

CAFF Policy Program: 2015 Review and 2016 Outlook

As discussed in previous newsletters, CAFF's major policy efforts in 2015 were to improve the ability of farmers to implement climate-friendly farming practices. We did that mainly by co-sponsoring SB 367, by Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis), which expands and reforms the Environmental Farming Program at CDFA and seeks \$25 million from the state's climate change cap and trade revenues to help farmers adopt climate-friendly farming practices.

SB 367 passed the Senate in 2015 and is now before the Assembly. Working with our co-sponsor CalCAN (California Climate and Agriculture Network), CAFF is confident the Legislature and Governor will act in 2016 to pass SB 367 and dedicate funds to a climate-friendly farming program. Governor Brown also has proposed a Healthy Soils Initiative, which we believe is very compatible with SB 367.

Many of the progressive, environmentally-friendly farming practices and policies CAFF has supported for years come under the rubric of climate-friendly farming. Because California has taken a comprehensive approach to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, including generating significant new revenues through cap and trade, CAFF sees long-term opportunities to pursue these environmentally-friendly policies as part of the state's effort to reduce GHG emissions.

For example, CAFF has worked hard to include funds in CDFA's SWEEP (State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program) and was the most dogged proponent for including \$100 million in the 2014 water bond measure for on-farm water management. The drought is obviously reason enough to support the efficient use of water on farms, but water conservation and efficiency also can reduce GHG emissions, because it reduces demand for electricity needed to pump water, and electricity generation is one of the largest sources of GHG statewide. In addition, on-farm practices to conserve irrigation water include environmentally-friendly soil management measures like cover crops and compost use.

Between these two programs, the state had \$73 million to spend in 2016. CAFF will be working this year with CDFA and the Department of Water Resources to ensure that the funds will be used for on-farm soil and water management practices, as well as the more traditional irrigation infrastructure and engineering solutions that water bonds usually support. We also will push for funding to provide training and technical assistance to help farmers adopt water conservation and efficiency practices.

Farmland conservation has been a core issue for CAFF since its inception. But now it is recognized as a strategy to reduce GHG emissions by preventing the conversion of farmland to urban uses. Studies by the University of California, Davis and American Farmland Trust found that GHG emissions from urban land uses were 58 to 70 times higher than those from crop production. After a year of persistent effort, CAFF and CalCAN succeeded in convincing the state Strategic Growth Council to

allocate \$40 million of cap and trade revenues to its Sustainable Ag Lands Conservation (SALC) Program. In 2016 we will focus on convincing the council to prioritize the protection of farmland where farmers adopt climate-friendly farming practices.

CAFF will, of course, continue to monitor and take positions on legislation of concern to CAFF members, including many issues unrelated to climate change. But CAFF also has recognized that many of the sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices it has long promoted also are climate-friendly and should be an important part of the state's strategy to reduce and sequester GHG emissions. As a result, climate-friendly farming will be an organizing principle for much of CAFF's policy work in in coming years.