



TULARE COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Mission: to promote and enhance the viability of Tulare County agriculture.

**A Vision for Tulare County Agriculture
Presented to the CDFA Ag Listening Session Participants
By TCFB President, Edward Needham
July 2, 2008
Tulare, CA**

Mr. Secretary and Board members I would like to thank you for taking the time proactively to address the future of agriculture by coming here today and asking for our input. It is seldom that a proactive approach is taken to address long term issues, we usually are reactive, and I again applaud you.

My name is Edward Needham; I live in Visalia, California, married, with four children and farm citrus and pomegranates here in the central valley. I also am the general manager of Synagro Technologies, Inc. overseeing the composting operations in California and serve as President of the Tulare County Farm Bureau, and am a director on the Kern County Farm Bureau. I hold a PCA and PCO license and have been involved with farming for over 25 years. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

At first glance this problem is easy if you apply my mindset at the beginning of each year, "Next year will be better let's try it one more time" I've been say this to myself for 25 years and I'm still here and I sure I share the same thoughts each time we start a new season or sit down and figure out our bottom line. I wish it was this easy and being an eternal optimist would solve our problems but it won't. Identifying where California agriculture will be in 2030 is a unique challenge.

In my remarks I would like to discuss just a few of the many critically important challenges that exist in attaining an ideal 2030 vision for California agriculture.

Challenges

What agriculture will need is not any different than what it needs today. Our needs have remained relatively the same for decades, first and foremost, a complete agricultural infrastructure that will allow for agriculture to exist and thrive in a sustainable manner. Sustainability must include a fair return on investment that is competitive with other applications of capital resources (i.e. other forms of investment). It will not be sufficient to compete only with other agricultural enterprises in other states and other countries. Again, agriculture will need to be profitable enough to attract capital and to lure new generations to the industry.

In order to achieve this, California needs a regulatory framework that allows for producers to be competitive. This means we need better understanding by and support of the public and our elected and appointed officials. There is currently a huge disconnect between food production and the consumers who depend on it. We will need to have a **sustained** outreach and reconnection effort with the public and decision makers.

Agriculture's Basic Needs (The "Must Haves")

Agriculture's basic needs for a sustainable and successful future are:

- Reliable water supply and investment and implementation of sufficient conveyance and storage
- Reliable rural crime prevention funds and programs, supported unilaterally throughout all 58 counties in California. Expanded funding, support, and integration of existing rural crime prevention taskforce efforts, the central valley's ACTION network, and the central valley's ag investigation units need to be fully utilized and expanded through statewide effort.
- Enacting of a fail-safe food safety regulatory framework that assures consumer confidence and establishes a consistent, science based, industry initiated process for greater food safety protection.
- Strong interaction between state agencies and county governments to streamline regulatory process; a renewed and enhanced effort to help farmers, ranchers, and dairy producers streamline permitting requirements and environmental compliance between air, water, and land. Flexibility must be adapted into the process at the local level of government to help producers comply with the myriad of overlapping, and sometimes even contradictory rules and regulations that are ever being re-written, modified, updated, or re-authorized.
- Reliable labor supply – both Management and Field Labor – this must be a broad bi-partisan process that engages our state and federal lawmakers to champion this effort
- Reliable and affordable fuel supply
- Reliable and affordable production inputs
- Efficient transportation systems and port facilities and

- Land Use policies that value the protection of agricultural land and rangeland – this will require that state and county governments work together to help develop a more consistent framework for protecting farmland in the state.

Concluding Comments

- The future public perception of agriculture will depend on whether or not the industry continues to deliver abundant high quality and safe supplies of agricultural products. Consumers today are largely disconnected with the struggles of American agriculture, or the impacts that urban encroachment, depleted water supplies and land availability have on agriculture. Even though we continue to be the most efficient and resourceful cultivators of the Earth, this only further disconnects the American public from the job of the farmer and the plight they face in delivering the abundant, high quality, safe commodities we all enjoy.
- Notwithstanding the above, the public will continue to play a role in determining how and where food is produced and processed. New resource stewardship concepts, animal care practices and other aspects of production and the delivery of agricultural products will be dictated by the market and consumer demands regardless of what the regulatory framework requires.
- With regard to the issue of “sustainability”, the State Board of Food and Agriculture should take a lead role in defining what sustainability means. Sustainability must include a fair return on investment for those in production agriculture. In the end and as mentioned earlier, California agriculture will not be sustainable unless it can compete for capital and other resources such as labor, water, land/soil, energy and fuel. The state board has an opportunity to be a key driver in establishing and standardizing what sustainability is.

- As part of planning for the future, the department should consider inserting themselves in all issues relevant and important to agriculture. This would include agricultural biotechnology, issues impacting animal agriculture, climate change and greenhouse gas reduction in agriculture, coexistence challenges, the rural/urban interface and the inherent conflicts emanating from urban encroachment, and more. The board and the department should devise a plan that assures that agriculture has a seat at the table with regard to all government decision making that impacts agriculture. The cumulative impact of over regulation should be assessed and dealt with to minimize impacts on agricultural productivity.
- And last, this visioning process should promote solidarity within agriculture, assist in establishing consensus and define common goals for California agriculture.