

DRAFT ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday – June 2, 2025

SLO County Farm Bureau Office – 4815 Morabito Place, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Members and Alternates Present: Dan Rodrigues, Ron Harben, Lisen Bonnier, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Claire Wineman, Tom Ikeda, Paul Clark, Jeff McKee, Jerry Diefenderfer

Staff Present: Ian Landreth – San Luis Obispo County Department of Agriculture

Absent Members: Daniel Jones, Sarah Kramer, Dylan Theobald

Guests Present: Rachel Best (MS Teams) – Land Conservancy, Hilary Phillip – United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Gary Troester – USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), Russell Todd – USDA FSA, Cal Poly Wine and Viticulture 428 Class (8 students)

I. Call to Order, introductions, quorum determination

The meeting was called to order by Chair Rodrigues at 5:01 p.m. There were enough members present to have a quorum.

II. Open Comment

Members wishing to address the ALAB on matters other than the scheduled items may do so at this time, when recognized by the Chairman.

Dan Rodrigues opened public comment.

Dan Rodrigues closed public comment.

III. Previous Minutes – March 2025

Thereafter on **Motion to approve March 2025 minutes as presented by:** Jerry Diefenderfer, **Second by:** Lisen Bonnier, and on the following vote:

REPRESENTATIVE:	AYES:	NOES:	ABSTAIN:	RECUSE:
Dan Rodrigues			X	
Jerry Diefenderfer	X			
Sarah Kramer	X			
Claire Wineman	X			
Paul Clark	X			
Hallie Richards	X			
Lisen Bonnier	X			
Tom Ikeda	X			
Ron Harben	X			
Jeff McKee	X			

The ALAB approved the March 2025, minutes.

IV. **ALAB Governance Membership Updates**

David Aguayo provided the following ALAB membership updates since the November 2024 meeting:

- Craig Pritchard will be reappointed as the District 1 ALAB representative at the June 3, 2025, Board of Supervisors meeting. Pritchard's term will expire in 2029.
- The Upper Salinas-Las Tablas RCD representative seat remains vacant.

V. **Informative Presentation: USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) & USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – Russell Todd, FSA County Executive Director, Hilary Phillips, NRCS District Conservationist, Gary Troester, FSA Farm Loan Manager:**

PowerPoint Presentation: https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/agriculture-weights-and-measures/all-forms-documents/information/meeting-minutes/alab-meeting-agendas,-minutes,-presentations/2025/alab_presentation_2025_06_02

- Russell Todd began the presentation. NRCS and FSA are sister agencies, and their offices are in Templeton. Their combined missions are to serve the farmers and ranchers of San Luis Obispo County through federal assistance. Funding for these agencies comes from congress, usually the Farm Bill but can also come through other ad hoc legislation such as recent relief and recovery acts.
- Todd provided an overview of how the Farm Service Agency (FSA) supports farmers and ranchers, primarily through disaster assistance and economic relief programs. For example, in the event of a drought, farmers experiencing forage losses may be eligible for supplemental feed support through FSA programs. By submitting the appropriate documentation, producers can receive government subsidies to help sustain operations. Todd noted that many producers are still unaware of these available resources. To get started with FSA, producers must identify the type and location of their operation and whether they operate as an individual or entity. A comprehensive list of FSA programs was shared in a PowerPoint presentation, which Todd will forward to Ian. All FSA programs are overseen by a county committee which is comprised of farmers and ranchers who serve a three-year term and represent the different regions within the county.
- Key upcoming deadlines were shared by Todd.
 - The application period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) closes this Friday, while the Grassland CRP will open at a later date.
 - The acreage reporting deadline for grazing lands is July 15.
 - The local workgroup meeting for the RCDs, NRCS, and agricultural community is scheduled for July 9th.
- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) was also highlighted. NAP provides coverage for crops that are not eligible for standard insurance and can assist with losses from events such as flooding, drought, and fire.
- Additionally, Todd shared information about the Tree Assistance Program (TAP), which helps vineyard owners replant vines lost due to natural disasters or conditions such as fire, flooding, or red blotch disease. As part of the program, vineyard owners must submit 10

verified lab samples from a third-party source. Once approved, they have approximately one year to remove, and replant affected vines.

- Gary Troester provided an overview of the FSAs' lending program. It is primarily to act as the lender when a farmer cannot get credit elsewhere. A key factor for loan assistance is that an individual must be working at the management level of a farm for at least one year. Loan amounts can range from fifty thousand to six hundred thousand dollars for the purchasing of property. Working with the FSA can help producers secure financial assistance that reduces perceived risk for lenders. This support can improve access to credit by providing banks with greater confidence in a producer's financial stability.
- Hillary Phillips provided an overview of programs offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a voluntary, non-regulatory agency that supports farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners with financial and technical assistance for implementing conservation practices. NRCS funding is provided through the Farm Bill, which has expired; stakeholders are hopeful for favorable developments in the upcoming reauthorization. Phillips highlighted three core NRCS programs, with a focus on:
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP supports producers in implementing conservation practices that can enhance production and help meet environmental goals. For example, rangeland improvements such as fencing for rotational grazing or water development projects are eligible. NRCS offers access to engineers, biologists, rangeland specialists, and conservation planners to help design and plan these practices. The agency also shares the implementation costs.
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): Typically following EQIP, CSP is a five-year program that encourages producers to adopt additional, long-term conservation practices. Examples include expanding rangeland plantings, pollinator habitat development, and other sustainable land stewardship efforts.
 - Phillips also noted that NRCS partners on easement projects within the county, further supporting long-term land conservation goals.

Several members, including Jean-Pierre Wolff, Hallie Richards, Jerry Diefenderfer, Ron Harben, and Claire Wineman shared their perspective and experience with USDA NRCS and FSA. Comments emphasized the historical background of the organizations, the importance of collaborative approaches, local engagement, and flexible program design. As well as the important communication network between these agencies and the local agricultural commissioner's office. There was a general agreement on the value of federal-local partnerships such as NRCS and RCDs.

VI. Updates from Ag Department Staff.

Ian Landreth provided general updates, including:

- Initial Ag Pass training is scheduled for June 17th. Renewal Ag Pass training facilitated by Santa Barbara County on June 11th. More information on the program is available on the Ag Commissioner's webpage.

- The Department is currently working on producing the annual crop report. It's anticipated that the crop report will go before the Board of Supervisors in September.

Claire Wineman reminded the ALAB of the importance of how the dollar amounts in the crop report are represented. The dollar amounts shown represent the gross income, and do not reflect operating costs and other input costs that impact the bottom line.

VII. Future agenda items/meeting dates, adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 PM. The next monthly ALAB meeting is scheduled for July 7, 2025.

Respectfully submitted by Ian Landreth, San Luis Obispo County Department of Agriculture\Weights & Measures.