

URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PUBLIC MEETING

NOVEMBER 29, 2023 | 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM ET

ZOOM FOR GOVERNMENT

MEETING MINUTES

The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (UAIPAC) is established by section 12302 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill), Public Law 115-334, 7 U.S.C. § 6923(b)(1), to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor, and other emerging agriculture production practices; and other aspects of the implementation of that section of the Farm Bill. This Federal advisory committee operates in compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, as amended.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the UAIPAC was convened for its seventh public meeting on November 29, 2023, from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. The meeting was open to the public and held fully virtually via Zoom webinar.

A [Federal Register notice](#) was published on October 30, 2023, providing general information and public participation details for the meeting. Secondary notices were also sent out to the public directly by the agency.

Committee web page: <https://www.usda.gov/partnerships/federal-advisory-committee-urban-ag>

General inquiries: UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov

ACRONYMS

- **DFO** – Designated Federal Officer
- **FSA** – Farm Service Agency
- **NRCS** – Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **OUAIP** – Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production
- **UAIPAC** – Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee
- **USDA** – United States Department of Agriculture

MEETING AGENDA

Item #	Topic
1.	Welcome & Attendance
2.	Opening Remarks
3.	Addressing Public Comments
4.	Deliberation/Voting
5.	Closing Remarks

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Committee Members			
Name	Represented Industry	Present	Attendance Type
Allison Papp	Financial Entity	✓	Virtual
Angie Mason (Chairperson)	Related Experience	✓	Virtual
Bobby L. Wilson	Urban Production	✓	Virtual
Carl P. Wallace	Non-Profit	✓	Virtual
Jerry Ann Hebron	Urban Production	✓	Virtual
John Erwin	Higher Education	✓	Virtual
John Lebeaux	Business/Economic Development	✓	Virtual
Kaben Smallwood	Innovative Production	✓	Virtual
Sally Brown	Higher Education	☒	
Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson)	Related Experience	✓	Virtual
Viraj Puri	Innovative Production	✓	Virtual
Zachari Curtis	Food Supply Chain	✓	Virtual

USDA Staff	
Name	Position/Title
Terry Cosby	Chief of Natural Resources Conservation Service
Brian Guse	Director/Designated Federal Officer
Markus Holliday	Coordinator

The general public attendance list can be found [here](#).

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public comment period was open from October 30, 2023 to December 13, 2023. Written comments can be viewed here: <https://www.regulations.gov/document/NRCS-2023-0019-0002/comment>. Comments are reviewed and may be considered for further discussion at a future public meeting. Oral comments were not accepted for this meeting.

MEETING MINUTES

Welcome and Attendance

Markus Holliday (Coordinator) welcomed and thanked everyone for joining. He also took attendance of committee members to ensure the meeting had a quorum after introducing presenters who provided opening remarks.

Opening Remarks

Terry Cosby (Chief) congratulated the committee members for the work completed throughout the year and acknowledged the public's efforts for joining and continuing to participate in the public meeting proceedings.

Brian Guse (DFO) called the meeting to order and proceeded to go over the meeting agenda and provide an overview of the purpose and priorities of the UAIPAC.

Addressing Public Comments

Angie Mason (Chair) and **Tara Chadwick (Co-Chair)** acknowledged and responded to written comments provided by the public from the last public meeting in August 2023.

Deliberation/Voting

Brian Guse (DFO) provided an overview of deliberation and voting ground rules.

Note: See slides in the Zoom [meeting recording](#) for full recommendations.

Proposed Recommendation #1: Access to Technical Assistance

To increase producers' access to technical assistance and reduce barriers to USDA program participation, we recommend that USDA dedicate skilled staff to support urban agriculture and innovative producer positions in each state either in the USDA Urban Service Center, USDA staff office, or in ad Extension Program at a state land grand university.

- a. USDA dedicated and skilled staff to provide technical assistance to better prepare urban farmers and innovative producers to write grant applications, create business plans, create marketing plans, etc.
- b. USDA dedicated and skilled staff to provide technical assistance on growing food in urban locations (soil testing, soil remediation, alternate growing practices (controlled environment farming, hydroponics, aquaponics, raised beds, etc.)
- c. Circuit Rider A mobile office/travel based/farm site-based approach encouraged with specialists in the field, not office based. Circuit Riders' The primary function of USDA staff would be to principally provide technical assistance at individual urban farms and innovative production sites and not in USDA office, both responding to particular inquiries and requests made by producers, and also to routinely and regularly conduct check in visits with producers at their farms.

Angie Mason (Chairperson) provided background information to bring everyone up to date on the status of the proposed recommendation as presented during the last meeting in August 2023 and opened it back up for deliberation.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) suggested a change to remove the word "positions" and add the letter s at the end of the word "producer".

John Erwin (Member) moved the proposed recommendation to a vote as recommended by Tara Chadwick. Multiple other members seconded the motion.

FINAL RESULT:

With no additional comments from other members the recommendation was moved to a vote and passed by simple majority.

Proposed Recommendation #2: Urban Soil Health and Safety

In cooperation with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), develop clear recommendations and guidance for assuring urban soil health and safety.

- a. There are multiple and often contradictory guidance values for ‘safe’ levels of contaminants in urban soils. The majority of these do not include options to improve soils to make them safe. Rather than coming up with a new set of limits for select contaminants in urban soils, we encourage the USDA to come out with clear guidance on how to improve urban soils and how to grow food safely in urban soils.
- b. Use of regulated composts and biosolids based soil amendments has been shown repeatedly in the scientific literature to improve soil health and safety. The USDA should incentivize municipalities to provide high quality residuals-based soil amendments {food yard compost and biosolid products (such as Bloom and Tagro) that has been tested and regulated to be safe} to urban gardeners and growers. This can be accompanied by efforts on how to spread compost, test soil, and how to plant a garden.
- c. Urban residuals including cardboard and wood waste can be repurposed to cover derelict soils and provide a barrier to contaminants in soils. These can be used for pathways in parks and gardens. USDA should provide guidance on this practice and offer grants, incentives and opportunities to municipalities to do this on a significant scale.
- d. Gardening in raised beds is an excellent tool for urban growers to reduce potential exposure to contaminants and to grow in higher quality soils. USDA should provide guidance, grants, teaching and demonstration sites on how to build and grow in raised beds including identifying cost - effective composts and soils for use in the beds
- e. USDA offices should build demonstration gardens on vacant or disturbed sites that incorporate use of regulated residuals-based amendments, covered walkways and raised beds as outlined in the above recommendations. The offices should partner with

municipalities to identify suitable properties, recycled materials and amendments for this effort. These sites should also serve as centers for accepting compost feedstocks and distributing finished composts.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) presented the recommendation on behalf of the original author Sally Brown, who was not in attendance.

John Erwin (Member) questioned and suggested an amendment to the last sentence of sub-bullet a to clarify the intent for growing crops. John also voiced his agreement with the proposed recommendation and added that it will help producers immensely.

Kaben Smallwood (Member) suggested an amendment to remove the company names from the final version of the recommendation.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson), John Erwin (Member), and Viraj Puri (Member) all agreed with the suggested amendment to remove the company names.

Allison Paap (Member) requested clarification to sub-bullet b for the type of incentives USDA should provide.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) agreed that Allison Paap brought up a good point and asked John Erwin if he could weigh in.

John Erwin (Member) responded by suggesting an amendment to replace the word “incentivize” with “encourage”.

Allison Paap (Member) voiced her concerns about the specific and actionable response that is being recommended in sub-bullet b.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) responded to provide an example of composting usage at a botanical garden in Miami, FL.

Allison Paap (Member) questioned if the recommendation was more geared towards information sharing or finding a way to facilitate activities.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) and John Erwin (Member) responded that the intention is to achieve both outcomes for information sharing and facilitating composting. John also provided a different composting example used in Minnesota.

Angie Mason (Chairperson) mentioned that she would like to hear from experts in the field and see more information about what constitutes biosolids and what some of the scientific literature

is on the state of biosolids due to personal concerns. She also mentioned that she supports the recommendation without sub-bullet b.

Kaben Smallwood (Member) made a motion to correct the title of the slide referencing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to replace “Service” with “Agency, amend sub-bullet a to clarify the safe growing of crops and safe levels of containments for crops and strike sub-bullet b to vote on the proposed recommendation.

FINAL RESULT:

With no additional comments from other members the recommendation was moved to a vote and passed by simple majority.

Proposed Recommendation #3: Scholarship and Education Support

Support more students in pursuing careers in agriculture by publicizing USDA scholarships and eliminating the standardized test score and GPA requirements for USDA scholarships. Instead, we recommend USDA to consider a student’s overall academic performance, extracurricular activities, community involvement, agricultural internships, letters of recommendation, personal essays and any additional evidence of their commitment to and interest in agriculture related fields.

Angie Mason (Member) read the recommendation on the screen for Bobby Wilson, who authored the recommendation and did not have access to the shared screen since he joined by phone.

Bobby Wilson (Member) suggested, in addition to USDA, to add 1890 scholars and 1890 land-grant universities as the entities that should consider the proposed recommendation. He also provided additional background information and statistics regarding 1890 programs and shared his personal experience dealing with 1890 representatives and students enrolled at certain Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

John Erwin (Member) questioned if the proposed recommendation was left as-is, if it would increase access to USDA scholarships at all colleges and universities versus only those with only 1890 programs.

Bobby Wilson (Member) responded to point out the margin between 1890 and 1862 programs and the challenges being faced by 1890 programs due to the large gap between the two.

Angie Mason (Chairperson) posed a question to Bobby Wilson to clarify his requested suggestion to include and specify 1890 land-grant institutions for scholarship and education support in the proposed recommendation.

Bobby Wilson (Member) responded and confirmed that he strongly suggests the amendment.

Allison Paap (Member) posed a question asking how the scholarship decisions are made currently.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) and **Angie Mason (Chairperson)** responded with information provided by USDA to the Committee in a previous closed/administrative meeting.

Bobby Wilson (Member) shared additional remarks regarding his personal experience and discussions with university personnel at HBCU's.

John Lebeaux (Member) provided a recap of the deliberation between members and posed a suggestion to proceed with Bobby Wilson's suggestion to include 1890 land-grant institutions but to also add language to clarify the proposed recommendation is not exclusive to those institutions.

Carl Wallace (Member) responded that he agreed with John Lebeaux's added suggestion and made a follow-up suggestion for the proposed recommendation language to read as publicizing 1890 land-grant and USDA scholarships to be more inclusive.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) responded in favor of the suggested amendments and also shared her thoughts of concern that the proposed recommendation language is not fully accomplishing the overall intent to be inclusive of scholarship and education support to all students that are interested while also targeting those who are historically underserved.

Angie Mason (Chairperson) posed a suggestion to postpone the recommendation in the interest of feedback provided from multiple members.

John Erwin (Member) shared background information regarding 1890 and 1862 land-grant institutions to point out a few key differences between the two.

Bobby Wilson (Member) shared sentiments toward the lack of funding and other disparities between 1890 land-grant institutions and other non-land-grant institutions to reiterate his views and intent to increase opportunities for students who are underrepresented.

Tara Chadwick (Co-chairperson) posed a suggestion for the Committee to consider a new separate recommendation to present at the next public meeting that would address the funding disparity brought up by Bobby Wilson and John Erwin. She also motioned to bring the proposed recommendation to a vote with the amendment to include 1890 land-grant institutions in the proposed recommendation.

Angie Mason (Member) pointed out a reminder that while the Committee can request additional funding, it is a congressional decision that cannot be forced and a recommendation to do so may not be particularly useful. She also reiterated her original suggestion to postpone the recommendation to give the Committee additional time to ensure it addresses the issues brought up during deliberation.

John Erwin (Member) responded that he agreed with Tara Chadwick and added that the proposed recommendation as-is did accomplish the intent to be inclusive and improves access to all students. He also seconded the motion to move the proposed recommendation to a vote.

Angie Mason (Member) pointed out the difference between the amendment proposed by Bobby Wilson and John Erwin and asked for clarification to decide how the amendment would be made.

Tara Chadwick (Member) clarified the amendment to insert “1890 and other” between publicizing and USDA on the first line of the proposed recommendation.

FINAL RESULT:

With no additional comments from other members, the recommendation was moved to a vote and passed by simple majority.

Proposed Recommendation #4: Federal Crop and Growing Structure Insurance Program – Expansion of the Covered Causes of Loss and Crops to Benefit Urban and Innovative Producers

- a. USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) amend crop policies to include causes of loss that are relevant to urban, innovative and controlled environment agriculture (CEA) producers, including but not limited to, structural failures caused by extreme weather events, critical infrastructure failures, disease and pest infestations.

- b. USDA should support the expansion of crops covered by insurance to crops more commonly used in urban, innovative and CEA production, including fruiting crops, specialty crops, and culturally significant crops. As part of the policy expansion, it will be important to ensure that amended crop policies do not cover losses due to poor operating practices by urban, innovative and CEA producers.
- c. USDA should support development of insurance products to cover growing structures for urban, innovative and CEA producers including but not limited to growing towers, high tunnels, hoop houses, greenhouses, hydroponic systems, aquaponics, etc.

Viraj Puri (Member) presented the recommendation and provided background information.

Kaben Smallwood (Member) requested an amendment to expand geographic barriers on the current insurance offering and to add aquaponics systems to sub-bullet c.

Viraj Puri (Member) mentioned a previous USDA press release that announced a new pilot program only offered in select counties of 25 states and the hope to have it expanded. He also pointed out the scenarios covered in the pilot program are limited to crops loss by disease only and does not cover other more common failures to critical infrastructure that lead to crop loss.

Viraj Puri (Member) requested an additional amendment to add “other innovative production systems” to be vaguer. He also offered to propose a new recommendation to provide guidance on the current pilot program to not only grow geographically but also for covered losses.

Viraj Puri (Member) suggested to amend sub-bullet c to replace “such as” with “including but not limited to”. He also mentioned that he supports proposing a new recommendation that builds on the current pilot program for crop insurance.

Kaben Smallwood (Member) made a motion to move the proposed recommendation to a vote with the amendments previously mentioned for sub-bullet c.

Allison Paap (Member) requested more information on how the Committee would define poor operating practices as mentioned in sub-bullet b.

Viraj Puri (Member) mentioned that he did consult with the USDA Risk Management Agency about this concern and the intent was to ensure there was no fraud or rewards for bad behavior.

Allison Paap (Member) suggested an amendment to add “as determined by RMA” to the end of the last sentence in sub-bullet b to provide more clarity as a standard practice.

Viraj Puri (Member) requested an amendment to sub-bullet b to replace the word “poor” with “negligent”.

Carl Wallace (Member) requested an amendment to replace the words “should” with “will” and made a motion to vote.

Tara Chadwick (Co-Chairperson) responded to clarify the Committee was advised to refrain from using such verbiage since the Committee is providing recommendations, not demands.

Viraj Puri (Member) seconded the motion to vote.

FINAL RESULT: With no additional comments from other members the recommendation was moved to a vote and passed by simple majority.

Proposed Recommendation #5: 1890 Land-Grant Universities – Invest in Research, Extension and Education in Urban and Innovative Production

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provide funding to 1890 Land-grant Universities for updated curriculum design, materials development, faculty development, student recruitment and retention and Extension program development support for urban, innovative and CEA agricultural production.

Note: Recommendation 5 was shown on the screen but not deliberated due to running out of time.

Closing Remarks

Brian Guse (DFO) thanked the committee members and the public for their participation. He also provided additional instructions on how the public can provide formal written comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:00 P.M ET.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

/s/

Brian Guse

Designated Federal Officer, Urban
Agriculture and Innovative Production
Advisory Committee

/s/

Angie Mason

Chairperson, Urban Agriculture and
Innovative Production Advisory Committee