

CAFF Pushes Climate Smart Ag in 2016 Legislative Session

The California Legislature is in the midst of a heavy hearing schedule on legislation introduced earlier this year, and CAFF is working on several bills of importance to family farmers and sustainable agriculture advocates. In next month's newsletter, we will review the range of bills CAFF is tracking and lobbying. But this month we focus on CAFF's continuing work to promote climate smart agriculture.

Last year CAFF co-sponsored SB 367, by Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis), which earmarked \$20 million from the state's cap and trade program to create incentives for farmers to adopt climate friendly farming practices that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon in soils and biomass. That bill made it almost all the way to the Governor last year, and is still alive in 2016 and poised to move to its final votes.

But the biggest impact of the bill has been on Governor Brown and the CA Dept. of Food and Agriculture. The Governor's proposed FY 16-17 budget, introduced in January, includes \$20 million for a Healthy Soils Program at CDFA. And CDFA approached Senator Wolk soon after to carry a SB 1350, which creates the Healthy Soils Program at CDFA. Both these moves are in direct response to SB 367, and they demonstrate that the Administration now sees the value of working with farmers to help meet the state's aggressive GHG emission reduction goals.

While these are very positive developments, CDFA's proposal, embodied in SB 1350, still needs improvement. CAFF and our partner, CalCAN (the CA Climate and Agriculture Network), are in active negotiations with CDFA to ensure that SB 1350 creates a robust Healthy Soils Program that actually promotes outcomes, like increased soil organic matter and improved soil moisture retention, that will create long-term GHG reductions and other agricultural and environmental benefits. Many of the environmentally friendly practices known to reduce or sequester carbon emissions in agriculture have long been adopted by CAFF farmers and others who practice sustainable agriculture.

We also are urging CDFA to reform its Scientific Advisory Panel on Environmental Farming to include farmers, scientists and technical advisors with expertise in the climate smart farming practices and the impacts of climate change on agriculture.

We are fortunate to have Senator Wolk as the author of SB 1350: she has been part of CAFF and CalCAN's efforts on this issue for years and received CAFF's Legislator of the Year award in 2015. With Governor Brown and CDFA also now on board, the prospects are very good in 2016 for a landmark climate smart agriculture program in California.