

# Ag Vision: Strategies for the Future

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The following notes report on ideas brought forth at the Ag Vision strategy session held on Sept. 15 and 16. While the list is comprehensive, it is the role of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture to determine which strategies to support and/or prioritize. The notes here are not intended to reflect the position of any one entity, including the board, but rather chronicle collective thoughts of the meeting participants.

## 1. Improve access to safe, healthy food for all Californians

### *Recommended actions:*

- See what the regulatory issues are around getting other products, such as dairy, to the food banks
- Food literacy – bring CDFA together with CA Department of Education and consider public policy to make nutrition education required for kids; explore the story of how food literacy relates to healthcare costs
- Communicate the social justice piece
- Increase federal participation
- Address the need for consumers to have adequate income at prices that enable farmers to make a good living and pay good money to their workers ... reframe CA Ag Vision to a broader context that would allow us to create connections and connect agriculture with prosperity and economic wellness
- Consider educating consumers on food preparation to build a preference for fresh ingredients
- Teach foodservice directors how to cook with secondary products in a healthy way
- Reflect the innovation, entrepreneurship of CA ag
- Get the state to reinvest in rural regions to rebuild economic prosperity; state should become an ally with private finance (Rural Economic Development Fund) ... unification between social justice organizations, rural communities, food access and agriculture

## 2. Ease the burden of regulation on agriculture while maintaining health, safety and environmental standards

### *Recommended actions:*

- Develop whitepaper (potentially with environmental allies) that describes the changes in the regulatory paradigm, implications and ways of supporting compliance
- Explore ecosystem service monitoring
- Develop list of regulations that allies can work on

- Advocate for science as the basis for regulation; is there a fair and equitable arbitrator in this process?
- Compare costs of regulations between California and other growing regions; develop baseline study
- Identify priorities of regulations to focus on
- Promote positive aspects of regulations – what is the benefit they provide to people, consumers?
- Turn California burdens into a selling point in external markets – make them a part of the positive California brand
- Pursue structural changes that may need to happen at regulatory boards – how they are formed, board members, etc.
- Explore voluntary compliance agreements as means of pre-empting regulations
- Show that multiple laws are in conflict with each other and eliminate redundancies/overlapping
- Develop a centralized hub for farmers to submit everything in one place
- Draft a model bill that moves toward a refined regulatory system; consider test region
- Take a new approach to ensuring environmental outcomes from farms; can this pre-empt regulations? Can we build a model?
- Create a one-stop for proof of compliance
- Implement grading system that allows farms to showcase the collective impact of their efforts
- CA Grown should reflect the superior products grown in CA as a result of regulations
- Ecosystem services should have protection for farmer down the road (FOIA, etc.)

### 3. Secure an adequate supply of water for agricultural purposes

#### *Recommended actions:*

- Predictability – that’s when you have security; lack of predictability hinders sensible groundwater management; strive for predictability to the best extent possible
- Need to do more conservation, reclamation, reuse and desalinization; we also need additional supplies
- Alter/redirect the conversation to be about supply management challenges versus conservation
- Reframe the debate to say how much water we need to feed the state/feed people
- Rally around California Water Action Plan
- Partner with environmental justice community to identify opportunities for temporary drinking water replacement while building long-term solutions
- Limit liability for replacement water options/providers
- Pursue statewide solutions for water replacement
- Recognize/encourage voluntary solutions
- Pursue continued investment (public) in water conservation technologies
- Put more carbon in the ground

- Fund conservation/tillage programs like the one at UC Davis
- Rethink strategies about how we optimize caught water in the dams, soils and reservoirs to recharge groundwater; focus on upper watershed management
- Foster programs that provide technical assistance for healthy soil practices and irrigation technology; encourage better plant technology
- Engage food and beverage companies / pursue allied partners / educate through presentations, etc. Seek partners with shared values and water interests
- Focus on water quality
- Embrace a more comprehensive approach to water quality that doesn't focus too much on one contaminant (lead, nitrogen, etc.); come up with a funding solution (public)

#### 4. Assure a strong labor force through fairness to agriculture workers and employers

##### *Recommended actions:*

- Be a voice pushing for comprehensive immigration reform
- Be a voice for H2A reform to make it more workable
- Support investment in infrastructure to support workers (housing, transportation, etc.)
- Support governors in bipartisan immigration reform efforts
- Prepare response for 1066 implications of reduced hours, mechanization, job loss
- Update workforce analysis to reflect today's realities and identify opportunities that result from keeping agriculture in the state
- Reconcile attitudes toward farm labor contractors
- Align with third parties close to the labor community
- Set up a group to monitor impact of labor regulations
- Do a better job telling the story of what we are doing positively related to labor ... entry level jobs turning into lucrative careers
- Bring attention to the governor's office on options for 1066 exemptions
- Look at unintended consequences of labor housing laws; what is the perception of H2A housing requirements?
- Support programs that allow ag to cultivate the type of labor and workforce they want to have; attract and inspire kids; cultivate entrepreneurs
- Revisit 1066 and nonproductive work time (breaks, travel, etc.)

#### 5. Effectively detect, exclude and control invasive species

##### *Recommended actions:*

- Work together going into the next Farm Bill to ensure California ag gets critical funds
- Look into organic control methods/products
- Need to involve public and earn public trust

- Bring in the notion of a healthy ecosystem and what happens when it gets disturbed ... for personal yards, neighbors' farms and communities

## 6. Adopt a policy of conserving agricultural land and water resources

### *Recommended actions:*

- Give farmers predictability in surface water supplies so they do not fallow land ... need to restore adequate water and improve infrastructure
- Support policy to conserve farmland that comes out of production as a result of SGMA ... encourage optimization of land where there are habitat values ... consider all options/factors to encourage policy that protects natural resources
- Ensure transportation and other infrastructure within existing urban areas helps make living in dense urban areas desirable; this, in turn, ensures adequate supply of agriculture land
- Overcome the barriers with infill
- Strive to have the least amount of conflict as possible between urban and ag areas
- Convince people that above ground storage helps groundwater supplies ... support conjunctive use
- Tie this topic into upper watershed restoration ... restore health of upper watershed, restore soils, look at tree mortality issues ... we'll see recharges that look a lot like it did 40 years ago
- Set a statewide target for land conservation ... urban growth boundaries, higher development densities
- Build alliances and have conversations before regulations are drawn
- Educate farmers so they can handle local decisions related to SGMA
- Reframe Ag Vision as a social contract between agriculture and the public with benefits to both sides ... no ag land loss is acceptable
- Reinvigorate the Williamson Act

## 7. Expand environmental stewardship on farms and ranches

### *Recommended actions:*

- Develop allies to build trust
- Build a program to set metrics and show progress (almonds and wine grapes are examples) ... industry sectors should show what they are doing to improve soil, water, toxicity, etc. ... data can help tell our story
- Support OEFI
- Provide financial and technical assistance to growers on the local level ... develop models
- Have CA Grown incorporate more elements of environmental stewardship; identify opportunities within the program/brand

- Modernize the ways of sharing farmer stories; better use of social media, digital technologies and influencers to educate audiences and shift perceptions
- Consider support of a sweetened beverage tax as a conduit for funding to CDFA
- Boldly say agriculture is part of the solution to climate change

## 8. Promote renewable energy and substitutes for fossil-based inputs

### 9. Assure agricultural adaptation for climate change

#### *Recommended actions:*

- Frame this strategy in a different way with language that doesn't seem pejorative to the industry ... modify verbiage
- Update 75% methane reduction reference mentioned in Ag Vision
- More collaboration with public utilities
- Make the existing climate program more meaningful for agriculture for when offset projects get off the ground
- Look into other methods for reducing methane, not just dairy digesters
- Promote/support innovation that repurposes biomass ... explore what a bio-based world might mean and how agriculture can be a part of that. How can we add value at the farm level for the byproduct stream?
  - Explore ways for agriculture to provide not just food, but also energy
  - Invest in the infrastructure for energy to capture what we can generate
- Evaluate the environmental impacts of what we can't burn
- Resolve the issue of agriculture land being sold for solar development; pursue opportunities to use BLM land for solar instead
- Track the renewable energy of a farm
- Work with equipment manufacturers (tractors, pumps, harvester equipment) to identify new technology integration
- Support technical assistance for cogen plants; public has an obligation to support these new technologies/methods
- Position agriculture as the solution to climate change
- Incentivize meaningful reductions in the processing level that don't necessarily require an innovative, new technology; identify sweet spot to get greenhouse gas emission reductions with existing technologies
- Seek funding to support keeping food processing in California; value chain proposition
- Collaborate with the wildlife conservation community and endangered species community to talk about opportunities and threats ... create credits for producers protecting wildlife, endangered species

## 10. Promote robust regional markets for all California producers

#### *Recommended actions:*

- Identify funding mechanism

- Fold it into rural development and investment strategy

## 11. Cultivate the next generation of farmers and ranchers

### *Recommended actions:*

- Expand language to include all of agriculture (not just farmers and ranchers)
- Consider the opportunity for sweetened beverage tax to funnel funds into 4H and similar community programs
- Support farmer to farmer learning exchange at a grassroots level
- Create more opportunities for young farmers to get their first break (and access)
- Identify opportunities to encourage non-specialty crop cultivation by new farmers
- Identify incentive programs for next gen farmers and ranchers
- Provide Spanish learning services to new farmers
- Shrink the knowledge gap to help farmers with transitional planning and estate planning

## 12. Promote agricultural research that anticipates 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges

### *Recommended actions:*

- Support research relevant to address regulatory issues and to respond to the real issues of California farmers
- Support whole system research/analysis; a lot of research is focused on one particular issue but a holistic look would be beneficial
- Ensure on-farm research opportunities
- Research national standards when it comes to climate change and carbon sequestration as it relates to the diversity of California ag products
- As we become more sophisticated in our growing systems, we need to enable/empower our researchers to explain scientific developments to the public
  - Earn public trust in science and science's benefits to ag
  - Shift perception that corporate greed is linked to GMOs
  - Translate science into something the layperson will understand; make ability to communicate a critical role of scientist
- Develop metrics that demonstrate state progress around environmental farming systems; have UC be the holder of the data to track over time and across industries
- More UCCE farm advisors – make it an attractive profession
- Seek funding to actually apply research/knowledge at the farm level
- Advance training to handle engineering skills needed for mechanization and automation; identify a funding source
- Diversify research to support various agriculture practices that will have broad applicability
- Be proactive in identifying where the priorities are to guide limited resources

- Establish partnerships between industry and researchers to provide funding and provide input on direction

### 13. Engagement with Allies

#### *Recommended actions:*

- Need to be focused, specific and targeted; we can't do a large general purpose public relations campaign
- Identify the icons 40 million people look to; identify the spokespersons and potential allies (Google) that we previously never would have dreamt to engage
- Ag fits into the sustainability metrics of the hospitality industry; help Visit CA with agrotourism for rural communities
- Explore what it means for agriculture to be a solution
- Reframe our approach to communications: listen, understand core issues, rebuild connections with people
- Create communications alignment between agencies, organizations and entities and come together on common issues
- Help the farmers know how to communicate their stories
- Consider having this group meet more often
- Strengthen communication to the department of agriculture
- Bring people out to farms, including important regulatory staff (not just legislators)
- Need dedicated staff to push this forward and own each of these areas
- Build common messages
- Meet people where they are