. (Jaime Smith) Give thought to those funds that are set aside, incentive for reaching and achieving those goals. The goal is to fund 10 BIPOC farmers. Say we only have 5 BIPOC farmers apply and 4 put forth feasible ideas, what happens? There are currently no set asides within the agency. There are internal goals, but no regulations that specify BIPOC producers. Currently only Agency priorities determine awarding. Provide a what happens scenario along with our recommendations. For the Farm Transition grant we definitely allocated it all, but if there's a set aside for BIPOC or a goal of X number of BIPOC producers and that isn't achieved - then what? Do we have to achieve more in the future?
- 8. Make it so administration cannot ignore it even if the administration changes
- 9. With these grant programs - Could they offer a program specifically for socially disadvantaged folks?
- 10. Set a goal and then it makes sense to align outreach and tracking with that goal.
- 11. Awarded applicants/ previous grantees will be a part of the future outreach solutions. Additional funding goes towards outreach. Note in the application that they want to be an Outreach sponsor (receive an additional amount of funds to help spread the word/ information). Would that be viable?
- 12. Providing guidance on how to fill out the application is super helpful. If the department has the funds to provide the technical assistance to help them through the application process. Help get quality applicants to apply. Offer or partner with other organizations that have the resources.
- 13. Peer to Peer learning
- iii. Other funding opportunities within the agency - <https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/ADaRC/ADaRC/Agricultural-Business-Development--Assistance>

4. Next Steps

Second Friday of the month 11am-12:30pm - Next Meeting December 10th

5. Adjourn



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Respectfully Submitted by MacKenzie White, AMIR, November 12, 2021