



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

Initial Discussion Session | April 27, 2023

Zoom video conference

Discussion Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Following a livestreamed kickoff of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Learning Network (Partnerships Network) by the Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas Vilsack, and moderated panel of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities' participants, the USDA Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Mission Area and the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE) hosted a Partnerships Network session with grant recipients and other partners in the effort. Sarah Alexander (Keystone Policy Center) welcomed participants, reviewed guidelines and introduced Keystone, which is joining Lindahl-Reed in helping USDA to facilitate the Partnerships Network. She also introduced Katina Hanson (USDA), Acting Senior Advisor for Climate-Smart Commodities, FPAC, and Bill Hohenstein (USDA), Director, Office of Energy and Environmental Policy (OEEP), OCE as co-leadership of the Partnerships Network. The USDA Climate-Smart Commodities team, including the National Program Officers, were also introduced.

Partnerships Network Roles and Expectations

Ms. Hanson and Mr. Hohenstein presented roles and expectations for the Partnerships Network and goals for the Climate-Smart Commodities effort. Virginia Green (USDA), FPAC Acting Deputy Director for Climate-Smart Commodities, presented administrative topics, including the process for MMRV (measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification) that would be required of Climate-Smart Commodities projects. Ms. Green and other USDA staff responded to questions that came in.

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).

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- 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.

Small Group Discussion #1

Participants broke into groups of 8-10, introduced their projects and reviewed what they most hoped to learn from one another through the Partnerships Network.

Polling and Q&A

Participants were polled on what they were most excited about for the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities effort and what they most hoped to learn from others in the Partnerships Network. Key themes and representative comments from the discussion included excitement about marketing climate-smart commodities, delivering incentives to farmers, sharing successes and challenges with others in the Partnerships Network, improving ecological outcomes, analyzing data to better understand complex agricultural systems, and developing new partnerships across practices and disciplines.

Participants also expressed a desire to learn from others how to better manage MMRV requirements credibly and efficiently, how to better initiate markets for climate-smart commodities, how to better address producer hesitancy and lower barriers to practice adoption, how other projects are addressing challenges, how to work collaboratively across projects, and how to manage projects more effectively to reach scale. USDA staff also responded to questions from participants.

Small Group Discussion #2

Participants broke into groups of 8-10, introduced their projects, and discussed what they saw as the biggest challenges to get started with their Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects, including with producer enrollment, and potential ways to overcome these challenges.

Polling and Q&A

Participants were then polled on the biggest themes from their conversations. Key themes and representative comments from discussion included the heavy data lift of MMRV requirements, producer enrollment hurdles, the complexity of scaling up projects quickly, the staggered timing of grower payments and grant reimbursements, and the potential need to modify grant agreements after execution.

Two additional polling questions asked when projects anticipated beginning enrollment with producers and if they had been approached by or were working with buyers for climate-smart commodities. Results indicated that while most projects intended to begin enrollment with producers in the summer and fall of 2023, many are planning for enrollment beginning in winter or later. Approximately 50% more

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respondents indicated that they had been approached by or are working with buyers than indicated that they were not. USDA staff also responded to questions from participants.

Next Steps

Kathryn Zook (USDA), Deputy Director for Climate Change and Environmental Markets, OEEP, OCE, with facilitation assistance from Keystone, reviewed the timeline of Partnerships Network meetings, presenting details about the June meeting with the first funding pool and the dates for the September meeting of the second funding pool. Ms. Zook added that an online space for the Partnerships Network to connect and share information is being considered.

Adjourn

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