Background

A recent Symposium on Applied Research and Extension was held in Sacramento, which was co-sponsored by the California Commodity Committee (CCC) and the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. By way of background, the CCC represents about 50 commodity-based organizations in CA which fund agricultural research with a number of research institutions – including the University of California, the USDA Agricultural Research Service, California State Universities, and other public and private institutions.

Key points made by speakers at symposium were:

- California Agriculture is a $32 billion industry, producing over 350 commodities, providing more than 50% of the nation's fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts, creating over 1 million jobs and exporting more than $10 billion a year in products.

- A key factor of this success is the contribution of publically funded agricultural research, development and extension. Key players have been the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Furthermore, the research of UC and USDA extends beyond agriculture to embrace stewardship of natural resources and human resource development.
- A recent study by UC, University of Minnesota, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and University of Wyoming economists estimates public funding for agricultural research and development generates a dividend in the range of $20-30 or more for every $1 invested. Very few public or private investments return dividends on this scale.
- Productivity gains in California over the last 50 years have helped farmers more than double agricultural production and at the same time with only a modest increase in overall inputs (e.g., land, labor, capital, fertilizer, fuel). The increase in CA productivity efficiency equates to about $20 billion annually in saved resources.
- Yet this study also documents a disturbing trend: over the past two decades public funding for agricultural research, development and extension has been reduced in real dollars. There is a 10-20 or more year "lag effect" between research spending and productivity. So as a result of this reduced spending, evidence is just now emerging that the rate of growth in US and California agricultural productivity is declining. For instance, in the past California agricultural productivity grew by 1.85 % per year (while the national average was a somewhat lower at 1.79 % per year). In contrast, currently agricultural productivity growth in California is much slower at 1.08 % per year (while the US average is now a somewhat higher 1.12%).
- As a more specific example, in California there are 24% fewer UC Agricultural Experiment Station Researchers and Cooperative Extension staff than in 1990. This is a result of significant budget downturns in the mid 1990's and in 2003. This support has never been recouped. Of great concern is a large turnover of the academic staff is expected in the next few years because of retirement. For example, 52% of all Cooperative Extension Academics will retire within the next ten years – will the support be available to replace them?

Strong Publically Funded Agricultural Research, Development and Extension is a "Must Have" to Fulfill the Shared Vision for California Agriculture and its People

- To sustain agriculture's contribution to the CA economy and our global competitiveness.
- To assure there is a secure supply of nutritious foods for California and the US.
- To assure continued development of sustainable farming practices which are environmentally friendly.
- To provide the "eco-services" of farming land and at the same time address issues which arise at the ag-urban interface.
- To address air and water quality issues which are an outcome of both public and agricultural activity.
- To address water availability and use efficiency in light of an increasing California population and balance this with agricultural and environmental needs.
- Understand the role of climate change and the potential positive role which agriculture can play.
- To tap the energy potential of agricultural bio-fuels and at the same time seek more energy efficiency in agriculture.
- To assure adequate pollination of California crops by honey bees and other pollinators.
- To preserve native endangered species and abate the introduction of invasive pests.
- Continue to address resource stewardship of forests, wild lands and watersheds.
- To address food safety issues.
- To address issues and continue to field programs in urban landscape and pest management.
- Continue advances in disease vector biology and management.
- Continue to address nutrition issues and field programs with at-risk and low income families.
- Continue community youth development programs.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert K. Curtis
Chairman, California Commodity Committee
Almond Board of California