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March 1, 2011

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The Honorable Karen Ross  
California Department of Food and Agriculture  
1220 N Street, Room 400  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Ross:

Enclosed, please find a white paper entitled, "Agricultural Conservation and Efficiency" approved by the California State Board of Food and Agriculture on February 23, 2011. This white paper reinforces the water recommendations made within the "California Agricultural Vision: Strategies for Sustainability" report and identifies proactive steps to encourage optimal use of existing water and land resources.

Under our statutory authority to advise the governor and the secretary of food and agriculture on issues that affect the agricultural industry, we respectfully request that you consider the enclosed white paper.

The California State Board of Food and Agriculture is prepared to assist the department in implementing these recommendations.

Best regards,

Craig McNamara  
President

cc: The Honorable Jerry Brown, Governor of California



## White Paper

### Agricultural Conservation and Efficiency Focus: South of the Delta

#### California State Board of Food and Agriculture Subcommittee on Water

February 23, 2011

The California State Board of Food and Agriculture conducted a variety of forums through its 2030 Ag Vision Process and by directly hearing from stakeholders during two recent meetings, in Sacramento and in Irvine, California, in order to develop a white paper on water that the California State Board of Food and Agriculture hereby submits to the secretary of food and agriculture and the governor. The state board is specifically focusing on the topic of water use efficiency.

#### Findings:

Through the 2030 Ag Vision Process and subsequent meetings held by the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, the board is recommending immediate actions in the adoption of the 2030 Ag Vision report:

#### Immediate Actions Endorsed by the California State Board of Food and Agriculture

*3A The State Board should charge its existing water task force to document on-going efforts by agricultural producers and processors to use water more efficiently; identify opportunities to expand the most significant of these efforts and to facilitate the short-term, voluntary transfer of water from areas of plenty to areas of deficit during periods of drought while maintaining existing water rights; calculate the potential statewide and regional savings in water use that could be devoted to other agricultural and environmental purposes; and identify obstacles to increasing most efficient use of water by agriculture; and prescribe programs, policies and practices to overcome these obstacles.*

*3B Private sector agricultural institutions and state agencies should promote public education to broaden support for a statewide bond measure or other methods of financing needed improvements in the water storage and conveyance system serving California agriculture.*

#### Longer-Term Action Proposed by Stakeholders

*3C The State Legislature should pass a California Agricultural Land and Natural Resources Policy Act that would clearly articulate that it is the policy of the state to support and maintain California agriculture as an essential part of the state's economy and environment by assuring that there are sufficient supplies of land, water and other natural resources to sustain the necessary levels of food production and ecosystem services.*

Based upon the state board's meeting on September 22, 2010, and a roundtable held in partnership with the Southern California Water Committee on November 30, 2010 in Irvine, California, the board urges the following specific actions to implement actions endorsed by the board in the 2030 Ag Vision Document:

**Re-Define Efficiency as Optimal Use of Existing Water Systems and Land Resources:  
*No Regrets Regulatory Reform***

The timelines required to implement solutions in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Bay-Delta ensuring stewardship obligations and reliable water deliveries demand that state, federal, regional and local water agencies cooperate to optimize the efficiency of water delivery, storage and technological resources that exist today. This means taking timely steps to reform the regulatory structure and taking other executive level actions including:

1. **WATER RIGHTS:** Provide farmers certainty about the integrity of their water rights under existing laws in order to encourage water use efficiency without perpetuating common fears outlined in the Department of Water Resources 2009 Water Plan Update that efficiency compromises the ability to rely on saved supplies. This includes encouragement of recycled water use in ways that makes groundwater resources available for other uses and/or to aid during periods of drought. **Recommended Mechanism:** Active consultation with the State Water Resources Control Board, Delta Stewardship Council, and Department of Water Resources creating assurances that water rights in cases where farmers have clearly improved farm water efficiencies resulting in conserved water will be respected under appropriate circumstances where the water conserved is stored.
2. **WATER EXCHANGES:** Encourage exchanges of water between areas of the state that have surplus supplies, and those with the surface and/or underground capacity to store those supplies for later return through firm State Water Project and/or CVP supplies. **Recommended Mechanism:** Active consultation with the State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Fish and Game, about creating a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Bureau of Reclamation to ensure that exchanged supplies can move through appropriate water systems in a timely way.
3. **KEEP AG LAND VIABLE:** Retain water for agricultural activities by changing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that currently requires an environmental review when land is returned into production after five (5) years of resting fallow, encouraging urbanization, less flexible supply dependence and increases in pollution threats. **Recommended Mechanism:** Consult stakeholders including those in the “locally grown” movement and consider possible legislative steps in the upcoming legislative term to appropriately modify CEQA.
4. **TRANSFER OF BEST WATER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:** Encourage the CDFA, the University of California Agricultural Extension Service, and other technical agricultural resource institutions to reach-out to urban farmers in advising them on methods and devices useful for compliance with the Federal Clean Water Act as well as other types of pollution avoidance and abatement such as eradication of invasive pests and plants. **Recommended Mechanism:** Launch initiative by the California Secretary of Food and Agriculture and the University of California in cooperation with regional water agencies and organizations throughout the state.