Californians for Pesticide Reform and Pesticide Action & Agroecology Network (Mayra Sanchez)

What types of SPM projects should DPR fund? Some ideas for projects to focus on:

- Active ingredients or products on DPR's Continuous Evaluation and Monitoring table
- Emerging pest threats
- Pest prevention
- Pest management coordination between different landscapes, neighbors, and communities

Note: All projects should have an SPM focus.

a. Projects that use practices that effectively prevent pest problems rather than prophylactic use of chemical inputs. The reduction of chemical inputs generally also has Environmental Protections as well as Human Health & Social Equity benefits, furthermore, it has economic benefits as growers do not depend on chemical inputs. A study analyzing 946 non-organic arable commercial farms across France found no conflict between low pesticide use and high productivity and profitability in 77% of the farms evaluated in their national network.

b. Projects that reduce entirely the use of "priority pesticides". While "priority pesticides" still need to be defined, to avoid further delays, we propose moving forward with the Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment's (OEHHA) list, which has prioritized 124 pesticides that are moderate or highly hazardous and also highly volatile, and those pesticides identified under Prop 65 as known to cause cancer or reproductive harm, or with the Highly Hazardous Pesticides List identified by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (https://www.fao.org/pest-and-pesticide-management/pesticide-risk-reduction/reducing-global-risk-from-hhp/hhps/en/).

b1. To eliminate the use of these pesticides, it would be important to focus efforts on natural biological control and pest prevention by eliminating pest-conducive conditions usually through a combination of cultural practices. We don't want to focus on chemical substitutes. (For a list of these practices, please see Babin, N., Tan, J., Church, S. P., & Radulski, B. (2025). Systemic change or input substitution? The impact of the Healthy Soils Program on agroecological transitions within California food systems. Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 49(10), 1785–1828. https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2025.2472770)

c. Projects that coordinate different neighbors and communities in order to create geographically continuous, regionally coherent pest management strategies. Ecological benefits are stronger across extended landscapes, rather than fragmented or discontinued patches. This approach is consistent with concepts discussed in the Pest Management Advisory Committee (PMAC) proposals and in Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS).

d. Projects that provide habitat that supports beneficial insects and birds, and other wildlife that support SPM and healthy agricultural ecosystems.

e. Projects that help restore natural ecosystems, such as repairing riparian buffers and wetlands, establishing native plantings and hedgerows, create native pollinator habitat, increase water infiltration and groundwater recharge, improving groundwater quality.

What are priority topics, communities, regions, etc., to fund?

Priority criteria should include:

a. Projects that can deliver multiple benefits for community health, environmental quality, and long-term agricultural sustainability.

b. Regions that should be prioritized include those where human and ecological communities have experienced the greatest combined burden from intensive agricultural pesticide use and cumulative pesticide exposure, and other social and environmental stressors. This may include nearby residents, farmworkers, waterways, and sensitive ecosystems.

b1. Communities that should be focused on are those that have been most impacted by pesticide exposure. CalEnviroScreen 5.0 can be a tool to help identify these communities, and larger regions.

b2. CalEnviroScreen 5.0 could be used to identify priority human communities and larger geographic areas with high cumulative pollution and social vulnerability burdens. This analysis should be combined with agricultural pesticide-use data, water-quality information, public-health indicators, and local knowledge to identify locations where funding can have the greatest impact.

b3. Initial attention could focus on the Central Coast and Central Valley, including the San Joaquin Valley, where

intensive agricultural pesticide use, environmental vulnerability, and community exposure may overlap.
b4. Regions where pesticide use poses substantial risks to surface water, groundwater, pollinators, wildlife, and other beneficial species such as barn owls.
c. Opportunities to reduce pesticide reliance while improving soil health, induced resistance and crop resilience, and farm viability.
d. Projects that can demonstrate scalable solutions and support adoption across similar crops, regions, or grower communities.

Should DPR fund fewer large-scale projects or several small-scale projects?
DPR should prioritize funding several coordinated small-scale projects that collectively build bioregional connectivity, rather than concentrating limited resources in a small number of large-scale projects. Seeding more projects gives us the opportunity to change the culture. This approach would not only reach more growers, but it would also better support small and mid-sized farmers, who often have fewer financial, technical, and staffing resources to compete for grants or implement major projects on their own. In this manner, supporting small and mid-sized growers, which have been increasingly disappearing over the last decades, is also a way to practice the SPM pillar of Social Equity. Such projects can also support farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange networks.

Should DPR fund long-term or short-term projects?
DPR should prioritize long-term projects, with a minimum duration of three years. Meaningful shifts in pest management practices require time: growers need opportunities to test approaches under real-world conditions, learn from setbacks, and refine their practices. A three-year minimum would allow projects to generate stronger evidence on pesticide-use reductions, crop performance, labor and cost considerations, environmental outcomes, and grower adoption. Funding projects for at least three years would better position DPR to measure meaningful outcomes, identify what works across different regions and crops, and invest public resources in lasting, scalable improvements.

What factors should DPR consider and evaluate when they review project proposals?
a. Number of growers participating.
b. Public health and environmental benefits.
c. Reduction in pesticide use.
d. Implementation of multiple complementary healthy soils practices. Among these practices are compost application, cover crop, hedgerow planting, reduced and no-til, mulching, riparian forest buffer, among others (Please see Babin, N., Tan, J., Church, S. P., & Radulski, B. (2025). Systemic change or input substitution? The impact of the Healthy Soils Program on agroecological transitions within California food systems. Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, 49(10), 1785–1828. https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2025.2472770)
f. Strength of partnerships in order to carry out the project.
g. Long-term and feasibility design

In addition, DPR should facilitate knowledge sharing and accountability: require grantees to share their projects, results, and lessons learned—in this manner, more growers can adopt SPM.

How can DPR turn information we gathered on third-party food certifications with IPM requirements into a useful resource without endorsing any particular certification or creating a new certification?
DPR could publish the list of third-party food certifications it reviewed and mark whether they include pesticide prohibitions or not, as well as with other components from the SPM pillars.

(In addition, it is important for DPR to clarify how the list of 30 food certifications was selected, and more discussion may be needed in regards to whether the list must be expanded or refined).

If you could have one tool or resource to activate markets for produce grown using SPM, what would you want that tool or resource to do?

First of all, there needs to be a clear definition of what constitutes verifiable SPM compliance. This definition could be codified into a bill. DPR should provide growers, distributors, and food aggregators with clear, practical guidelines for demonstrating
compliance while also helping food buyers identify and purchase produce from SPM-compliant growers.

A critical tool to activate markets for SPM-grown produce could be procurement policies for state agencies. California state-owned or state-run agencies represent a significant source of food demand and should lead by example by purchasing food produced in alignment with the practices the state is working to promote. In order to activate SPM-relevant markets, The Department of General Services (DGS) and other public buyers must include factors beyond lowest bid in procurement policies. SB 1058 (2026) establishes procurement criteria that do not require lowest bid and offer flexibility for school contracting.

California already has an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program that helps state agencies incorporate environmental criteria into purchasing decisions. A similar model could be applied to food procurement guidance and buyer training. The state should include an incentive component—such multi-year contracts, payments or promise of purchase made in advance.

DPR presented its list of 30 certifications that addressed SPM to some extent. It is unclear how the list A subset of that list that specifically addressed pesticide reduction was presented to DPR in 2025. (Please see the letter Re: Suggested Approach to Identify and Verify the SPM-compliant Food Supply Chain in California sent to Sapna Thottathil from the Sustainable Pest Management: Procurement Working Group, organized by PANNA on September 5, 2025 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EQxH82Naw3YyHtgRHWKj8r9QImSUyFQFcWpVBCifZE8/edit?tab=t.0). These lists could be used to develop SPM purchasing guidelines.

What would make an SPM procurement resource useful enough that it would be used to make business decisions?
Create a registry of SPM-compliant growers with easy access for buyers. At the same time, there should be incentives for growers such as price premiums, preferable access to state contracts, access to technical assistance, tools or inputs needed for the implementation of SPM practices, etc.

Which partnerships should DPR engage to activate markets for SPM?
- California Department of General Services
- University of California-system, including Cooperative Extension
- California State University
- Grower Associations
- Regional Food Hubs
- Large commercial food retailers interested in appealing to customers and investors concerned about reducing pesticide use and protecting workers, communities and the environment from exposures to hazardous pesticides.