

# Speakers



## KAREN ROSS

### *Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture*

Karen Ross was appointed Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture on January 9, 2019 by Governor Gavin Newsom. In re-appointing Secretary Ross, Governor Newsom cited her unmatched leadership experience in agricultural issues nationally, internationally, and here in California, in areas including environmental stewardship, climate change adaptation, and

trade. Secretary Ross was initially appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. in 2011.

Before joining CDFA, Secretary Ross was chief of staff for U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, a position she accepted in 2009. Prior to that appointment, she served as President of the California Association of Winegrape Growers from 1996-2009, and as Vice-President of the Agricultural Council of California from 1989-1996. Her prior experience before moving to California included staff work for a United States Senator, a presidential candidate, and government relations for rural electric cooperatives and public power districts.

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## TONY THURMOND

### *California State Superintendent of Public Instruction*

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond is responsible for the largest public school system in the nation, with more than 6.3 million students and over 10,000 schools. Since taking office earlier this year, State Superintendent Thurmond has made improving equity, access, and opportunity for California's public school students his top priority. He has created initiatives that are focused on closing the achievement gap for our state's most vulnerable students and is dedicated to supporting educators in delivering an equitable education to all students. During his 4-year tenure in the Assembly, Thurmond authored legislation that successfully expanded the free lunch program, bilingual education, and the Chafee Grant college scholarship program for foster youth. Additionally, Thurmond's legislation guaranteed preferential voting rights for student school board members, improved access to families for early education and childcare, and shifted millions of dollars directly from prisons to schools. State Superintendent Thurmond is a social worker, educator, advocate, and public school parent who continues to work tirelessly on behalf of all students to ensure they reach their full academic potential.

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## JENNIFER SIEBEL NEWSOM

### *First Partner of California*

Jennifer Siebel Newsom is the First Partner of California, co-founder of the California Partners Project, founder of the Representation Project, and a filmmaker. Since becoming First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom has championed issues related to raising healthy, whole children and advancing gender equity. She wrote and directed Miss Representation, The Mask You Live In, and The Great American Lie.



## ALICE WATERS

### *Chef, Author & Food Activist*

Alice Waters is a chef, author, food activist, and the founder and owner of Chez Panisse Restaurant in Berkeley, California (est. 1971). She has been a champion of local sustainable agriculture for over four decades. In 1995 she founded the Edible Schoolyard Project, which advocates for a free regenerative school lunch for all children and a sustainable food curriculum in every public school.

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## YUSEF BUZAYAN

***Farm to Cafeteria Program Manager, Community Alliance with Family Farmers***

Yusef studied Agricultural Economics and International Ag Development at UC Davis and has interests in food systems and agricultural supply chains. As Farm to Cafeteria Program Manager, he provides technical expertise and assistance to farmers and foodservice operators on supply chain logistics, regulations, and best practices for Farm to Cafeteria sales.

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## FRANCES DI CRISTINA

***Farm to School Director, Sierra Harvest***

Frances is passionate about connecting kids to good food and the knowledge of where it comes from. Her previous experience in food banking introduced her to the interconnected issues of food access, health, and local food systems. Through her Farm to School work she strives to ensure all kids have the opportunity to appreciate delicious local food.

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## ALISE ECHELE, RDN

***Healthy Schools Project Coordinator, Ventura Unified School District***

Since 2010, Alise has led and collaborated with a team of garden and nutrition educators to implement whole food cooking, nutrition, and school garden-based education across thirteen schools and to connect programming to school cafeterias.

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## SARA ELAZAN

***Director of Data Insights, Center for Good Food Purchasing***

Sara is with the Center for Good Food Purchasing, which manages the Good Food Purchasing Program. In her role, Sara oversees analytics and assessment of school districts and other large institutions enrolled in the Program. Sara is excited by the commitment of schools to sourcing food that is local, sustainable, and healthy for people, animals, and the environment.

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## JOHN FISHER

***Director of Programs and Partnerships, Life Lab***

Since 1996 John has worked exclusively in farm- and garden-based education programs, teaching pre-school through high school students, and has provided professional development opportunities for thousands of educators.

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## JACKIE IOIMO-JONES

***Agriculture Education Program Consultant, California Department of Education***

Jackie has been a part of agriculture education for the past 12 years. During her time in the classroom, she taught a variety of classes, advised students with unique supervised agriculture experience projects, and helped students become successful within FFA. For the past two years, she has been serving as the Regional Supervisor and FFA Advisor for the Southern Region. Jackie assists teachers and districts with program development, oversees the Southern Region FFA officer team, and coordinates leadership/professional development events for students and teachers.

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## DEIRDRE KLESKE

***Healthy Works Program Specialist, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency***

Deirdre is with the Chronic Disease and Health Equity unit of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency. She also serves as co-chair of the Schools & After-School Domain of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative. Her favorite part of her job is supporting schools and districts to create healthy environments leading to student achievement.

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## EMILY KOLLER

***Food Love Farm Director, Sierra Harvest***

Emily is passionate about exploring the personal, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of our food systems. Grounded in the belief that farming is an opportunity to deeply connect with the Earth, our community, each other, and ourselves, Emily loves to share her love of food and farming with kids and families.

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## NATALIE LAREAU

***Program Assistant, Community Health Improvement Partners, Farm to Institution Center***

Natalie earned a B.S. in Environmental Science and a double minor in Biology and Food Studies from the University of Oregon. She previously served as an intern on a 2.5 acre garden in Eugene, Oregon where she grew and cooked food, as well as educated garden volunteers. Natalie has a passion for sustainability, food and gardening. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, trying new cooking recipes, and playing with her puppy. In her role with the Farm to Institution Center, Natalie leads program curriculum development, direct education, and administrative logistics.

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## NICHOLAS LEE

***Senior Program Manager, The Edible Schoolyard Project***

Nick is the Senior Program Manager at the Edible Schoolyard Project and a co-designer of Edible Education at Home. Nick is an educator, cook, curriculum writer, and trainer. For the past seven years he taught cooking to middle and high school youth at the Edible Schoolyard Project in Berkeley, California. Nick sees cooking as a pathway to support youth to deepen their relationship with food and learn how food impacts their own health, the health of the planet, and the health and wellbeing of the people working in the food system. Nick is also the lead trainer for the Edible Schoolyard Project, helping educators and school food professionals develop their own edible education programs.

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## AMANDA MASCIA

***Hunger Free Kids Manager, San Diego Hunger Coalition***

Amanda provides management support to the Hunger Free Kids Task Force, while supporting San Diego County school districts and community based organizations to ensure all children in San Diego have access to nutritious meals wherever they live, learn and play. Amanda is most known for creating The Good Food Factory - a healthy cooking show for kids and their families. Over the last decade Amanda has worked with countless youth teaching them in cooking classes, cooking camps and school events. Amanda recently helped launch and oversee a teaching kitchen and after school meal program in Oceanside before she decided to put all of her experiences to use at the Hunger Coalition.

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## ALEXA NORSTAD

***Director of Programs, Center for Ecoliteracy***

Alexa oversees all program efforts across the organization, ensuring efficient and effective team management and program administration to advance education for sustainable living. She brings extensive project management, contract management, quality control, and evaluation capabilities to the position.

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## DANE PETERSEN

***Program Coordinator, Community Health Improvement Partners, Farm to Institution Center***

Dane earned a B.S. in Kinesiology and Health Promotion and a minor in Psychology from California Polytechnic State University, Pomona. While earning his degree, Dane discovered his passion for community health while observing the health habits of members within the college community. Dane was born and raised in San Diego, and is passionate about supporting the local farmers growing in his hometown. In his role, Dane facilitates the brokering of local farm-to-buyer connections, leads a Farm to School marketing campaign within 9 San Diego County school districts, and coordinates program events and logistics. Through his passion for supporting communities' health, Dane earned his Health Education Specialist certificate in 2019.

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## AIMEE RETZLER

***Executive Director, Sierra Harvest***

Aimee co-founded Sierra Harvest after she had lunch with her kindergartner at school and noticed how much food was going to waste leaving kids hungry. She was curious as to why a community that is surrounded by an abundance of agriculture wasn't feeding kids nutrient dense, locally grown foods that were delivered in an educational way. Her passion for making sure kids get the best food possible is what fueled her to begin the farm-to-school program in Nevada County. She believes that if we teach kids to value food and appreciate the cornucopia that nature provides, this can lead to children embracing human diversity that is essential to life.

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## HOPE SIPPOLA

***Farmer and Co-Owner of Fiery Ginger Farm***

Hope is one of the co-owners of Fiery Ginger Farm, a small urban farming operation in West Sacramento, California growing mixed vegetables, broiler chickens and hogs. Their mission is to grow the highest quality food using sustainable practices, deliver hands-on, ag-based educational experiences, and develop community where they farm. Hope and Shayne believe that urban farms are powerful agents of change for the environment, the food system and the cities they service.

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## CATHERINE SLOMKA, MS, RD

***Director of Nutrition Services, Oceanside Unified School District***

Catherine has been with Oceanside Unified School District since April 2016 and became the Director of Nutrition Services in August 2020. She is very passionate about food equity and particularly making healthy food as accessible as possible. Catherine absolutely loves what she does!

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## NORA STEWART

***Senior Program Manager, Community Health Improvement Partners, Farm to Institution Center***

Nora has supported teams in school gardening, student cooking, farm to school promotion, and school food service for 9+ years, building over 40 new school garden and cooking programs. Nora earned a B.A in Public Health and a B.A. in Sociology from Pitzer College, and focused her education on creating robust, sustainable food systems programs. Nora is passionate about forming partnerships with communities to provide greater access to healthy foods.

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## AMBER STOTT

***Founder & Chief Food Genius, Food Literacy Center***

Amber is a food activist and author. She created the nonprofit Food Literacy Center to inspire kids to eat their vegetables. Her advocacy efforts successfully launched a statewide California resolution declaring every September as Food Literacy Awareness Month. Thanks to her action, California's 13th largest school district (out of 1,000!) built elementary students a zero-net energy cooking school based on her design. Her podcast, Raising Kale, launches March 10, and her debut book for children goes on sale this spring.

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## BEN THOMAS

***Farm to Market Program Director, Community Alliance with Family Farmers***

Ben provides direction and support for the Farm to Market Team to develop and deliver programs to increase local market access for small- to mid-scale California family farmers and help ensure that the food that they produce is available to local communities, including schools and hospitals. Ben brings ten years of experience in sustainable purchasing and believes that supporting farmers and farmworkers is key to a just and resilient food system. In his spare time, Ben enjoys exploring the outdoors, traveling, improv comedy and cooking.

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## RAQUEL VIGIL

***Curriculum Specialist, The Edible Schoolyard Project***

Raquel is Edible Schoolyard's Curriculum Specialist and a co-designer of Edible Education at Home. Prior to joining Edible Schoolyard she founded an Urban Agriculture Career Technical Education Program at Mission High School in San Francisco, where she taught for seven years. Raquel holds a Masters in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University and a Certificate in Horticulture from the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems.

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## KRYSTA WILLIAMS

***Program Manager, California Food for California Kids®, Center for Ecoliteracy***

Krysta maintains relationships with school districts and allied organizations throughout California to cultivate, support, and sustain the California Food for California Kids® initiative. She has extensive experience as a public school teacher as well as designing and directing informal out-of-school time educational programs across the US and Costa Rica.

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## SHAYNE ZURILGEN

***Farmer and Co-Owner of Fiery Ginger Farm***

Shayne is one of the co-owners of Fiery Ginger Farm, a small urban farming operation in West Sacramento, California growing mixed vegetables, broiler chickens and hogs. Their mission is to grow the highest quality food using sustainable practices, deliver hands-on, ag-based educational experiences, and develop community where they farm. Hope and Shayne believe that urban farms are powerful agents of change for the environment, the food system and the cities they service.

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