

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

Funding Pool 2 Meeting | September 20 – 21, 2023

USDA | 805 Pennsylvania Ave, Kansas City, Missouri 64105

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 reflected on the policy path that had led to Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, and he emphasized the role of the land sector, including small and underserved producers, in contributing towards net zero by 2050.

Katina Hanson (Acting Senior Advisor for Climate-Smart Commodities, USDA FPAC) introduced the USDA team. She provided updates on the status of grant allocations and expressed excitement at the diversity of projects represented. Mindy Selman (Senior Analyst, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, Office of the Chief Economist, USDA) presented on the importance of learning from the Partnerships Network. Data collection and analysis will provide valuable information on project benefits, how practices differ across crops and between geographies, and the value of estimates compared to on-site measurement, among other questions. She invited participants to let USDA know what Network information would be useful for them. 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:

- Alice Melendez, Climate Smart Project Lead, Mount Folly Enterprises, Inc.
- Elzadia Washington, Program Director, National Black Growers Council
- Joe Tomandl, Executive Director, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
- Katie Woodrow, Watershed Director & Climate Smart Project Mgr., Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance

Panelists represented projects focused on row crops, cover crops, and dairy operations. The project representatives discussed a variety of marketing strategies including working with large supply chain businesses to secure a premium, enabling farmers to sell a larger diversity of products close to home, and establishing labels for climate-smart products.

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

Moderator:

- Bidisha Bhattacharyya, Senior Advisor, Climate and Conservation, FPAC, USDA

Panelists:

- Venkatesh Balan, Associate Professor, University of Houston (Project lead: Prairie View A&M University)
- Artees Vannett, Program Manager, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska
- Lisa Woodke, Sustainability Director, Star of the West Milling Co.
- Ann Staiger, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University Kingsville

Panelists represented projects focusing on both cropping and livestock systems, and they discussed aspects of MMRV systems in use in their projects. Discussion ranged from the sensors, models, and methods they use to the certification programs they are trying to fulfill.

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.

Presentation: COMET tools overview

Presenters:

- Mindy Selman, Senior Analyst, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, OCE, USDA
- Adam Chambers, Environmental Markets Specialist, NRCS USDA

Mindy and Adam 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.

DAY 2

Debrief of Day 1

Choose-your-own tabletop discussion

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

1. Grower contracts and incentives
2. Project management, budgeting, and collaboration
3. Reporting and data sharing

Small group discussion was followed by a full group report-out of what was discussed, delivered by a representative from each group.

Presentation: Engaging your project partners in the Partnerships Network

Presenters:

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

USDA representatives and members of the Lindahl-Reed Partnerships Network data analysis and learning contract team presented on how the purpose of the 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 described 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

Moderators:

- Gloria Montaño Green, Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, USDA
- Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, Senior Advisor for Racial Equity, USDA Office of the Secretary

Panelists:

- Elzadia Washington, Program Director, National Black Growers Council
- Rafael Almeida, Assistant Professor, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
- Laura Tessieri, Executive Director, North Jersey Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)
- Nana Tian, Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas at Monticello

Panelists represented projects focusing on engaging small landowners, black farmers, Hispanic farmers, and others from underrepresented communities. They discussed their strategies for producer engagement, including the importance of in-person outreach, preexisting trusted partners, farmer peer networks, and local leadership. The moderators reflected on how the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is a different kind of funding opportunity since it is underpinned with a requirement to engage with small and underserved producers in all projects, increasing the opportunity to improve equitable outcomes.

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.