



July 11, 2008

To: A.G. Kawamura, California Secretary of Food and Agriculture and  
Members of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture

Fr: Shirley Kirkpatrick

**Re: California Agricultural Vision**

My perspective comes from a 73-year lifetime commitment to agriculture. As the youngest of five children growing up on a small family farm in Fresno County (where we were the unpaid workforce), I have seen the progression of farming from draft horses to today's highly mechanized precision farming methods. My career path led to journalistic training and I have been telling agriculture's story through freelance writing and client work for more than 50 years. Beyond this, I married an "aggie" from UC Davis and we eventually – through hard work and perseverance – acquired farm property on which we raise citrus and pomegranates in Tulare County.

**There is a future for California agriculture.... but it may not look the same. Public perception has changed.**

Please do not discount the "locavores" when considering the future of agriculture in our state.

When your listening sessions began, it bothered me to hear agriculture's "old guard" and firmly entrenched organizations say that too many "others" were horning in. These hardliners said the outsiders were expressing views which may be detrimental to agriculture as we know it.

Welcome to the real world! At the July 2 session in Tulare, I heard reasoned arguments for including farm laborers, consumers and – horrors – environmentalists, into agriculture's vision! The word "sustainable" was on everyone's lips, but from very different perspectives.

Of all the people who spoke that day, Holly King of the Great Valley Center, said it best. I highly recommend that all of you pull out her commentary and re-read it. She advocates re-connecting the state's urban population "to the fundamental reality that food and agriculture *in their region* is the foundation upon which their lives depend." The emphasis on "in their region" is my own. That, folks, is what locavores are all about.

When such acclaimed authors as Barbara Kingsolver writes a book celebrating food production and eating locally ("*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle – A Year of Food Life*"), you can bet the "buy locally"

movement is well underway. Look at the increase in farmers' markets and CSA – Community Supported Agriculture – operations. Whole Foods Markets and independent marketers such as the Monterey Market and Berkeley Bowl buy locally and are highly successful. Even Wal-Mart recently announced that it plans to source more produce from local growers.

Clearly, people want to know where and how their food is grown. They respect local farmers and are willing to help them survive. Our family saw the writing on the wall years ago and we are transitioning nicely to direct sales. We have used IPM practices with biological control of pests even before there was a name for it. We can successfully manage our crops to give us 'pesticide free' zones and we can sell well under that banner. While we don't want the hassles and expense of being certified organic, we are ready to make that move if we think it is necessary.

Holly King was right on when she said "Agriculture must recognize that it is not an industry in and of itself, but part of a world whose ecological and social sensitivities have changed.... The general public has heightened concerns about the environmental and social consequences of agriculture. Our challenge will be to move that needle from negative consequences to positive consequences. We do that, and I believe the commitment by non-farm populations to the resources that produce the benefits inherent in agriculture – food, open space, groundwater recharge and the list goes on – will follow."

**'Must haves' for California's ag vision:** For the future, we must have an agricultural sector that is responsive to the public, responsible in its production methods and ethical in its practices. Admittedly, we need the large farms to feed the world, but they need to see themselves from the consumers' viewpoint.

To keep agriculture viable well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need:

- a reliable water supply.
- good city and county planning codes that keep cities and developers within clearly defined boundaries and using smart growth principles that encourage walkable, livable environs.
- clarity of meaning for the word sustainable. It must include a profitability component and assured resources for those in production agriculture.
- reliable and affordable production inputs.
- compensation for farmers who are willing to commit their property to conservation easements and more encouragement for extensive use of these easements through additional funding..

#### **FARRM:**

The California agriculture sector, through leadership from CDFA and the Board, must seek a federal program of tax deferred savings accounts to even out the ups and downs of feast or famine farming years. As recently as 2001, Congress considered such a program. It was called Farm and Ranch Risk Management (FAARM) accounts – similar to IRA's – that would allow farmers to deposit funds during years of high farm income that could be drawn on during low income periods. These accounts could self-insure the farmer with tax deferral and possibly tax savings through bracket reduction.

What happened to this concept? What killed it in the legislative halls? Why doesn't CDFA investigate and re-propose it? Having survived three major citrus freezes and loss of entire years' income, we are well aware of farming's risks and income fluctuations. Tax averaging and savings plans would have helped.