

Dear Ag Vision Team,

I recently attended the Sacramento Ag Vision Listening session and nearly missed the opportunity to present the Marin Farmers Markets' vision for agriculture in California. Please include these comments in your report and consider them with the many valuable comments given by producers, non-profit representatives, leaders, educators and advocates who have come to clearly understand that business as usual will not produce a sustainable farming system for California, nor will it reverse the incredibly disconcerting trends in diet related disease in California and across our nation. I am very pleased that many people attending expressed a vision that put the health of people and the environment, equity and community, together with economic and environmental sustainable farm businesses as top priorities for the coming decades.

Thank you for including our comments...

Ag Vision for California

Submitted by: Leah Smith, Marin Farmers Markets and Marin Agricultural Institute

Brief Organization Description: Marin Farmers Markets is a 24 year old organization running seven award winning Bay Area farmers markets with a membership of more than 400, about 200 of which are farmers. Other members include bakers, food purveyors, artisans, etc. We run the third largest farmers market in California. We have been recognized with numerous awards including the Acterra Green Business Award in 2007, Top 500 North Bay Companies 2008 and Best of Marin for Organic Produce for 2007 and 2008.

Vision for CA Ag by 2030

- California has reversed the trend of losing family farms and we are well on the way to growing the number of small and mid sized diversified and sustainable farms.
- California has created an economically and environmentally viable food production system that serves the financial and health needs of farmers and farm workers, the nutritional needs of the community, and the ecological needs of the land, water and air that farms impact and are impacted by farming
- California has appropriately scaled agriculture – not too large and not too small to meet the specific needs of the community. Ie. Different products require different acreage – one size does not fit all.
- Diversified family and small to mid scale farms receive direct support through farmers markets and direct marketing programs by the government, non-profits, individuals, families, institutions, chefs, schools, businesses, and health care industry.
- The success of agriculture in California is measured by the three E's – Economic viability, Environmental Sustainability and Equity. California approaches

- supporting agriculture with a whole systems, integrated understanding of the ecology of food production.
- California is using its air, water, and land resources not only sustainably but in a regenerative way that helps clean air, water and soil, adds nutrients, and builds soil.
 - California has a renewal of urban agriculture and food is grown on porches, roof tops, in small yards, in pots on windowsills, etc.
 - All schools in California have Farm to School programs and businesses and public service organizations have Farm to Institution programs. The children, adults, residents and employees of California know where their food comes from, how it is grown, and the life stories of their food.

What is the Biggest Challenge to Achieving this Vision?

- A lack of understanding about the interrelationships between human health and the environment; between urban and suburban life and rural, agrarian life; between business as usual and an understanding of the ecological context
- The subsidization of large scale, corporate and commodity agriculture is a barrier to truly supporting the emergence of a sustainable agricultural system in California.
- Follow the money – where the money goes, so does the energy to create or sustain either a healthy or an unhealthy system.
- A lack of understanding about the living nature of soil and a dependency on chemical inputs
- Population pressures and a general misunderstanding about what is healthy to eat
- Institutional inertia that keeps the same processes and thinking in place. We need to step outside and look from a distance. The exercise of looking forward to 2030 is one helpful way to look broadly about how we are growing food in the global sense.

In 2030, how has the public perception of agriculture changed?

The perception will be that:

Local, healthy, ecologically sound agriculture is valued, understood and directly supported by local communities;

Agriculture in California is a leader in solving the environmental and health crisis facing our state, country and planet;

Farmers and farm workers are a valued and respected part of society and their role is no longer sidelined or behind the scenes, but central.

What is a “must have” in an Ag Vision for California?

We must have a comprehensive vision that is embraced by the CA Department of Food and Agriculture that has sustainable agriculture and local community supported food systems as a guiding force. We must look long term and directly address the farming methods, distribution systems and political systems that perpetuate an unsustainable way of growing and distributing food.

We can do a lot in California at the local and state levels, but we are still very much affected by the Farm Bill and federal policies. Therefore, significant reform to the Farm Bill, which would require even more effort from CA to educate legislators **is a must have**. We would specifically like to see more resources for research in sustainable agriculture farming methods, resources for new farmers and for current farmers growing row crops/fruits and vegetables, a dismantling of the commodities program, and a significant increased in direct markets opportunities and local distribution programs in support of small local food systems.

Leah Smith

Marin Farmers Markets