

Program Team: Vegetable December 12 and 13, 2023

This meeting was held in-person at the USDA ARS facility in Salinas, CA.

I. Meeting Objectives

1. To network with colleagues that work on vegetables. Introduce and welcome new vegetable team members so that we all know our colleagues and where they are located.
2. Interact with USDA ARS personnel in Salinas. They have a brand new facility, new scientists who are primarily working on vegetable breeding and pest management.
3. Discuss items of common interest such as labor shortages, pest management issues like lettuce and tomato diseases, nutrient and water quality issues, high production costs, and ANR vegetable personnel needs.
4. Learn about research our colleagues are doing in the research updates.

II. Workgroups engaged: we invited the Pest Management PT but they declined

III. Primary meeting outcomes

1. Nine new ANR personnel were introduced, and seven USDA ARS scientists attended and participated in the discussions.
2. We reviewed pest management, water and nutrient issues, and labor shortage issues.
3. Personnel from Gabe Youtsey's VINE initiative presented on activities and opportunities that they offer.
4. We presented the Oscar Lorentz award to CE Specialist Jeff Mitchell.
5. The PT identified several vegetable extension publications that need to be published. Most are finished but are being held up in publications. Steve will follow up on this.
6. We reviewed the recent cost and return studies and farm labor availability trends.
7. We reviewed our personnel priorities for the current call for Advisor and Specialist positions. Several County Directors were present at the meeting and we listened to their insights.
8. Brenna Aegerter has agreed to be the new Vegetable Program Team Leader. Steve Fennimore will provide assistance to Brenna as needed until he retires.

IV. Next steps

1. Try to meet in person in SJV, Santa Maria, Ventura or Imperial Valley to focus on key issues in those districts.
2. Consider a joint proposal to fund research in a vegetable related topic such as labor use efficiency, or alternatives to soil fumigation.

3. Most ANR personnel who work on vegetables are spread thin and very much in demand. We need more people particularly in the area of nutrient regulation mitigation, developing strategies to address the cadmium crisis in leafy greens, labor use efficiency and food safety.

V. How the PT activities fit with the larger SI picture.

Vegetable PT activities are relevant to EIPD and SFS. There are so many relevant issues: improved labor efficiency is necessary for long-term sustainability of the industry, challenges in the area of pest management due to lack of hand weeding labor, cancellation or restriction of old pesticides, need for improved water use efficiency and increasing salinity to name a few.

We see the Vegetable PT as consistent with these Focal areas:

All of the EIPD and SFS focal areas are relevant to the vegetable PT. Food safety is also a huge issue.

And fits with these Grand Challenges:

Pursuing new technologies such as robotic weeders and improved labor use efficiency. Food safety and high production costs. Climate change, water quality and quantity.

VI. Optional: Do you have “Hot Button” items. These items that might warrant a trending [Trending](#) article – help educate the broader public on key issues.

- a. Labor shortages and need for harvest mechanization

VII. What are 1-3 impact stories from PT group members that could be highlighted with Strat com? Note the theme & contact(s)

- a. Impact of Crop Manage on Water use efficiency throughout California: Mike Cahn