



United States Department of Agriculture

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Learning Network (Partnerships Network)

Funding Pool 1 Meeting | June 14 – 15, 2023

Colorado State University Spur, 4777 National Western Dr, Denver, CO 80216

Discussion Summary

DAY 1

Welcome and introductions

Robert Bonnie, U.S. Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC), welcomed network partners to the meeting. He emphasized the goal of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities to discover market-based collaborative approaches that can deploy climate-smart agriculture at scale.

Katina Hanson (Acting Senior Advisor for Climate-Smart Commodities, USDA FPAC) introduced the USDA team, and Bill Hohenstein (Director, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)) presented an overview of the intent of the program and the Partnerships Network. Facilitator Sarah Stokes Alexander (Vice President of Programs, Keystone Policy Center) reviewed the agenda for the meeting and requested that participants observe participation guidelines.

Panel: Market engagement and development

Moderator: Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm Production and Conservation

Panelists:

- Mitchell Clark, SVP Supply Chain, Maple Hill Creamery
- Paul Vanderford, Green Markets Program Director, Sustainable Northwest (Forestry)
- Courtney Hodges, Program Director, ECOM USA, LLC

The panel discussed several questions related to establishing and developing markets for climate-smart commodities, first discussing their vision for these products. They described where they saw themselves in the marketing process, noted the importance of connecting sustainable outcomes with the motivations of consumers, and reflected on ways that the USDA could assist with standardizing the space.

Small group discussion: Market approaches by commodity

In small groups roughly organized by commodity, attendees discussed their vision for climate-smart commodities, shared with each other where they were in the market engagement process, discussed how they planned to engage end consumers, and anticipated what conditions would enable the market for climate-smart commodities to be self-sustaining 5 years into the future.

Panel: Measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification (MMRV) approaches

Moderators:

- William Hohenstein, Director, Office of Energy & Environmental Policy, USDA OCE
- Bidisha Bhattacharyya, Senior Advisor, Climate and Conservation, USDA FPAC

Panelists:

- Jared Knock, Business Development at AgSpire, Leadership at Millborn Seeds
- Tyler Hull, Director of Strategy, AgriCapture
- Kristi Cammack, Assistant Dean, South Dakota State University
- Audrey Epp Schmidt, North America Agroforestry Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy

The panel moderators opened by emphasizing how central MMRV is for Climate-Smart agriculture and for establishing climate-smart markets. Panelists introduced their general approaches to MMRV and further described how they are employing strategies to reduce cost while remaining credible.

Small group discussion: MMRV approaches by commodity

In small groups roughly organized by commodity, attendees discussed their overall planned approaches to MMRV, what they anticipated learning from others, and where they see challenges in implementing MMRV as part of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities effort.

DAY 2

Debrief of Day 1

Presentation: COMET tools overview

Presenters:

- Mindy Selman, Senior Analyst, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, USDA
- Adam Chambers, Environmental Markets Specialist, NRCS USDA
- Amy Swan, Project Scientist, Colorado State University
- Haley Nagle, Outreach and Education Specialist and Data Analyst, Colorado State University
- Andie Conlon, Outreach and Education Specialist, Colorado State University

Representatives from Colorado State University presented on the design and use of COMET tools. COMET-Farm permits the user to provide more details in practices and rotations to set an operation-specific baseline, while COMET-Planner uses a fixed baseline by county. A graphical user interface is available for data entry by farm, and an API (application programming interface) is available to run large amounts of data. Presenters responded to questions from those in attendance.

Choose-your-own tabletop discussion

Participants were invited to self-select one of six table discussions on topics that had emerged in the course of conversation, comparing notes between projects. These topics included the following.

1. Engagement with industry & supply chain
2. Incentive payment structures
3. Technical assistance and workforce
4. Data use and management
5. Partnering, collaboration & managing project overlap
6. COMET tools

Presentation: Engaging your project partners in the Partnerships Network

Presenters:

- Sara del Fiero, Management and Program Analyst, Climate Change, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, OCE, USDA
- Virginia Green, Acting Deputy Director for Climate-Smart Commodities, FPAC, USDA
- Meredith Niles, Associate Professor, Dept. of Nutrition and Food Sciences, University of Vermont
- Kristal Jones, Principal Researcher, JG Research and Evaluation
- Jonathan Geurts, Senior Project Manager, Keystone Policy Center

USDA representatives and members of the Lindahl-Reed Partnerships Network data analysis and learning team presented on the purpose of the Partnerships Network and how to engage in it.

The Partnerships Network is co-chaired by the USDA Office of the Chief Economist and the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area. The Partnerships Network will inform synthesis reports to be assembled by USDA on a range of topics related to the implementation of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects, including:

- Lessons-learned as projects are implemented;
- Options for providing technical assistance;
- Procedures for measurement/quantification, monitoring, reporting, and verifying GHG benefits;
- Options for tracing climate-smart commodities through the supply chain;
- Mechanisms for reducing costs of implementation;
- A forum for discussion and learning regarding approaches to CSAF program implementation (including but not limited to deployment; measurement/quantification, monitoring, reporting, tracking, and verification of associated greenhouse gas benefits and marketing of climate-smart commodities).
- Synthesis of outcomes and successes; and
- Opportunities for USDA and others to inform future approaches to generating new and expanded markets for climate-smart commodities.

The Partnerships Network topics to be discussed will cover at minimum the areas above and will evolve with USDA's ongoing project data analysis efforts **and** with input from the project participants on the kinds of sessions that will be most helpful to them in building the diverse climate-smart markets associated with their projects.

A live poll was delivered to attendees to evaluate their priorities for network engagement.

Panel: Producer and landowner enrollment

Moderator: Katina Hanson, Acting Senior Advisor for Climate Smart Commodities, FPAC, USDA

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities

- Kelly Wilson, Associate Director, Center for Regenerative Agriculture, University of Missouri
- Andrew Currie, Climate Smart Program Director, Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture
- Will Maples, Assistant Professor, Mississippi State University
- Julius Pasay, Executive Director, The Climate Trust (Project Lead Org: Oregon Climate Trust)

Panelists discussed their strategies for producer engagement. These ranged from setting up producer listening sessions to leveraging the networks of trusted advisors to initiating peer-to-peer learning networks. Several of the panelists' projects had planned or existing websites to attract interest. They closed by discussing their timelines for enrollment.

Small group discussion: Producer engagement by region

In small groups roughly organized by region, attendees discussed their overall strategies for producer engagement, how they planned to enroll underserved producers, build trust, and overcome skepticism, and on what timeline they are anticipating enrollment to take place. Additionally, they discussed what they hoped to learn from others in the Partnerships Network and where they see challenges emerging.

Adjourn

Ms. Hanson thanked attendees for their time and thought and adjourned the meeting.