

Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming to Oxnard this afternoon.

I am proud to be a 5<sup>th</sup> generation farmer in Ventura County. We grow avocados and citrus, but our family operation dates back to when dry-farmed lima beans were a staple of Ventura's economy. We have seen many changes and many crops, but we have continued to evolve. To my mind, this is the essence of sustainable agriculture.

### **Regulatory Burden**

Much will be said today about the need for supporting small farms. In no area is a small farm at a greater disadvantage to larger competitors than in regulatory compliance. When a single set of shoulders must bear the weight, the burden gets heavy. If it is the goal of our policies not to have small farmers choose to lay that burden down, we must examine the load. As these listening sessions give way to policy formulation, let us consider chipping away at the layers of policy that exist already. Some are problematic already, and others may become contrary to the new policies adopted to lead to our 2030 vision. I hope we will seek good policy, rather than simply more policy.

Agricultural policy has tended to favor large producers and a small range of crops for global distribution. You may hear advocates tell you that the proper role for policy is to favor the opposite end of the spectrum: very small, highly diversified farms serving local markets. I ask you to recognize that replacing one extreme with the other has seldom worked in politics, economics or any other field of human activity.

Let's apply the concept of biodiversity to the economics of farming. Just as we now recognize that a range of species must inhabit a given habitat for a healthy environment, a variety of farms make for a healthy farm economy. With Ventura County's diversity of crops, there is not a day in the year that something isn't being harvested and sent to market. Our large operations are essential to maintain a healthy population of equipment dealers and service providers. Mid-size family farmers often provide much of the leadership in local co-ops and associations. Smaller farms help sustain the agricultural service economy, and often pioneer specialty crops while feeding local markets. There is room for them all. We need them all. Our vision should embrace them all.

### **Local Food Systems**

Now to the topic of local and regional food. There is currently a great deal of enthusiasm for this approach, and I happily support efforts to greatly strengthen this aspect of our food system. But as we look to create policy, we must ask: "How local should we be?"

To be sure, we could do a great deal more. Only 5 to 10 percent of food going to local consumption could yield a great reduction in the amount of energy used for transportation and a boost for local economies. What is the right amount of local food? Is it 30%? 80%? I don't have that answer for you, other than to suggest that there is a point beyond which we are not increasing diversity of opportunities for growers and consumers, but restricting them. The antidote to extreme globalization is not extreme localization.

To look at the broader view for a moment: There is a nutritional crisis all over our country, and California agriculture has the ability to deliver nutritional produce throughout the year. It is appropriate, both ethically and economically, that we do so. Changes in policy should recognize that agriculture is both a source of economic strength for California, and a resource for our nation.

### **Immigration Reform**

This state was built with the labor of those seeking a better life through hard work. And for all of our faults and sins along the way, our state and our country have been the greatest generators of wealth, freedom and human happiness this world has ever seen. Today the energy to continue this growth comes not from the East, but from the South. California must lead the way to practical, workable immigration reform. The people who travel here seek work and economic opportunity, and that is what we have to offer. A well managed border is in the national interest of both the United States and Mexico. California stands to gain if we enact meaningful reform, but no state stands to suffer more if we fail.

### **Invasive Pests**

While we need a border that can accommodate a two-way flow of goods and labor, we cannot accommodate the introduction of foreign pests. Phytosanitary controls at the border must be increased. Without these measures, there will be no alternative to costly control measures taken after the fact. As we see currently with the Light Brown Apple Moth, such measures are costly both to government and growers, and will often anger certain segments of our community. Tight controls at the border are not only good policy, they are also a good investment.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to close with a thought on our purpose here today. I often hear it said that we must have a common vision of the future, and that creativity and innovation will be necessary for success.

But if innovation and creativity are the solution to the problems of our food system, then is a common vision a meaningful goal? Has genuine innovation ever emerged from within a broadly held common vision? Or has it been the fringe view (the Uncommon Vision) that has been the origin of innovation? History is filled with those creative souls who have found new ways to accomplish what was thought to be impossible. Do we innovate here today? No, we don't, but there is a role for us to play.

A common vision transformed into policy places limitations on the possible. Our role here today is not to define how the food system of 2030 will look. Today we begin to define the possibilities, and clearly we must leave them open. We cannot expect to find the results we seek by limiting our options. We must allow room for people to experiment, to make mistakes, and even fail and we will find the answers. If we are not prepared to let innovation be our guide, then we will fail.

I am reminded that here in Ventura County, where we are lucky to have people working on innovative farm-to-school programs, institutional and policy obstacles prevent them from fully realizing the potential of these programs. Will our new policies set them free? I hope so. In our pursuit of “common vision”, let us not preclude the Uncommon Visions that will be the catalysts for true success.

I am pleased that CDFA is recognizing these issues, and again, Mr. Secretary, I wish to thank you for your time.